



From the margins

Building Curriculum for Youth in Transition

Funded by the Department of Justice

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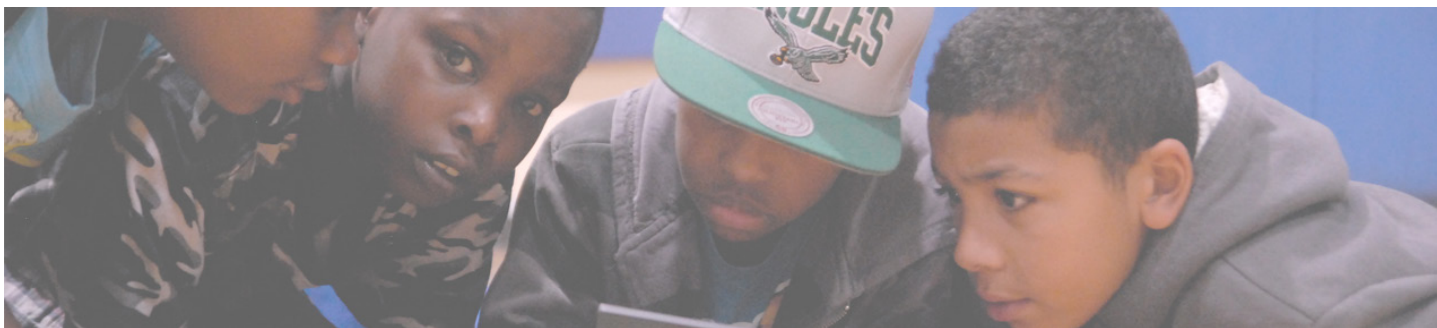
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Department of Justice
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Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.C.E.)
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About Youth Association for Academics Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E)

VISION STATEMENT – THE DREAM:

Founded in 2007, the Youth Association for Academics Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E) is a community organization that seeks to engage children and youth from all communities – particularly those from poor racialized communities – in year round comprehensive programming and activities such as the following: academics, athletics, recreation, technology and the arts.

MISSION STATEMENT – ACTIONS TO FULFILL THE DREAM:

The Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E) uses a social inclusion framework that enables participants to access opportunities, engage in academic activities, build self-confidence, and enhance self-identification. The wraparound strategy is designed to micro-manage the lives of children and youth so that they grow, learn and play in a context that is responsive and supportive of their needs, interests, expectations and aspirations, thereby enhancing their capacity to become productive members of society.

YAAACE’s social inclusion strategy is an operational framework co-constructed by frontline workers, educators, researchers, academics, law enforcement officials and others. The program design pivots on the provision of comprehensive year round programming (academics, athletics, recreation, technology and the arts) and educational opportunities both inside and outside of the traditional schooling environment. The strategy seeks to provide our participants with year round programming that enhances their abilities and taps their aptitudes in a number of areas. The operational framework is as follows: outreach and wraparound; arts, athletics and expanded opportunities; academic intervention and support (the weekend academy and summer institute); research and curriculum development (specifically, the creation of a curriculum that targets reflective education and seeks to mitigate negative environmental factors that compromise academic engagement for students in racialized communities).

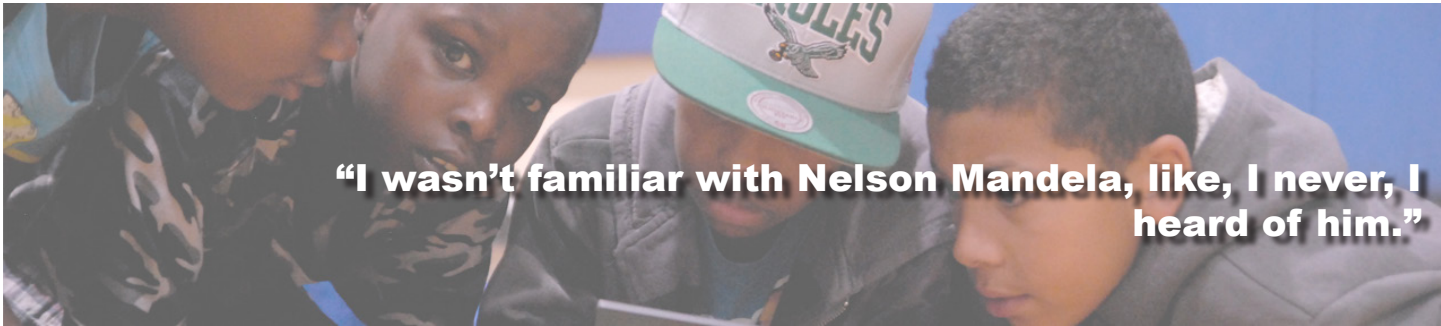
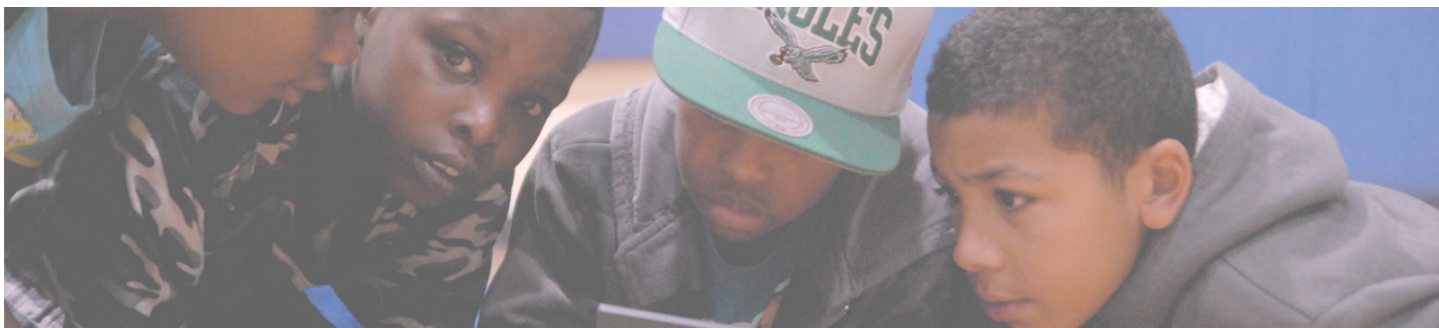


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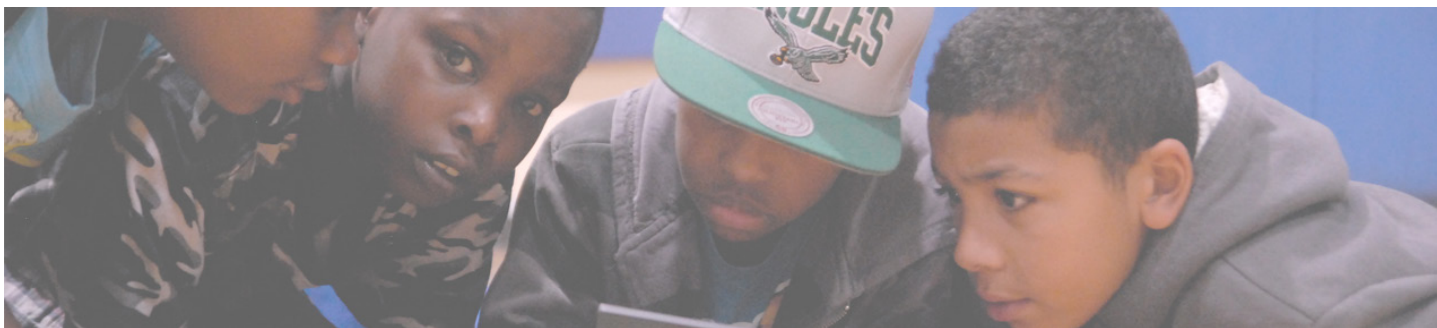
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Executive Summary:

In this day and age, an abundance of public discussion and debate centres on questions regarding appropriate responses to youth criminality, including the use of the harshest response available, namely, incarceration. For a variety of reasons, however, much less attention is granted to the matter of what should be done for and with youth once they have served time in custody and seek to return to the communities from whence they came. Education is undoubtedly among the factors capable of facilitating successful custody-to-community transitions, but this general proposition leaves a host of specific questions unanswered: If continuity is a key consideration, should youth re-entrants resume their learning at the schools they attended prior to being incarcerated? Or in the interests of addressing challenges that are often part and parcel of the post-incarceration experience, are they best served in alternative educational settings? If the latter, what modes of pedagogy and types of curriculum are most likely to yield desirable results?

With an eye toward answering such questions, our research team, working in partnership with six community-based organizations, conducted forty interviews with two categories of interviewees, that is, youth re-entrants and those who teach them. The often wide-ranging interviews constituted rich sources of information about how front-line workers and policy-makers can best respond to the needs of youth who exhibit desires to engage with a host of disciplines – history, geography, mathematics and so forth – in contexts that stress the importance of culturally relevant curricula in tandem with experiential and reflective forms of learning and teaching.

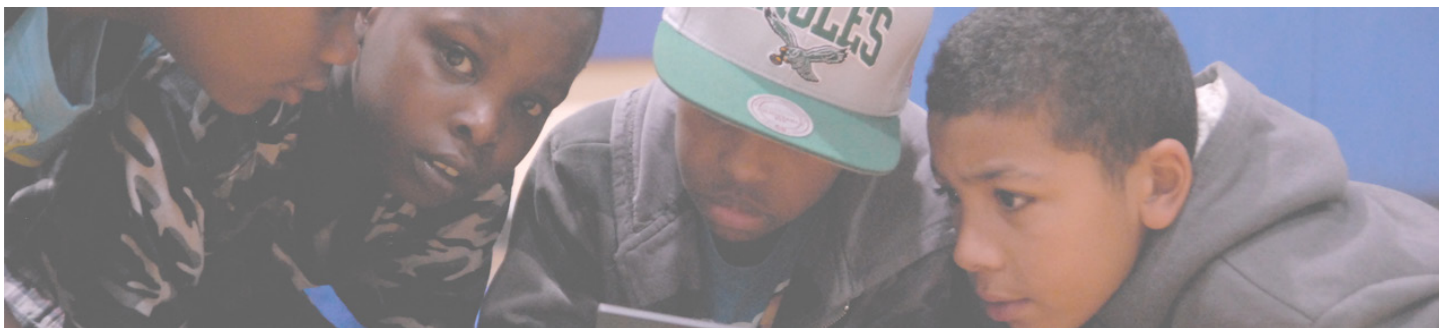


“For me curriculum is a learning tool by which to maybe get across certain knowledge with a set of objectives or purposes or goals. Getting across knowledge, getting across a particular message. Or helping to unlearn certain behaviour. Helping to learn or change a certain attitude. But at the end of the day with the young people that we work with it is to basically bring about change in their thinking, in their lives. More importantly, it is about rehabilitation. Through those learnings via the curriculum to help...reduce the recidivism or to decrease recidivism and any future involvement in the criminal justice system.”

Executive Director - African Canadian Legal Clinic

Research Methodology:

Given the nature of the topic under examination, structured interviews qualified as the best means by which to ascertain the efficacy of transitional curricula in relation to the task of educating youth re-entrants. Following a specific schedule of questions, interviewers asked three categories of individuals (program directors, teachers and students) to provide their views on various aspects of the curricula used in the organizations within which they teach or learn. Forty-three interviews were conducted (23 re-entrants and 20 staff members) and 6 focus groups providing us with responses characterized by breadth – insofar as a range of sub-topics were addressed – and depth in the sense that follow-up questions enabled respondents to go into fine-grained detail about those elements of the subject that interested them the most. The recorded interviews were conducted in full accordance with relevant protocols (relating to full disclosure of project objectives, funding sources, assurances of interviewee anonymity, etc.) and, upon completion, the interviews were forwarded to two professional transcribers. Once the transcripts were complete, members of the research team went over the transcripts from an inductive standpoint whereby recurring themes were identified on the basis on what respondents said rather than on the basis of a rigid, top-down interpretive schema. Multiple points of topical convergence from a variety of respondents enabled us to identify the following areas of emphasis: *(1) Structure, Delivery and Content: The Limits of Traditional Curricula*, *(2) Reaching for Relevance: The Power of Relatable Curricula* and *(3) From All Angles: Multi-faceted Approaches to Education*.



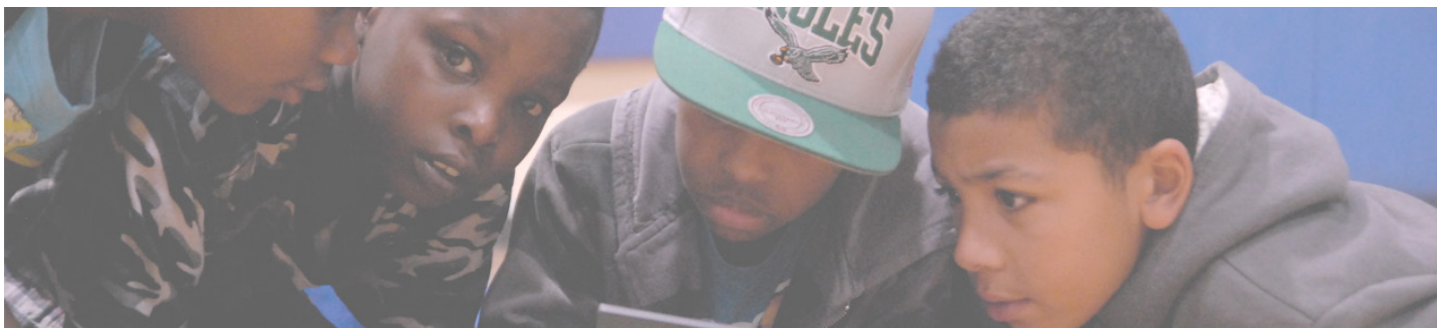
On who delivers the curriculum and why: “It is generally...African-Canadians. Why do they do it? I think it shows everyone that we can, we are educated and that we are able to teach each other. We don’t always need someone from outside of the community to come and teach us.”

On experiential learning: “We like to do experiential learning. If we are trying to teach about university, even today we are going to go down to a university. So instead of talking to them about ‘you could go to Ryerson, you could go to U of T,’ we are actually going to go to Ryerson, go to U of T and talk with the counselors and let them look around at the classrooms. Let them get that feel. We like to take people to the place. Experiential learning.”

Participant / Youth Worker in Training - African Canadian Legal Clinic

Introduction: The Challenges of Youth Custody-to-Community Transitions

The placement of certain convicted individuals in secure facilities for determinate periods of time is a societal practice that has widespread support even among segments of the population who cast critical eyes on all forms of coercive state power. Nonetheless, a recognition of the need to place *some* individuals in such facilities does not preclude the advancement of concerns about the unintended negative effects of time in custody on inmates, especially youth. As one group of researchers contend, “despite its putatively rehabilitative aims, it is all too often the case that young offenders finish their time with the justice system and move into the adult world with just as many, if not more, problems than when they first entered,” while adding that “the context of justice system intervention is one that is more likely to arrest individuals’ development than promote it” (Steinberg et al., 2004:23,32). At a time in which rehabilitative ideals are in decline and punitive tendencies are on the rise, one will not find an abundance of currently or formerly incarcerated youth who will speak of secure facilities as nurturing environments. The negative effects of standard custodial settings are such that incarceration may contribute to the exacerbation of pre-custody problems and can, indeed, bring new problems into being.



On workshop around the term ghetto, including brainstorming sessions, a video produced by a student from Regent Park and other elements: “I had a journal article that was written by a university student. But it was very straightforward. It was only two pages. It was a very easy read, very straight to the point. It talked about the history of the ghetto, all those different things. We would do a reading circle and we would read it and also have a discussion about [it]. A lot of the people that did that workshop...it was so well received. It was always well received because the young people could, they would want to talk about that. It was of interest to them. They could relate to it because a lot of them were from those communities.”

Youth Worker/Educator/ Founder - Amadeuz

In comparison to their counterparts on the outside, youth in custody are at risk of being at standstills from the standpoint of expected patterns of adolescent development – but none of this is inevitable. Consider this observation: “without a consistent and sustained emphasis on what happens to youth while they are incarcerated and then released, including programming that encourages the creation of and access to opportunities to succeed, a cycle of failure is highly likely” (Mears and Travis, 2004:9). Typical cycles of failure can therefore be supplanted by counter-cycles of success if concerned institutions and organizations take measures to bolster the life chances of youth re-entrants, those making custody-to-community transitions. Individual agency on the part of these youth, coupled with community-based programming centered on the provision of positive incentives (rather than punitive sanctions), are key aspects of the quest to foster rejections of criminal lifestyles.

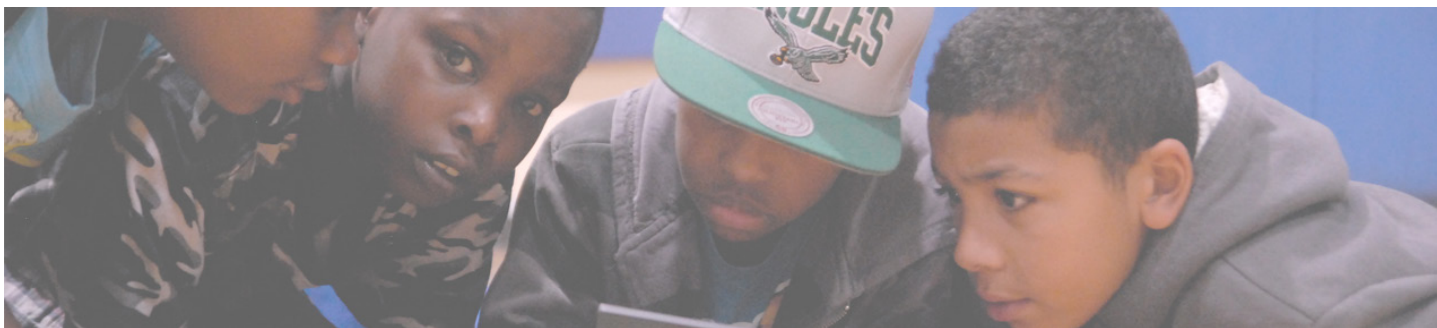
In this regard, educational programming is critically important. While education is not, in and of itself, a panacea – diplomas and degrees are not worth much without corresponding job opportunities – it can open doors that would otherwise be closed in this age of ever higher education. If it is true, furthermore, that below average educational attainment constitutes a risk factor vis-à-vis criminality (specifically street crime) then it follows that higher educational attainment can mitigate said risk. “Attendance at school is a strong protective factor against delinquency,” state the authors of a report by the Youth Reentry Task Force. “Youth who attend school are



much less likely to commit crime in the short-term and also in the long-term....Emphasis on returning to school upon exit from out-of-home placement [custody] should be a high priority for any reentry initiative” (n.d.:17). In addition to having intuitive appeal, emphases on the rehabilitative capacity of education in relation to youth re-entrants are supported by a number of relevant empirical studies.

Taking these observations into account, this report constitutes a preliminary effort to (1) evaluate current educational programming available for youth re-entrants and (2) consider what will be needed when formulating educational curricula geared toward effectively addressing the particular needs of these young people. Both our youth and youth worker interviewees spoke about these matters in various ways. The youth stated preferences for programming outside of traditional school settings because these programs were more “real,” while youth workers recognized the need to deliver curricula in ways that support the positive psycho-social development of youth re-entrants.

While this report is focused on speaking to current educational programming for youth re-entrants, it is our view that similar work in other key areas of youth development may be envisioned to support ongoing, proactive work for marginalized young people. Thus, the value of *From the Margins: Building Curriculum for Youth in Transition* is twofold: first, it provides insights into available educational programming for youth involved in the justice system; second, it gives youth an opportunity to direct their learning by providing feedback and suggestions for future curriculum development under the guidance of educational experts. By incorporating the views of youth re-entrants in dialogues about their educational needs, future curriculum development for these youth will be more effective, creating a bridge that promotes social inclusion for youth who are regularly silenced in educational discussions in Canada.



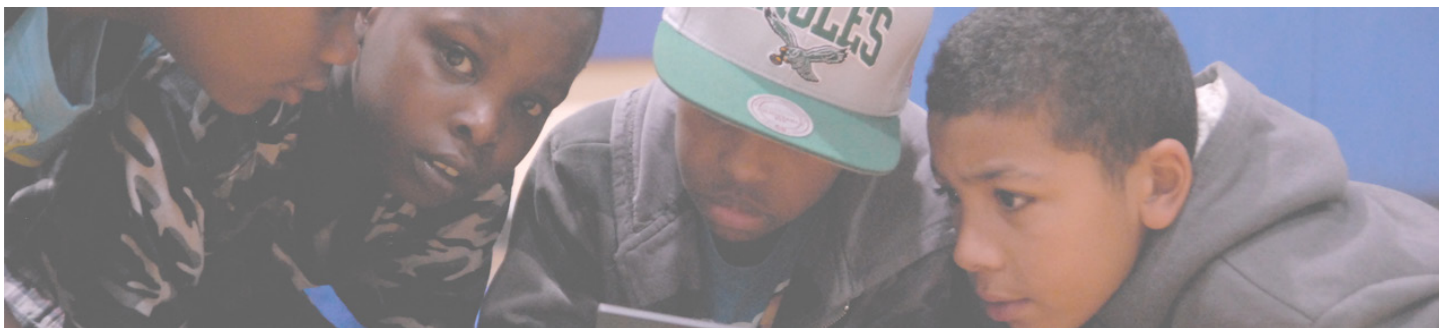
On different degrees of readiness for individual transformation and life-skills: “[It] depends how deep they are and where they are in the stages of change. If a youth’s in contemplation, where he identifies...that there’s an issue and he needs to change, then he’ll change, but if I’m dealing with a youth that’s at pre-contemplation then he doesn’t even think that he has a problem, then that’s gonna be more difficult.”

Staff - Breaking the cycle

Youth Criminalization and Criminality: Contextual Considerations

A game of word association centered on the key term “youth in conflict with the law” would likely yield associated adjectives along the following lines: immoral, disgraceful, menacing, evil, irredeemable, wicked, irresponsible and so forth. Mainstream members of the society which has shaped most of these young people from birth are wont to engage in forms of collective denial – “those kids cannot be products of *Canada*” – while subscribing to various discourses of demonization. The resultant denigration of social context paves the way for the proliferation of propositions regarding individual pathology as it supposedly applies to youth in conflict with the law, thereby cementing their status as targets of national disownment.

Standing in opposition to these notions, we would note, first, that youth processed by the criminal justice system are a subset of all youth who engage in criminal activity or, to draw upon the language of the preceding paragraph, there is a large pool of “demons” but only a small percentage are detected and selected for being arrested, charged and convicted. The upshot is that youth who have participated in the *same* illegal actions – drug possession, drug dealing, sexual assault, weapons offences, etc. – may nonetheless be classified in two very different ways, as normal or pathological, depending on the formal labelling practices of the criminal justice system. Second, the relevance of social conditions vis-à-vis patterns of criminality becomes quite apparent when one considers the question of why cities like Winnipeg or Saskatoon have much more violent crime than, say,



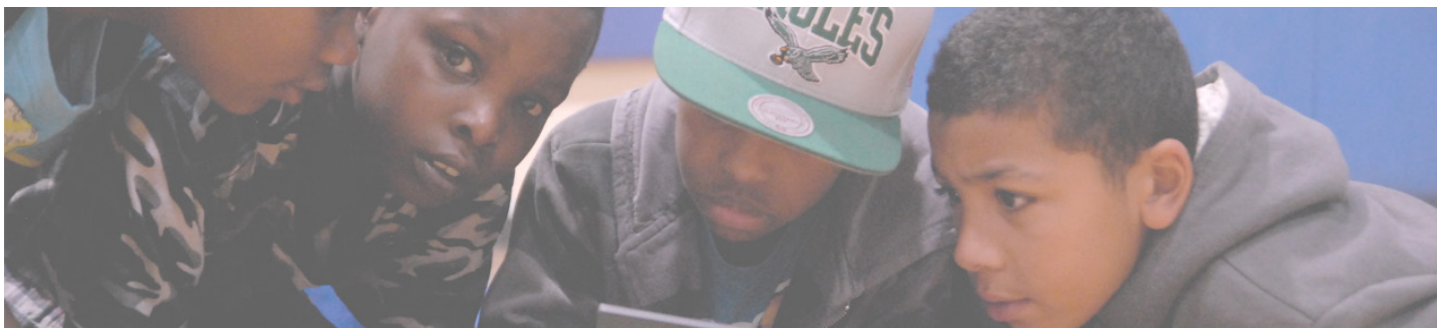
“To tell you the truth, I joined these programs because I wanted more insight on certain things. I wanted more knowledge on certain things. I’m not very versed in the educational aspect. But I wanted to be versed in a knowledgeable aspect, like in the streets, in the world....I guess just trying to get a better knowledge on certain aspects of life to try to elevate my plateau.”

Male Participant - YJEP/African Canadian Legal Clinic

Ottawa or Halifax. Are we to assume, inexplicably, that the former cities just happen to have high concentrations of crime-prone individuals? At this point let us consider the perspective of Bob Horner, a former Mountie turned Conservative MP, who had this to say in 1993 when he headed a federal justice committee: “If anyone had told me when I became an MP nine years ago that I’d be looking at the social causes of crime, I’d have told them they were nuts. I’d have said, ‘Lock them up for life and throw away the key.’ Not any more” (Carey, 1995). When crude impulses give way to cerebral reflection, transformations such as this are not altogether surprising.

We should add, crucially, that although our report features the term “youth in conflict with the law,” we nonetheless recognize its limitations insofar as it presents the law as innocently inert whereas the youth who come into conflict with the law are construed as individuals determined to seek out trouble for whatever purpose. But if we turn this common term on its head, and therefore speak of “the law in conflict with youth,” then a different slice of reality comes to the fore, one in which law in the form of “law enforcement” aggressively seeks out opportunities to criminalize young people. Speaking about police practices in a low-income section of Toronto known as Chalkfarm, Nate Fraser, a recreation centre supervisor, makes this observation:

During the summertime, there wasn’t a day you wouldn’t see a police car here. They’re sitting outside when we’re closing the building. They’re waiting for someone to come outside. It’s the adolescents. They love to target them. The police would grab one or two and question them and search them. The (officers) would write down information. The (kids) would come back in here, upset. They’re venting. They would say, ‘They searched my pockets. I don’t know why. They asked me all these questions.’ The kids were afraid to go outside (Bruser, 2010, parentheses in original).

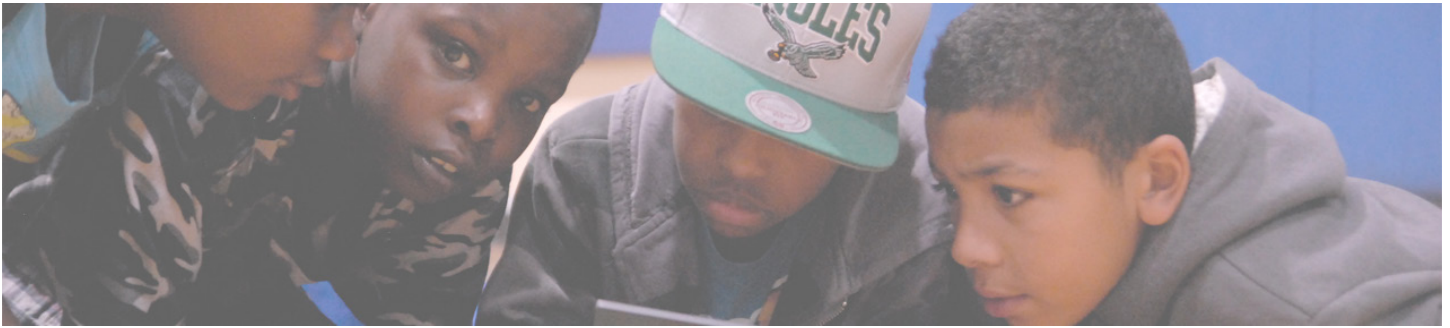


“I believe the Afrocentric piece is clutch, it’s key, it works. I feel that with the marginalized youth that we deal with, that the program targets, a lot of these youth don’t really know their background, they don’t know their history, where they come from. But I feel this program enables them to learn that and once they learn that and they grasp that concept, it empowers them. And it makes them want to learn more.”

Staff - YJEP/African Canadian Legal Clinic

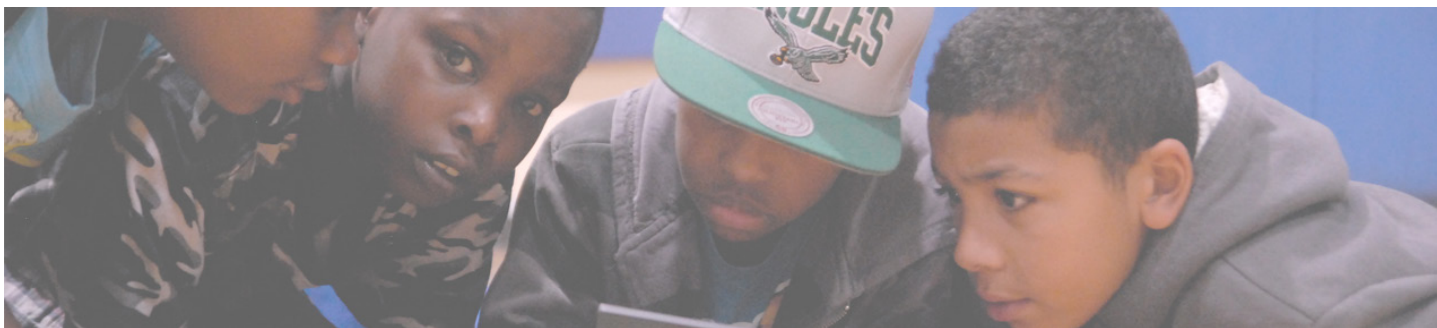
In these instances the police, far from responding to criminal incidents of any sort, are engaged in the practice of *creating* incidents which can turn into confrontations that then “necessitate” the issuance of criminal charges such as resisting arrest, obstruction of justice and other charges that may follow police decisions to target youth for harassment and intimidation. Aside from criminalizing people for doing nothing other than asserting their Charter right to be free from arbitrary detention, such harassment contributes to environments in which actual criminals are more free to operate than would otherwise be the case since some community members who witness their crimes are determined to have nothing to do with the police.

Bearing all of this in mind, we do acknowledge that a small percentage of youth qualify as individuals who are willing and able to compromise public safety by participating in crimes such as robbery, assault, drug trafficking and so on. Contra sensationalistic news reports, serious young offenders do not lurk in every shadow or around every corner, but they do exist, they do cause harm and, when they are indeed violent, their violence is often linked to the pursuit of specific instrumental aims. In their *2011 Environmental Scan*, for example, the Toronto Police Service has this to say about the connection between drug crime and violent crime: “There is...a strong link between drugs and violent crime in the illegal drug market. Violence is *understandably* a means for eliminating competition, settling disputes, and/or protecting turf or a shipment of drugs” (2011:53, emphasis added). So, putting aside moral considerations, violence along these lines does have rational underpinnings – it is not universally senseless as some pundits suggest – which explains why it occurs in rather predictable ways with respect to geography and demography.



While expressive, thrill-seeking criminality is likely to be practiced by lone individuals or loosely knit peer groups, criminality of the sort we have touched upon, that which is instrumental and money-driven, is more likely to be carried out by relatively cohesive and coordinated groups of young people. If, at this point, we follow if-it-walks-like-a-duck reasoning, we might be inclined to immediately label such groups “gangs.” Some measure of definitional caution is in order, however, because, as the Toronto Police Service points out, “there is still no consensus on what constitutes a youth gang; without a clear definition, some jurisdictions resist labelling youth groups as gangs while others report youth gangs based on a much broader definition” (2011:100). So a particular crime-oriented entity will be defined as a duck or a non-duck depending on whether it operates in Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto or elsewhere. In this zero-consensus area of inquiry easy answers are hard to come by, though there are instances when external definitions (“they are a gang”) and self-conceptions (“yeah, we are a gang”) do coincide. Our carefully considered view is that although the label “gang” is often misused it can nonetheless be suitably used to describe certain manifestations of group-linked youth criminality.

The troubling grouping of gangs, guns and drugs often takes hold in areas of major cities that are economically marginalized and politically impotent, two conditions that feed into notions that those who live in such areas are socially expendable. Writing in 1995 in the *Toronto Star*, David Crane lamented “the large numbers of single parents who live in poverty” and “the devastating impact of the restructuring of our economy on young families,” while warning readers that indifference to the plight of the poor and oppressed would produce grim crime-related consequences: “if we ignore our tough social problems, then fears of rising crime and violence will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People who cannot get jobs will turn to crime as an alternative; people who are mistreated by society will vent their rage or turn to drugs” (Crane, 1995). The title of the article was “Future society will pay price for youth poverty of today” and, as prescient prognostication would have it, ten years later, in 2005, Toronto was home to the media-dubbed “Summer of the Gun.”

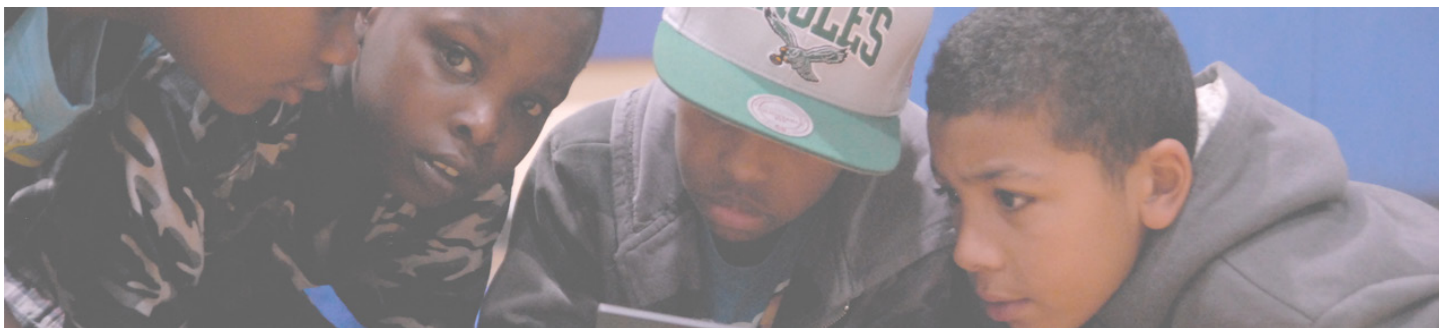


Problems with standard school instruction: “I just feel like really, like, when I’m in a regular school teachers usually just shove the work down your throat, they don’t really break it down and really teach it to you, they just feel like, ‘oh, you just know this because you’re in this last year’ or something like that, you know what I’m trying to say, so it’s like they don’t really teach it to you, they just give you the work.”

Female Participant - PEACH

Does this mean that we subscribe to the idea that a simple one-to-one connection exists between poverty and street crime? No, we certainly do not, but we do recognize that socio-economic status is linked to the probability that particular groups of youth may end up joining gangs, for instance. To illustrate this point let us consider it from a counter-intuitive, hypothetical angle. If a teenager from a wealthy family decided to become aligned with a gang, and if he engaged in a series of minor and major crimes alongside his compatriots, and if he was eventually caught by the police and then caught in the glare of relentless media attention, the likely reaction from the typical wo/man on the street would be along the lines of, “Why would he choose to join a gang and become immersed in street life? It makes no sense – his family is *rich*!” The flipside is, of course, that if he was from a poor family his actions would be more comprehensible. While no *certainities* apply to the topic of youth crime and its causes – after all, human beings are not akin to molecules that behave in predictable ways under specific physical conditions – we can speak in terms of *probabilities*: youth who live on the economic margins of society have a higher probability, vis-à-vis their more affluent counterparts, of becoming involved in the types of activities that fall under the rubric of street crime.

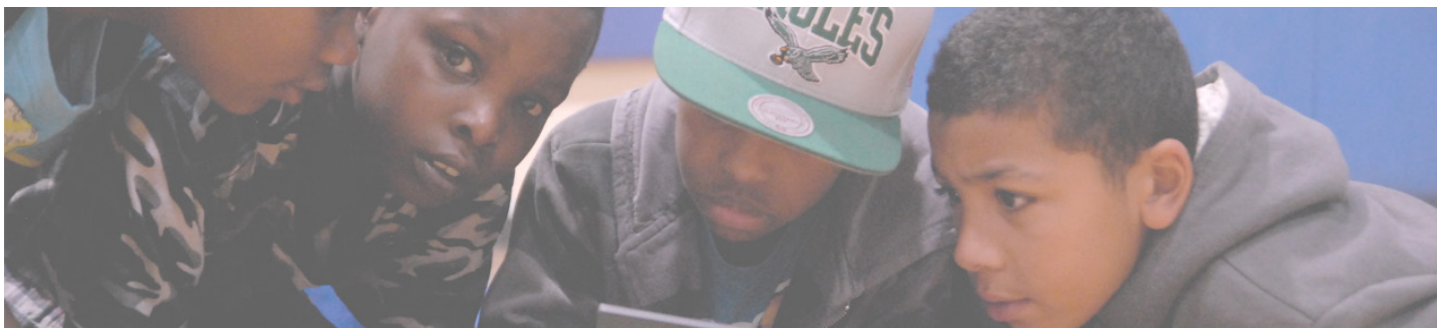
Although law-and-order observers are commonly associated with narrow perspectives on crime causation that are limited to individuals and families, prominent police officials have at times asserted the value of understanding youth crime in structural terms. Julian Fantino, who is perhaps best known for his tenure as the head of the Toronto Police Service, has cited ghettoization as a problematic feature of life in Toronto:



Crime itself has no particular denominator, but certain crime has certain elements to it. You take a community with a lack of infrastructure, no support systems, and lots of young people being left to their own devices, and you're going to have problems. Some of these high-density subsidized-housing developments do nothing but warehouse people. They ghettoize people. This has been a big problem in Toronto and in many other cities as well, and the inevitable results are tragic for everyone. These things were built for disaster (2007:247).

Concordantly, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has published an undated report entitled *Crime Prevention in Ontario: A Framework for Action* in which they draw attention to “risk factors... that may increase the presence of crime or fear of crime in a community” such as “racism/marginalization,” “few social services,” “high poverty concentration” and “poor housing” (OACP, n.d.:8-9). In sum, damaging social conditions tend to produce damaged individuals, some of whom will become street-involved youth.

Taking these observations into consideration leads us toward the task of addressing a key question, namely, what is to be done? Prospective answers are commonly framed in oppositional terms: structural transformation vs. cultural enrichment, rehabilitative initiatives vs. retributive penalties, long-term projects vs. short-term interventions and so forth. Additionally, from a policy standpoint, emphases on expedient courses of action in the field of electoral politics tend to undercut the willingness of political elites to pursue substantive crime control measures. As Julian Falconer explains, “crime prevention policies take decades to bear fruit, rather than the months or years that make up the election cycle. This is the heart of the problem: Politics have a life span far shorter than the time it takes real change to take effect. Tough-on-crime initiatives cater to the election cycle but accomplish little else” (2008). While we certainly agree with the basic thrust of Falconer’s observation – the quest for electability does indeed pervert the aim of meaningful crime reduction – we depart from his claim that lengthy stretches of time must pass before crime prevention measures become effective.

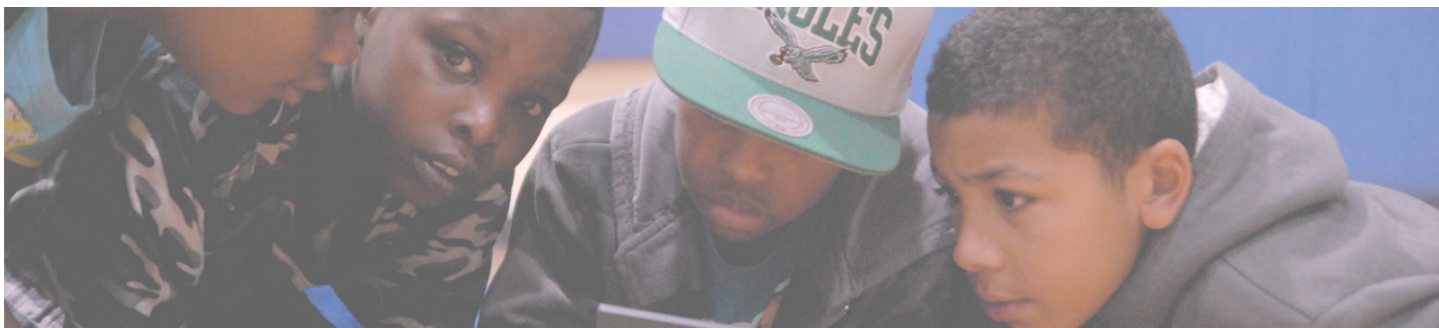


Uses of history for emphasizing resilience: “Heritage counselling stems from understanding that your heritage, the resiliency of your ancestors, can give you motivation to proceed forward....It gives you a completely different context of the things that you go through. And it gives you a different context of your own resiliency and the things that you can face. So that is why heritage counselling is important to us as a program.”

Staff - YJEP/African Canadian Legal Clinic

An abundance of evidence indicates that positive returns on investments in formerly incarcerated youth need not take years upon years to take hold. Consider, for example, this comment about youth custody-to-community programming: “Promising practices on rehabilitative programming for youth indicate that in order to ease a young person’s transition from custody to the community and to foster desistance from crime, the public and communities into which they are reintegrating need to be supportive” (OACP, n.d.:22). In other words, assuming certain conditions are satisfied, desirable outcomes (in the form of ongoing desistance) can become apparent within a few years or less.

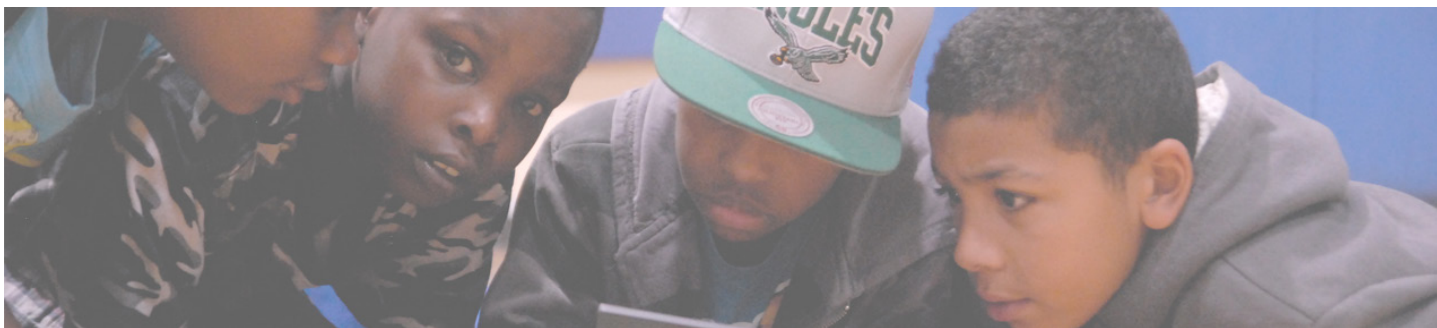
Within the scope of rehabilitative measures, we are concerned with transitional curricula that speaks to the experiential realities of youth who are adjusting to post-custody life. Unlike traditional curricula with its emphasis on classic texts and conventional pedagogy, the curricula we have in mind is attuned to the proposition that in order to move street-involved from the periphery to the mainstream there is a need to first engage with the subcultures of the periphery. What this means, concretely, is that their modes of expression and bodies of experience should be reflected in the content of the curriculum so that, for example, lessons centered on the topic of economic hardship might be based on the lyrics of relevant recording artists rather than, say, a novel like *The Grapes of Wrath*. Putting aside possible elitist objections to this approach, the need to engage marginalized youth is the paramount objective of transitional curricula which, by definition, is part and parcel of a process designed to bolster the capacity of students to read thoroughly, write effectively and think critically; thereafter, having made



“These youth are disengaged from their education for a number of reasons, and disengagement is a symptom, it’s not the problem in itself, and so how do you get to the crux of what is causing that disengagement and work with that. You know, the students that come to us have been beaten down, there’s little trust, self-esteem is an issue, but it’s over-compensated with all these other behaviours that cause them to be loud and brash. But when you get down to really getting to know that person, you know, there’s a lot of self-esteem issues and a lot of things that happen in their lives that have led to this. How do we work with them to build up that self-esteem, their confidence, build up their skills so that they will be successful adults, you know, successful human beings?”

Executive Director - PEACH

the transition to higher levels of academic achievement, they may decide to explore the work of John Steinbeck of their own volition. The bottom line from our standpoint is that enhanced literacy and self-esteem, in tandem with the ability to understand and ultimately transform one’s local environment, are the factors most likely to encourage desistance from crime. Transitional curricula, if properly formulated and delivered, is one of the key means by which this end can be achieved.



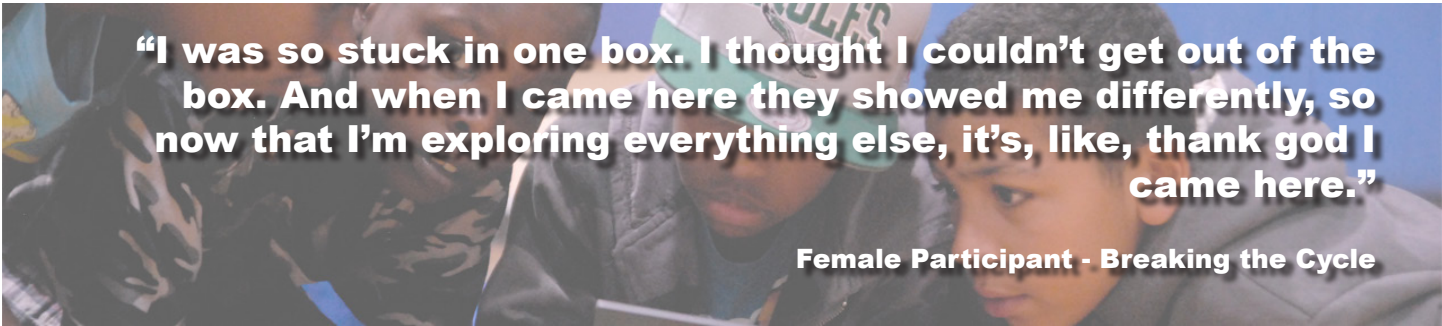
“We have identified through a research study over 150 young people that come in for serious crimes, a lot of them did not have a sense of empathy for victims, didn’t have a sense of empathy for various reasons. Mainly because they are socialized around kill or be killed. Socialized around survival of the fittest. That capitalistic mentality isn’t consistent with African principles and precepts. That mentality is actually very consistent with Eurocentric values based off of their socialization.”

Staff - Redemption Reintegration Service

Incarceration, Community Re-entry and Education: Examining the Connections

Insofar as acknowledgement of ignorance is a useful precursor to approaching the path of knowledge, it behooves us to carefully consider an observation made by the authors of a 2004 Urban Institute report entitled *The Dimensions, Pathways, and Consequences of Youth Reentry*: “Even a cursory glance at the research literature and the policy landscape reveals just how little is known about the transition of young people from prisons to communities or how best to increase the likelihood that the transitions are successful” (Mears and Travis, 2004:1). Accounting for such gaps in knowledge is no simple task, though one might speculate that the relative dominance of “law and order” discourse over the past couple of decades has resulted in analytical opportunity costs; preoccupations with devising new means of rendering the juvenile justice system more punitive may have diverted attention from formulating responses to questions such as “how do we increase the likelihood that when youth are released from custody they do not return?”

Notwithstanding the need to be cognizant of the knowledge gaps associated with this area of inquiry, some observers have perhaps overstated the degree to which youth re-entry qualifies as a novel topic. Writing in 2013, in the *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, a pair of researchers declared that “very little is known about factors that facilitate or inhibit postsecondary educational engagement among formerly incarcerated youth” (Abrams and Franke, 2013:238). This is a somewhat surprising statement given that they mention a key element



"I was so stuck in one box. I thought I couldn't get out of the box. And when I came here they showed me differently, so now that I'm exploring everything else, it's, like, thank god I came here."

Female Participant - Breaking the Cycle

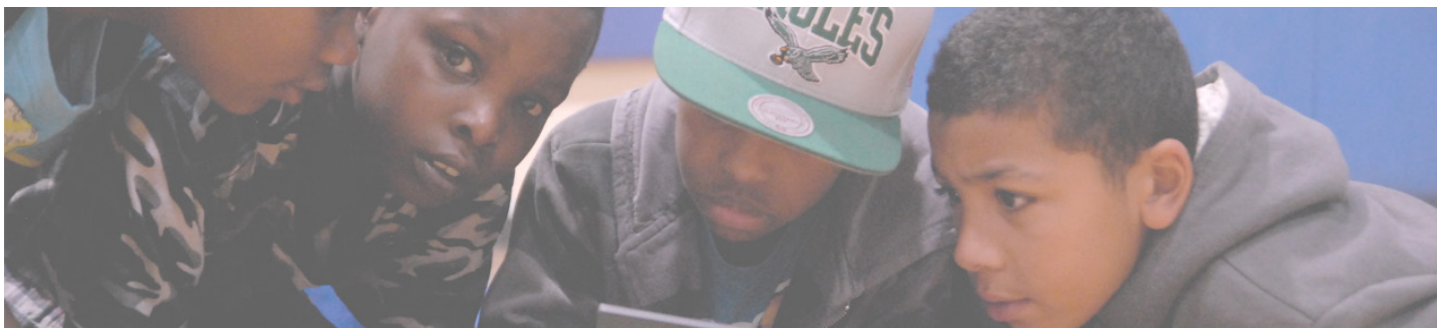
of the knowledge they deny: *incarceration*, in and of itself, and in association with the collateral consequences that it generates, is a powerful inhibiting factor in relation to academic achievement. Although books have been written and movies have been made about against-all-odds individuals who became autodidacts behind bars, such stories are noteworthy precisely because they are relatively rare. The typical state of affairs is that education in custodial settings is situated somewhere between the signposts of slow progress and no progress.

In this regard the first-hand observations of Mercer L. Sullivan are compelling. His field research on youth criminalization has yielded a variety of key findings, some of which speak to what he calls "a process of accumulating educational disadvantage":

Over and above prior school difficulties, involvement with the criminal justice system aggravated their educational problems from the moment of arrest onward. The disruption of the educational process that culminates in removal from the community begins long before then, with interruptions caused by repeated court dates. Often, this process leads to transfers from one school or school program to another. These transfers then lead to progressively poorer instruction...I found evidence in some cases that stigma appeared to exacerbate the problem, as school officials seemed to find reasons to reject students who had legal difficulties, thus forcing them out of their prior schools (Sullivan, 2004:61).

The proposition that youth incarceration is far more injurious than curative is echoed by Stan Kutcher, a Halifax-based doctor who is an expert in the field of adolescent mental health. Pulling no punches and mincing no words, he holds that the status quo, as it pertains to the placement of youth in penal settings, is essentially criminogenic. What do we do with kids who have two strikes against them already? We put them into penal situations. And what kind of environment is there? Exactly the kind of environment that predisposes them to a lifetime of crime, so that they never learn. If we wanted as a society to create specifically the things that would lead to the worst possible outcomes in kids we would set the system up the way it's set up right now. It's frustrating (Rankin, 2013).

In sum, youth who face problems prior to being confronted by the criminal justice system are subsequently saddled with additional problems that tend to be mutually intensifying. Rocks on the paths of their life-courses therefore become boulders, some of which may be almost insurmountable.

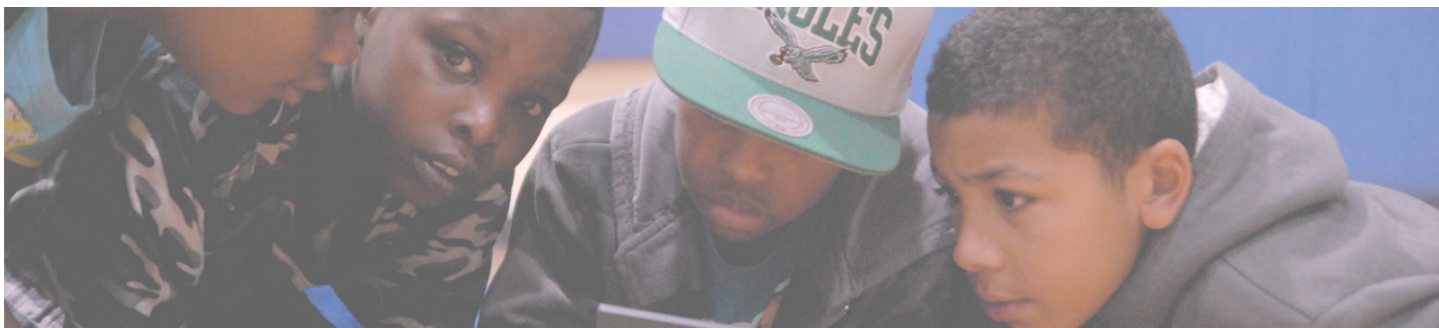


At an even more basic level, age-linked developmental challenges experienced by youth are highly relevant for understanding why a focus on re-entry as it applies to youth *specifically* is crucial. Insofar as the words “flux” and “adolescence” go hand in hand, researchers concerned with youth re-entry emphasize the need to appreciate core differences between youth and adult re-entry trajectories. To wit: “Because young people in their teens and early twenties undergo considerable physical, mental, and emotional changes, the process and experience of youth reentry may fundamentally differ from what adults face” (Mears and Travis, 2004:v). One key reason for this fundamental difference stems from the fact that although a given custodial sentence is temporally the same for everyone regardless of age, at an experiential level a two year sentence can be “more time” for a fifteen year-old than a thirty year-old, for example; at the point of re-entry the youth, at age seventeen, would be on the cusp of adulthood though likely bereft of the resources (both material and non-material) to make that landmark transition successfully. These points are stated concisely by David M. Altschuler and Rachel Brash:

Young incarcerated offenders confront not one but two transitional challenges: the transition from childhood to adulthood (the developmental transition) and the transition from life in a correctional facility to community living (the correctional transition). Each of these two transitions is difficult in its own right. When combined, the two transitions are probably greater than the sum of their parts (2004:83).

One might add that this picture is further complicated by the possibility that these dual transitions can feature potentially conflicting elements. Whereas the developmental transition is associated with heightened assertions of independence and autonomy, the correctional transition can entail the curtailment of autonomy depending on the stringency of this or that re-entry program in which case the re-entrant might feel more externally governed than self-governed.

The justifiability of highlighting youth/adult distinctions is bolstered by drawing attention to the centrality of education in the lives of youth. With a focus on school participation, Sullivan notes that



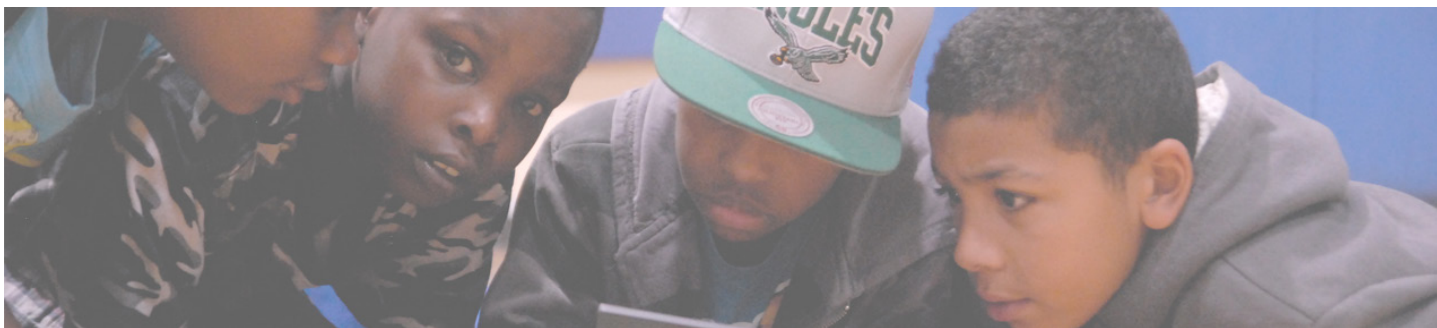
“The Halifax trip was to Africville. And it was also part of a big Black Business Expo that the Halifax community puts on. So a lot of the stuff the guys were interested in [pertains to] business. So we thought let them go and be exposed to Black businessmen and women. And see what that looks like and what are some of the rewards and challenges of being a business person.”

African Canadian Legal Clinic - Executive Director

many if not most people returning from secure confinement, of whatever age, need additional education and training. The needs of younger people, however, are qualitatively different from those of adults. This is because school involvement is a master social status in their lives that affects everything they do and all their other social relationships. Their own and other people's expectations of what they should be doing are affected by the fact that school involvement through the secondary level (and, increasingly, beyond) is a socially desirable and highly prevalent developmental path in the transition to adulthood (2004:60).

School involvement and educational engagement are not co-extensive; the latter is broader than the former and, logically, one can be educationally engaged without being involved with school. Nonetheless, aside from the family, school is the most influential institution in the lives of youth. Typical rejoinders to this claim posit that street-involved youth (whether formerly incarcerated or not) have no respect for school, or educational opportunities available outside of school, yet matters are not so simple. Expressions of “f--- school” sentiments among marginalized youth are usually part and parcel of the ostentatious posturing that occurs within their peer groups. However, when speaking one-on-one with youth workers, for example, those same young people are not likely to declare that being grossly uneducated is a virtue. Even if they reject school (perhaps, in part, because schools have rejected them) they are fully capable of embracing certain modes of alternative education.

Such education ought to be formulated in accordance with youth requests for educational material that speaks to their day-to-day lived realities. Indeed, the word “relevant” is frequently mentioned by youth when they are asked about what, in their view, constitutes effective curriculum. Experts on this subject hold concordant perspectives and, accordingly, recommend that “effort[s] to tailor programs to the unique circumstances of each



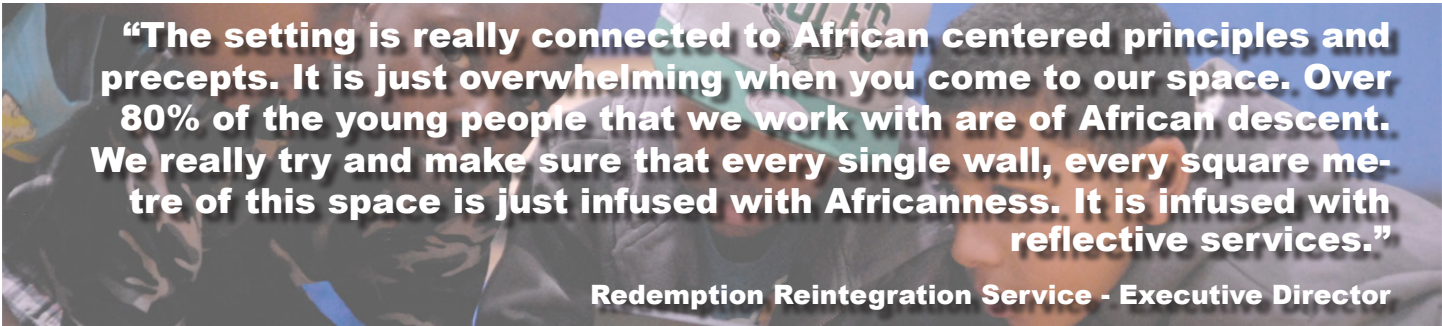
On creative ways to work with fixed curriculum: “In education we know that there is how you teach and what you teach, your methods and the actual content....the content we cannot change but how that person is receiving that information can be changed, right. It could be creative. [For example] Jay-Z had a book that came out, that was released that was called Decoded. Decoded had a lot of different things in it where he would talk about his lyrics and what they really meant. So he was kind of decoding what his songs were about. He would talk about his life and stuff like that. [We were] using that book in English class to explain a metaphor, a simile...as opposed to reading this boring one-page thing from the TDSB about ‘a simile is this and there is the definition.’ But actually trying to really, as a group, to come up with actual examples as the metaphor. So you come up with a metaphor and share it together, right.”

Youth Worker/Educator - Amadeuz

young person should...take into account the age, race/ethnicity, and gender of released youth, and the distinctive racial, ethnic, and cultural dimensions of the communities to which they will return” (Mears and Travis, 2004:14). The second level of analysis, that of particular communities, has a special bearing on some fundamental ideas that underpin educational programs for formerly incarcerated youth. With a focus on race, for example, one scholar explains that programs for black youth should be heavily informed by sociological insights.

The origins of the problems of African American juvenile offenders who tend to reside in urban communities marked by concentrated disadvantage and violent encounters can be thought of as primarily socio-pathological in nature. This contrasts somewhat with White juvenile offenders who display a pattern that suggests psychopathological origins....The differences observed between African American and White youth are such that interventions should reflect acknowledgment of those differences (Vaughn, 2008:326-27).

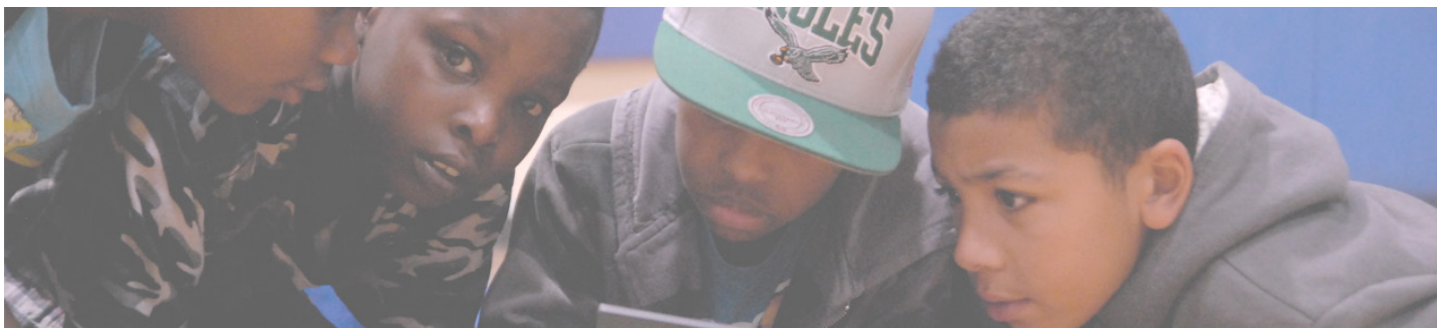
These are differences of degree – not to be confused with absolute differences – and, as such, any programming for any subset of the formerly incarcerated youth population will take account of sociological and psychological factors, though the relative balance should differ depending on the subset.



“The setting is really connected to African centered principles and precepts. It is just overwhelming when you come to our space. Over 80% of the young people that we work with are of African descent. We really try and make sure that every single wall, every square metre of this space is just infused with Africanness. It is infused with reflective services.”

Redemption Reintegration Service - Executive Director

Regardless of differences in social location among the youth with whom we are concerned, the following claim is undeniably true: “without a consistent and sustained emphasis on what happens to youth while they are incarcerated and then released, including programming that encourages the creation of and access to opportunities to succeed, a cycle of failure is highly likely” (Mears and Travis, 2004:9). When cycles of failure are replaced by patterns of success, the youth who undergo positive transformations are the obvious beneficiaries but far from the only ones.



“What has worked in the past is the incorporation of the Afrocentric principles. That has worked tremendously because it is a fallacy to think that the Eurocentric model works best with our youth because that is not the case. It is also about connecting people’s minds, people that they could look up to.”

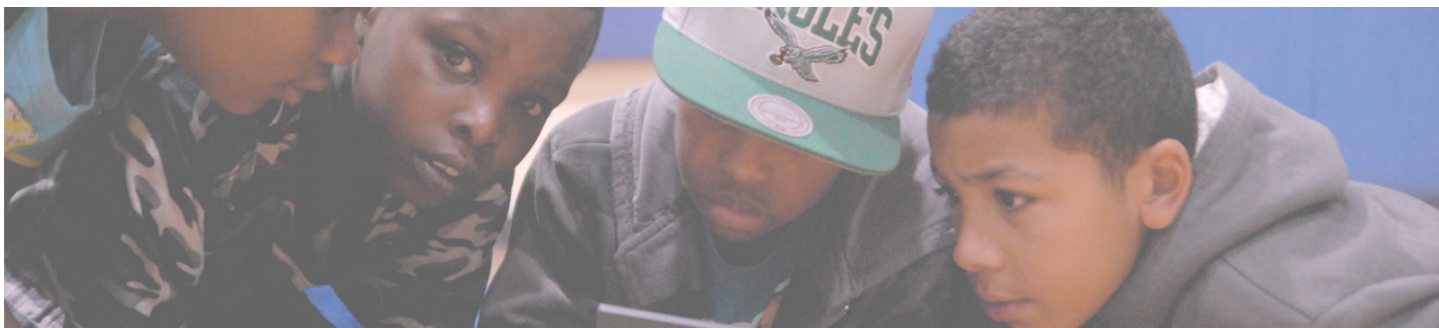
YJEP/African Canadian Legal Clinic - Male Participant

Transcending Conventional Curricula: What Works For Youth Re-entrants

I. Structure, Delivery and Content: The Limits of Traditional Curricula

Cognizance of the limits of traditional curricula as it applies to youth re-entrants was expressed in multiple ways by our respondents. According to them, the typical tripartite educational division – consisting of curriculum creators, deliverers and consumers (students) – is inadequate insofar as this hierarchical manner of doing things runs contrary to student-centered approaches to curriculum creation and delivery. In addition to making allowances for participatory input on the part of students, emphasis was also placed on approaches to pedagogy characterized by innovation, flexibility and spontaneity. In his critique of pedagogical rigidity, for example, one program director stated, “structure doesn’t work, British educational structure. Thinking outside the box works. Throwing from your hip [works].” And with respect to modes of curriculum delivery, a youth worker made this point: “I think that if you’re going to work with a specific demographic, then you need to understand, you know, just reading a book verbatim is not going to cut it.” Tradition is not for everybody and, therefore, not everybody is for tradition, one might say.

The issue of *how* curriculum is presented to students is very significant, especially when the students in question are readjusting to community life after being in custody. The proposition that teachers in mainstream schools tend to deliver curriculum in rather superficial ways is a concern and, accordingly, this observation is cited as one element in the case for alternative approaches to education. “I just feel like when I’m in a regular school



“I would like to see a movement in the curriculum, you know, the curriculum is Eurocentric, it’s not exciting, it only works because a youth is forced to sit down with a teacher and work on it and, therefore, it works, but it doesn’t lend itself to being engaging, exciting, you know, inspiring a learner.”

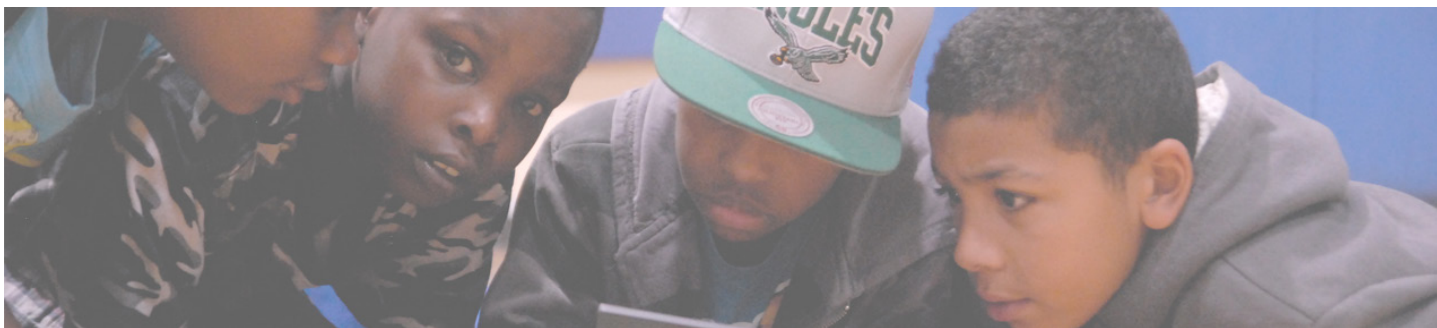
Executive Director- PEACH

teachers usually just shove the work down your throat,” explains one youth respondent. “They don’t really break it down and really teach it to you, they just feel like, ‘oh, you should know this because you’re in this last year’ or something like that, you know what I’m trying to say? So it’s like they don’t really teach it to you, they just give you the work.” This is sufficiently valid at the level of critique – indeed, students of all academic stripes can see the value of *sustained* teacher/student instruction – but what might this look like in practice? Here is a detailed example courtesy of an individual involved in curriculum delivery:

We have had problems where a young person just didn’t understand a concept. It got to a point where the facilitator could no longer be creative in how she was facilitating that one concept. We had to have a staff meeting to come up with different creative ways to get this concept across and the young person still didn’t understand it. Then one day one of the girls went in and I don’t know what she did. She was talking about your bank account and having more money and less money and how that relates to integers. Finally the person got it. Sometimes it just takes a lot. Sometimes they won’t necessarily work right away with what you are doing. You have to keep going back to finding another way to explain the information.

One can readily imagine stunned reactions to this illustration – “goodness, they spent all of that time teaching *one* concept to *one* student...” – but it reveals, quite vividly, the degree to which educating youth re-entrants can be a labour-intensive endeavour, lending credence to claims that only highly dedicated educators are suitable for this sort of work.

Aside from preoccupations with “how” questions – namely, how is curriculum structured (or unstructured) and delivered – concerns about “what” were also quite prominent: what is included in a particular curriculum and



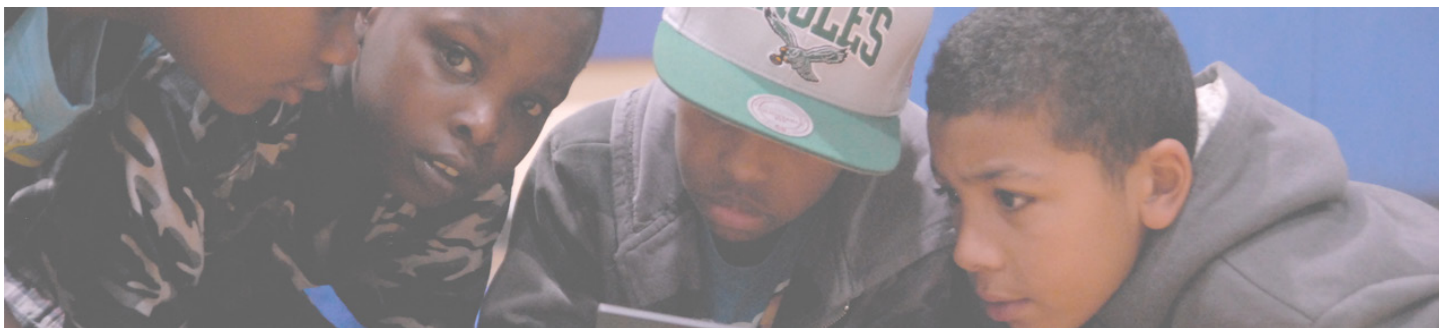
“Part of what, in terms of indicators of success for us has been...about their whole view on education, that has shifted tremendously. From them initially thinking that ‘I cannot really get anywhere in education’ to we now have three of them going into university come September. All of them have completed their high school diplomas within the year and a couple of months that they have been here with us....one of them is going to college. So they now have a better sense of self and they can actually see themselves progressing, whereas previously they never thought it was possible. So that has been a tremendous shift for us.”

Program Worker - YJEP/African Canadian Legal Clinic

with what justification? It goes without saying that no curriculum is exhaustive and, consequently, every curriculum has presences and absences, points of emphasis and areas of silence. At least a few of our youth interviewees demonstrated a capacity to put forth assessments of curriculum that were two-dimensional in the sense of paying attention to included *and* excluded content. Commenting on an educational program featuring oft-neglected topics, one youth stated this: “In the program a lot of stuff worked because I learned so much stuff inside the program. I learned about modern slavery...it was new, ‘cause in school you don’t learn that stuff.” Another respondent noted that the day before he was interviewed he learned about South Africa’s former post-apartheid president (“I wasn’t familiar with Nelson Mandela, like, I never heard of him”) while explaining the cognitive demands of his program in these terms: “It’s mental exercises, like, I learn stuff that I don’t really learn in school. They make us work, they make us use our minds differently, like we look at things deeper than what it is.” From the standpoint of these youth and others, the content-related parameters of mainstream curricula are disturbingly narrow, hence their affinity for curricula that accommodates their desire to learn the unfamiliar.

II. Reaching for Relevance: The Power of Relatable Curricula

The ancient injunction to “know thyself” seems to encapsulate much of what our youth interviewees seek to derive from their engagements with transitional curricula. Knowledge, for them, should have extrinsic value in the sense that it enables them to situate themselves within broader socio-historical contexts that have some bearing

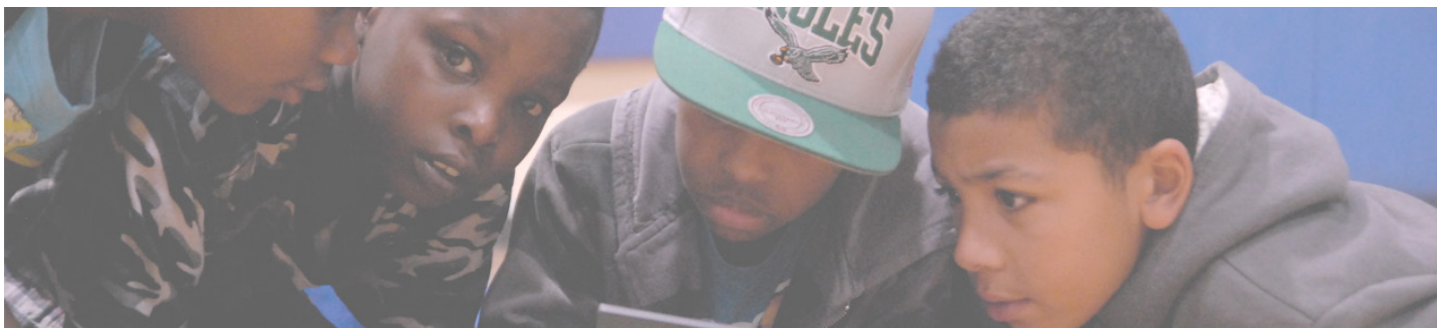


“In terms of the actual text or literature, we use books and culturally specific texts that we have brought from Atlanta, Chicago, from across the globe that a lot of times you wouldn’t be able to get it in Toronto Public Library. These texts have actually helped us enrich our documents or any of our curriculum with new relevant information that is extremely culturally competent. It really embeds identity in the young people that are taking part in the course.”

Staff - Redemption Reintegration Services

on their lives and the lives of those around them. Here, again, criticisms of standard curricula arise, for as one youth declared, “if they’re not going teach me about something that relates to me, there’s not really much point of me doing it, you know. I need stuff that I need to learn about reality, about life, like, how we got here, you know. I need to learn about me.” Given the real-world problems that confront them, youth re-entrants want real-world curricula that is not external to them, that is not alien to them, but is, instead, intertwined with the fabric of their day-to-day lives. Interestingly, aside from wanting to develop critical understandings of contemporary events, a number of youth expressed a very keen interest in history. Asked about how he would improve the program in which he was a participant, a respondent said: “Putting more history courses, like, learning more about history, because I can say the history that we’re learning today is kind of corrupted in a way, so it would be really supportive to know the background of where we came from, like, you know, what we had, what we lost, you know...so if this program could get involved with more stuff that can, like, hit the light bulbs in our heads for real.”

Although the idea of “relevance” as it applies to curriculum is certainly contestable, it must be said that the one area of universal agreement among our interviewees is centered on the belief that transitional curricula should speak to the lived experiences of youth as well as certain historical realities that have direct or indirect relevance vis-à-vis the lives they lead in the present. In educational settings of various sorts it is quite common for subtle tensions to develop between students who say “give us what we *want*” versus teachers who reply “you will be given what you *need*.” In sharp contrast, however, our interviewees (both youth and adults) situated wants and



needs under the same umbrella of practical knowledge; the high degree of teacher/student interest convergence was very evident.

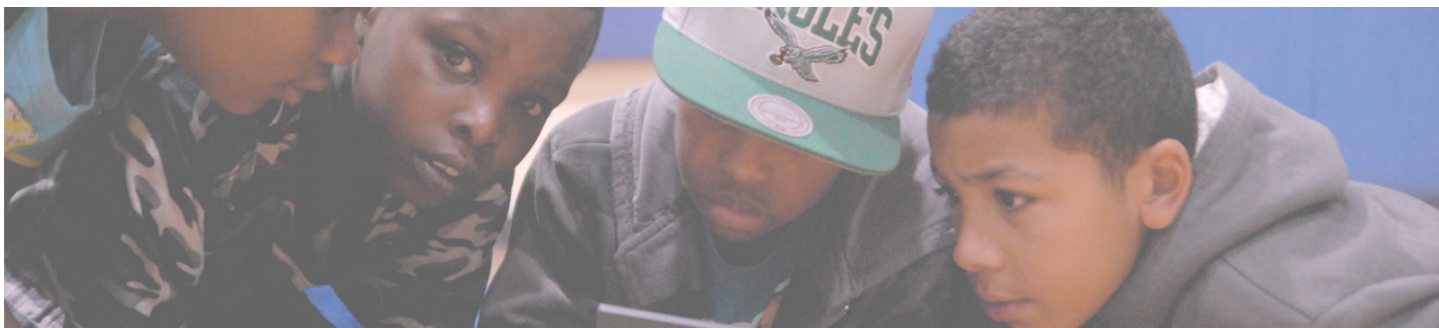
With these points in mind, let us consider two solid examples of how relevant and relatable curricula are received by youth, as told to us by those who teach them:

The African centered piece has worked really well, more so than we thought. Although we knew it was important to have those pieces and those relevant [elements]. Those are the pieces that elicit the biggest discussion, that generate the biggest discussion and engagement. Which says to me that our young people are craving for this sort of learning. Like when they meet with the elder, they will just talk and talk. They are very interested in the sixties, the civil rights movement and the music. And they are like ‘our parents don’t tell us about this or enough of this.’ So they really crave that...those discussions, especially when we start talking about the prison industrial complex and overrepresentation, those elicit the biggest discussion. So that just says to me that our kids, our community are really craving that...and what it says to me is the importance of our community developing and delivering those curriculums.

Another respondent had this to say about curriculum delivered in the context of a workshop about impoverished communities:

I had a journal article that was written by a university student. But it was very straightforward. It was only two pages. It was a very easy read, very straight to the point. It talked about the history of the ghetto, all those different things. We would do a reading circle and we would read it and also have a discussion about [it]. A lot of the people that did that workshop...it was so well received. It was always well received because the young people would want to talk about that. It was of interest to them. They could relate to it because a lot of them were from those communities.

Clearly, then, we see a connection between academic engagement, on one hand, and substantive opportunities for curriculum input on the part of students, on the other. When youth who are accustomed to having little say about anything are able to “see” themselves in the material presented to them the results can be profound, contrary to the assumptions of observers who are wont to write off formerly incarcerated youth as hopelessly uneducable. Given

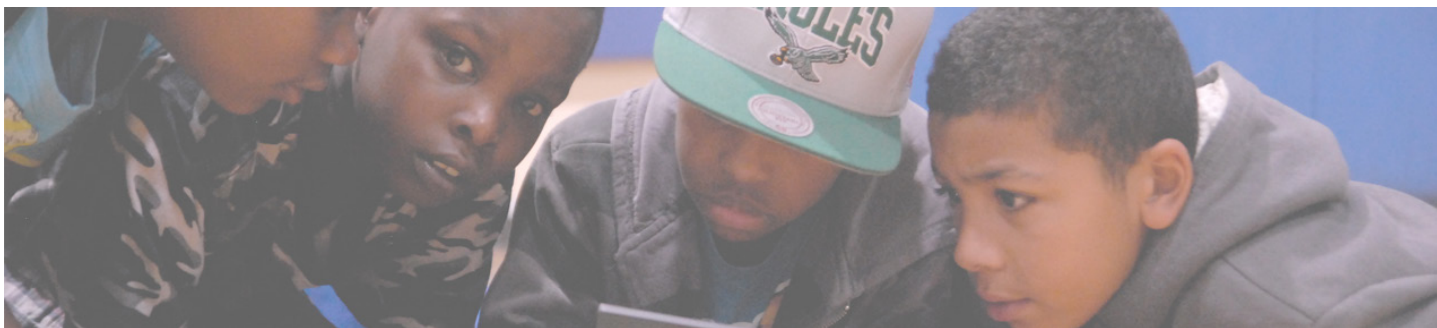


the chance, these youth not only embrace education but are also willing to educate the educators about what ought to be taught. “Every school year or before the school year ends, we do a questionnaire with our young people and ask them what do they want to see in their school curriculum for next year,” noted one program director. “What do they want to see different, what do they want to add to it...because it is an independent type style curriculum, we want it to be inclusive. We want our young people to be in charge of what it is they want to see or what they want to gain in their education.”

III. From All Angles: Multi-faceted Approaches to Education

While it is undoubtedly true that the program directors and youth workers with whom we spoke qualify as individuals engaged in the conveyance of critical knowledge, one should not get the impression that their work unfolds at the expense of teaching fundamentals in subject areas such as English, math and science. Mastering fundamentals and learning to think critically can take place concurrently and our educator interviewees have ample respect for the former task, especially given that most of them, if not all of them, were educated in conventional schools featuring standard curriculum. Still, common pedagogical destinations can be reached via various paths, some of which are more innovative than others; it is in this regard that our respondents depart from their conventional counterparts. Here, for example, is an illustration of how metaphors and similes are taught in one program:

In education we know that there is how you teach and what you teach, your methods and the actual content...[the methods] could be creative. Jay-Z had a book that came out, that was released that was called *Decoded*. *Decoded* had a lot of different things in it where he would talk about his lyrics and what they really meant. So he was kind of decoding what his songs were about. He would talk about his life and stuff like that. [We were] using that book in English class to explain a metaphor, a simile...as opposed to reading this boring one-page thing from the TDSB about ‘a simile is this and there is the definition.’ But actually trying to really, as a group, to come up with actual examples as the metaphor. So you come up with a metaphor and share it together, right.



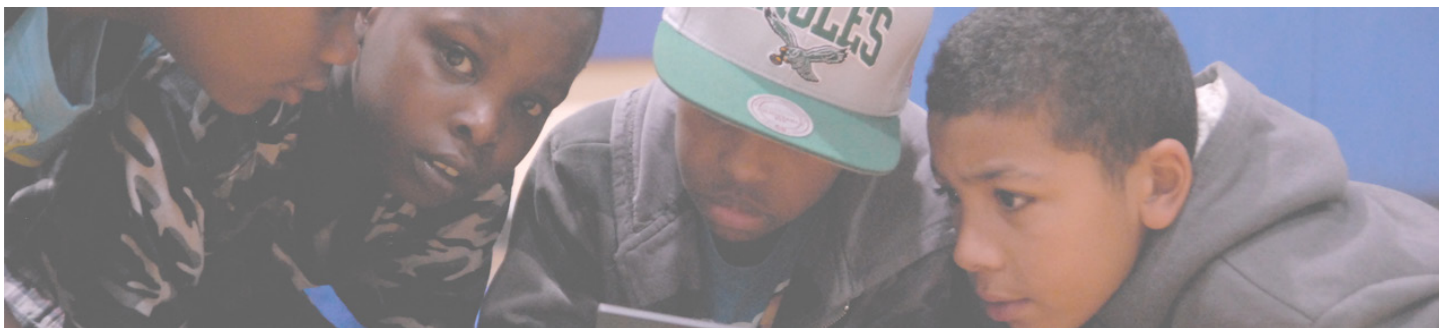
In other instances the quest for maximum comprehensibility entails the practice of introducing students to unfamiliar learning tools, which may sound like a recipe for confusion but, in fact, good results can be wrought via this approach. As one educator explains, “there are so many different things that we use. We have an Oware board, which is a West African math game. And our young people are learning these things that they wouldn’t have learned if they were in a regular TDSB school. So we do have different tools that we work with.” The high degree of educative effort exhibited by such teachers is not lost on their students who, in turn, are motivated to put forth corresponding learning efforts of their own.

Given that understanding the importance of what is taught in the classroom is sometimes best achieved by leaving the classroom, some of the curricula we examined feature field trips as a key component. Youth re-entrants, like many young people, are more receptive to concrete experiences than abstract ideas and, accordingly, their educators and program directors have established ties with external institutions that offer rich learning opportunities:

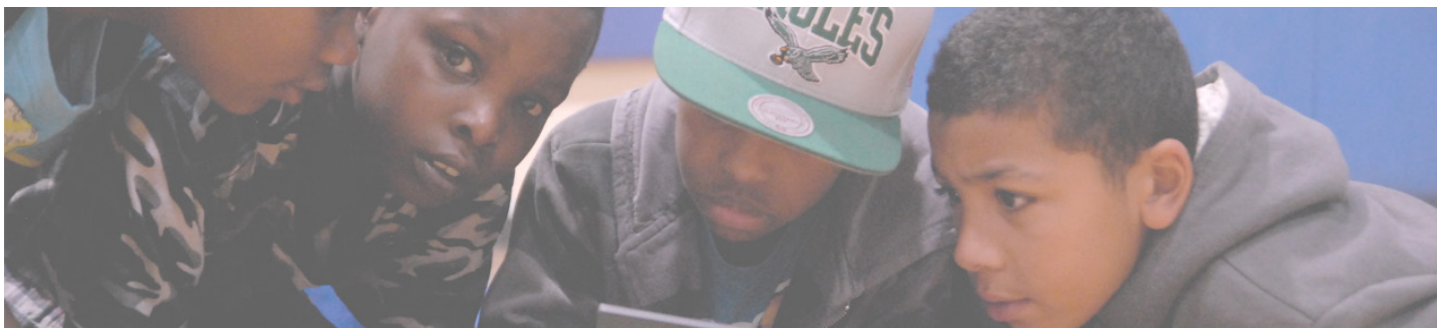
We have built a partnership with the ROM, the Royal Ontario Museum, where young people would have never gone there on their own. Not to say that they don’t want to go there but maybe that’s not something that struck a spark in their minds to say ‘hey, let’s go the museum.’ And the first perception once we say museum, they think it’s boring. But once they get there they see a whole different world.

Another respondent explains how lessons about post-secondary education are best conveyed by visiting institutions where such education is offered.

We like to do experiential learning. If we are trying to teach about university, even today we are going to go down to a university. So instead of talking to them about ‘you could go to Ryerson, you could go to U of T,’ we are actually going to go to Ryerson, go to U of T and talk with the counsellors and let them look around at the classrooms. Let them get that feel. We like to take people to the place – experiential learning.



Field trips of this sort are significant for youth re-entrants, especially considering some of them grow up in areas where they can see a university campus from their high-rise apartment windows without ever spending time on campus or entertaining thoughts of one day enrolling. Encouragingly, our interviews reveal that some formerly incarcerated youth now attend community college and university thereby enabling their exposure to a host of “whole different worlds.”

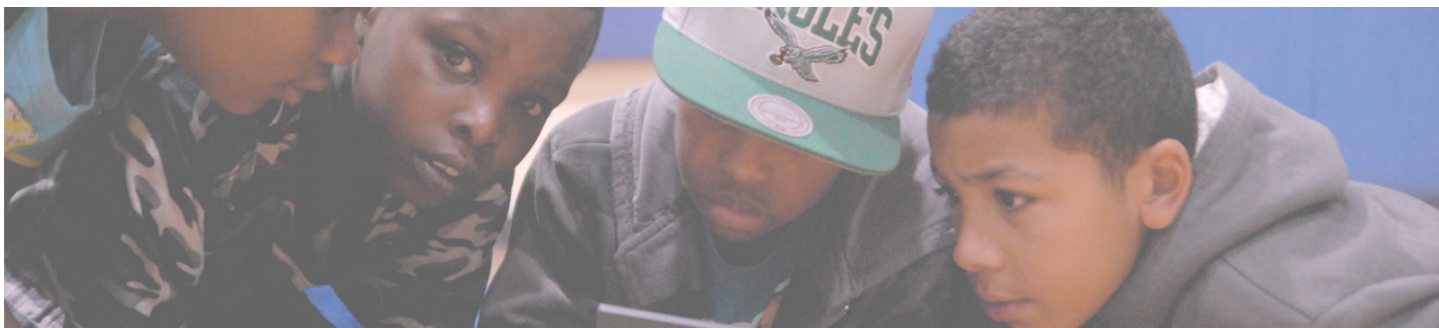


Next Steps: Building Curriculum

In light of the insights derived from our interviews with youth re-entrants and the staff who worked with them in alternative educational programs, there is clearly a need for the development of transitional curricula that speaks to the experiential realities of youth who are adjusting to post-custody life. These curricula should be attuned to the lived realities of youth who have “been on the inside,” and should take into account, the particularities of their experiences both within and beyond traditional school settings. Only in this way can we work with young people on the margins to support their quests for enhanced literacy and self-esteem, which can ultimately help them to better understand their local environments – and perhaps even transform them for the better.

On the basis of these interviews, it should also be noted that prospective curricula must be flexible and instructors delivering these ought to be willing to adjust both their delivery approaches as well as their selection of relevant materials to suit the specific needs of their students. To this end, it is suggested that a database of curriculum resources be made readily available to all alternative educational programs that may need to address a number of social, day-to-day issues while engaging young people in traditional subject areas.

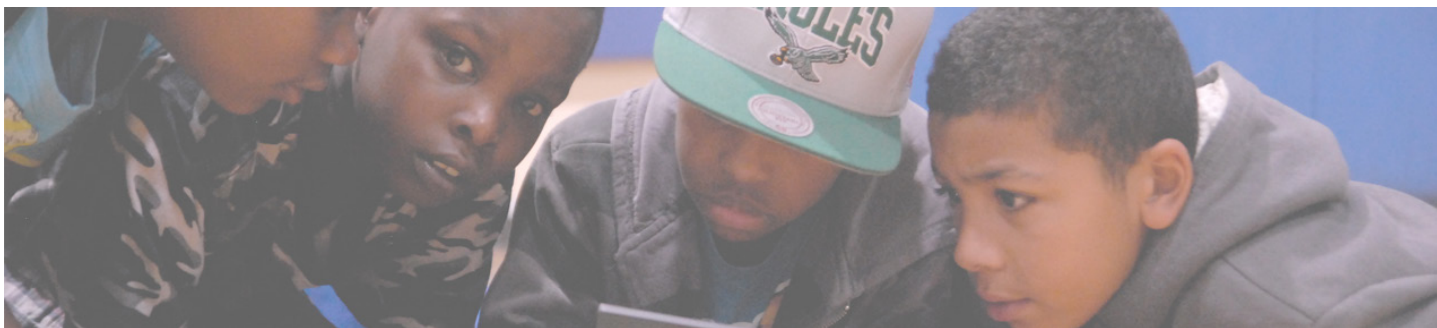
Future creative approaches to curriculum should provide instructors in alternative educational sites with novel opportunities to engage students who have existed on the margins, in survival mode, often for their entire lives. While some programs developed successful approaches for working with youth re-entrants, sharing effective teaching methods is also an important next step. Creating instructor forums that enable cross-fertilization at the level of teaching methods will benefit not only youth workers functioning as educators within specific organizations, but also certified teachers; the latter can learn from youth workers who have mastered the practice of building authentic relationships with formerly incarcerated youth.



Additionally, and crucially, youth re-entrants should be given the chance to provide grounded perspectives on a variety of relevant topics such as the causes of academic disengagement. To this end, the development of a panel reflective of youth who have been in custody should be created. The inclusion of educators – both traditional and non-traditional – as well as other professionals who want to work with youth re-entrants is a crucial step in facilitating authentic reintegration for these youth. These measures will qualify as concrete demonstrations of commitments to ensuring that young people have a voice in both building and directing curricula in all stages: the brainstorming, creation, and evaluation of curricula aimed to meet their particular needs.

Encouraging and supporting these youth in their aspirations for post-secondary schooling is also imperative. While it is true that youth re-entrants are in problematic situations, it is not true that they want to remain in their current circumstances. Their aspirations are notable – for example, some want to be artists, mechanics, politicians, writers, firefighters or doctors – which is evidence that they are willing to rise above the hardships associated with post-custody life. Taking their dreams seriously can be a valuable point of departure in relation to the aim of enabling them to rise. What they need is our help.

Orientations toward curriculum can be conceived of in terms of the degree to which they have a sociological/macro focus or a practical/micro focus. The first, which is essentially a “big picture” approach, hinges on a recognition of the degree to which structural factors may impact the immediate life prospects of youth re-entrants. Accordingly, a sociological perspective serves as the broad pedagogical umbrella under which curriculum is formulated and delivered. In the case of one program, for example, the curriculum is said to “deconstruct the realities of poverty, racism, oppression and discrimination within poor racialized communities,” while also “taking into account...the different learning styles of racialized groups.” Another program speaks about its commitment to hiring youth “who will receive education and training using an African-centered, anti-oppression framework.” In these programmatic settings youth re-entrants are therefore exposed to learning material which transcends the local contexts within which they reside.

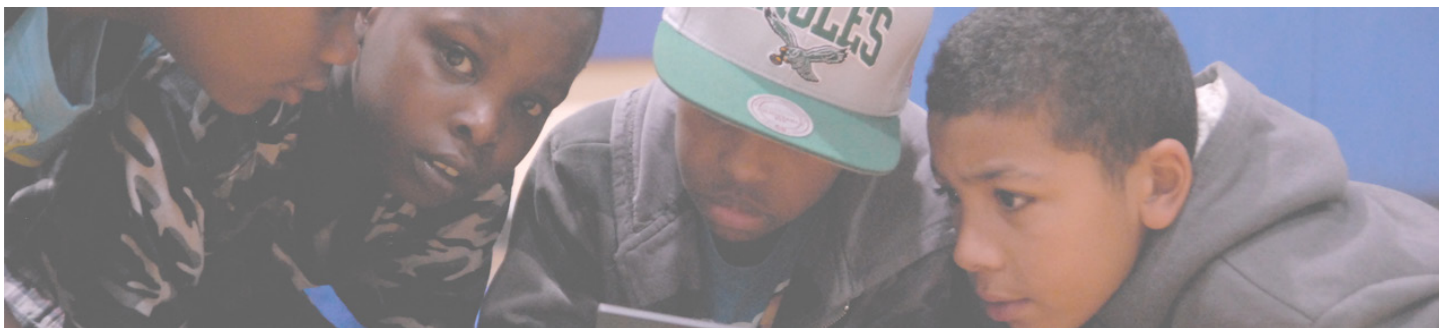


The other orientation, the practical/micro, is based on the well-established fact that youth re-entrants can often benefit from various forms of life skills training that may, for instance, bolster their employability, their ability to live alone on an independent basis and so forth. Armed with the notion that practical problems require correspondingly practical solutions, curricula within this vein emphasizes “personal development,” “anger and conflict management,” “civic rights and responsibilities,” “employment readiness” and the like. In addition to featuring learning modules chosen on the basis of the needs of the youth re-entrant, this orientation often goes hand-in-hand with some measure of one-on-one learning as a supplement to more traditional classroom instruction.

Having said this, it should be noted that this typology does not capture a reality in which all of the programs under examination fit under the rubric of one orientation or another. Elements of both can be identified in each program and the relative balance varies depending on resources, organizational mandates and the articulated needs of specific cohorts of youth re-entrants.

Supplement to Curriculum Section

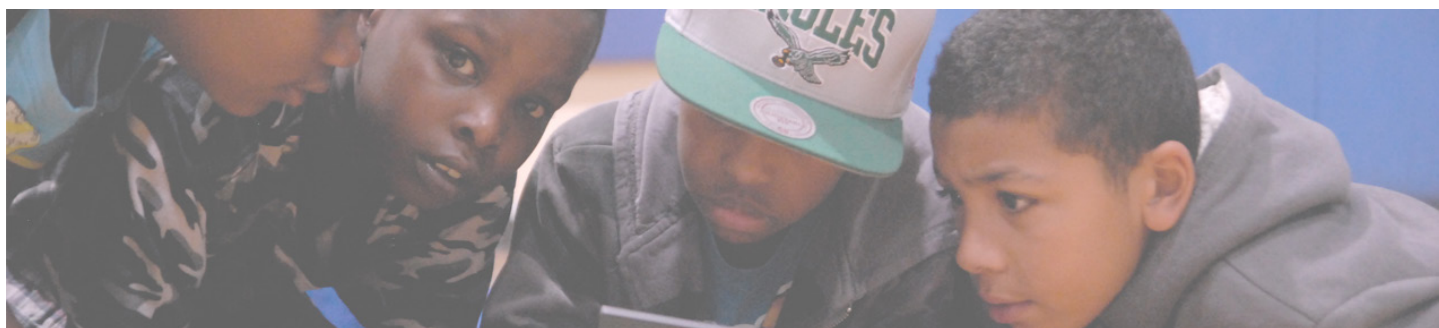
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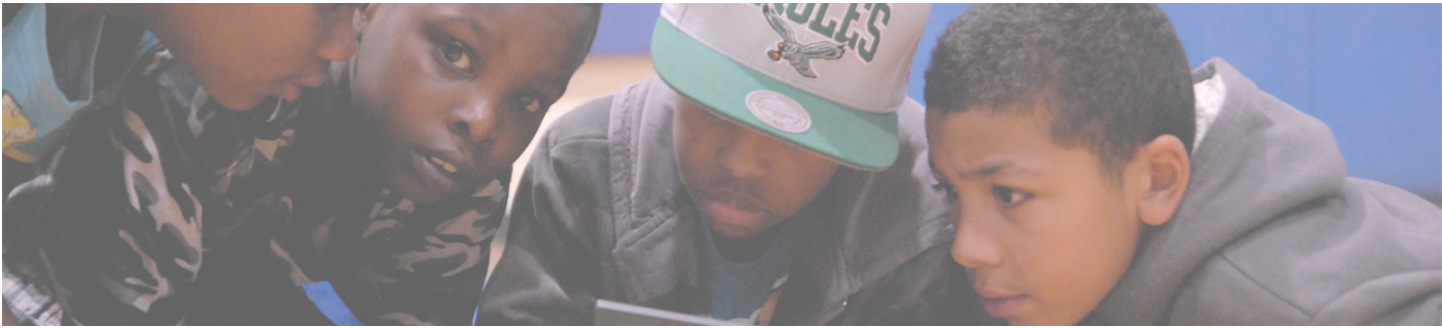
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Curriculum Orientations of Participating Organizations

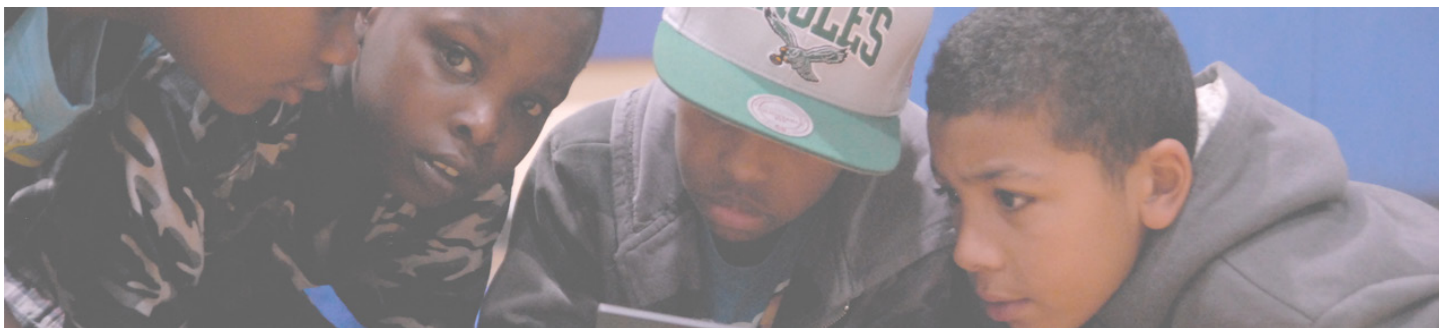
Organization	Sociological/Macro	Practical/Micro
Amadeusz	Community Transformation via Education	Literacy, Math Skills, Problem-Solving, Self-Confidence, Career Exploration
Breaking the Cycle	Social Capital, Community Outreach, Crime Prevention, Gender Roles, Media Analysis	Intensive Personal Development Programming dealing with topics such as “Self-Concept,” “Healthy Relationships,” “Anger and Anger Awareness,” etc.
Nine Heavens Healing Academy	Systemic Racism, Poverty, Intergroup Relations (e.g. Race Relations)	Addressing Post-Traumatic Stress, Drug Treatment, Interest-Specific Career Training, Employer/Prospective Employee Connections
PEACH	Resiliency	Pro-social Bonding, Financial Literacy, Time Management, Study Skills
Redemption Reintegration Services	Racial and Cultural Identity	Housing, Employment, Substance Abuse, Mental Health, Gender-Specific Supports
Youth Justice Education Program	Organizational and Institutional Change, Anti-Oppression	Cultural Self-Awareness, Legal Rights, Crime-Related Risk Factors



Standardized Versus Alternative Curriculum and Programs

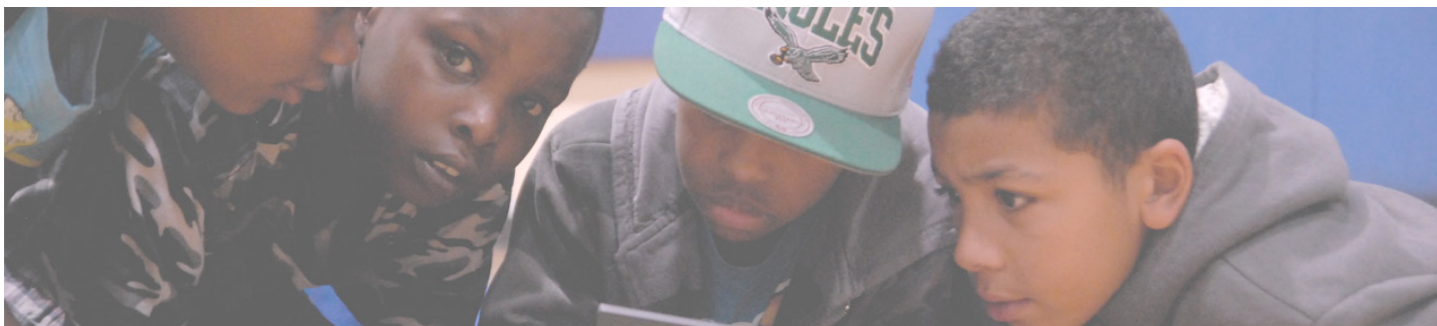
Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Reintegration services and cultural consideration of care for youth re-entrants or youth involved or at risk of involvement in guns, gangs and drugs:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reintegration support • housing support • mental health support • culturally specific support • employment support • leadership and ambassador gang exit program model: personal development, including CPR training, conflict mediation certification, a 2 day outdoor leadership course and community safety workshops (BTC) • work experience model (current model in use) 24 week internship through work placement experience, with 6 weeks of gang exiting through spiral model of learning, commencing with 19 weeks of work placement internship with a minimum of 2 experiences and ongoing job coaching plus trauma informed case management (BTC) 	<p>Standardized curriculum and programming that's ill equipped to appropriately identify and accommodate the unique needs of youth re-entrants or youth involved or at risk of involvement in guns, gangs and drugs...</p>

Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Culturally relevant and reflective pedagogy:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student centered approaches • material and content that speaks to the lived reality of the student(s) • pedagogy characterized by innovation, flexibility and spontaneity • programs that factors the following: age, race/ethnicity, gender, nature of offence committed, propensity to re-offend, cultural dimensions of the community to which they will return • the development of transitional curricula that speaks to the experiential realities of youth who are adjusting to post-custody life • and should take into account, the particularities of their experiences both within and beyond traditional school settings • curricula must be flexible and instructors delivering these ought to be willing to adjust both their delivery approaches as well as their selection of relevant materials to suit the specific needs of their students • creative approaches to curriculum that provide instructors with novel opportunities to engage students who have existed on the margins, in survival mode, often for their entire lives. The curriculum is said to “deconstruct the realities of poverty, racism, oppression and discrimination within poor racialized communities,” while also “taking into account...the different learning styles of racialized groups and the uniqueness of youth re-entrants” • another program speaks about its commitment to hiring youth “who will receive education and training using an African-centered, anti-oppression framework.” In these programmatic settings youth re-entrants are therefore exposed to learning material which transcends the local contexts within which they reside • orientation, the practical/micro, is based on the well-established fact that youth re-entrants can often benefit from various forms of life skills training that may, for instance, bolster their employability, their ability to live alone on an independent basis and so forth • armed with the notion that practical problems require correspondingly practical solutions, curricula within this vein emphasizes “personal development,” “anger and conflict management,” “civic rights and responsibilities,” “employment readiness” and the like 	<p>Standardized curriculum and programming that’s ill equipped to appropriately identify and accommodate the unique needs of youth re-entrants or youth involved or at risk of involvement in guns, gangs and drugs. Curriculum characterized by a top down approach, inherently rigid with pre-determined expectations and mandated by the Ministry of Education and the various school boards with no student input...</p>

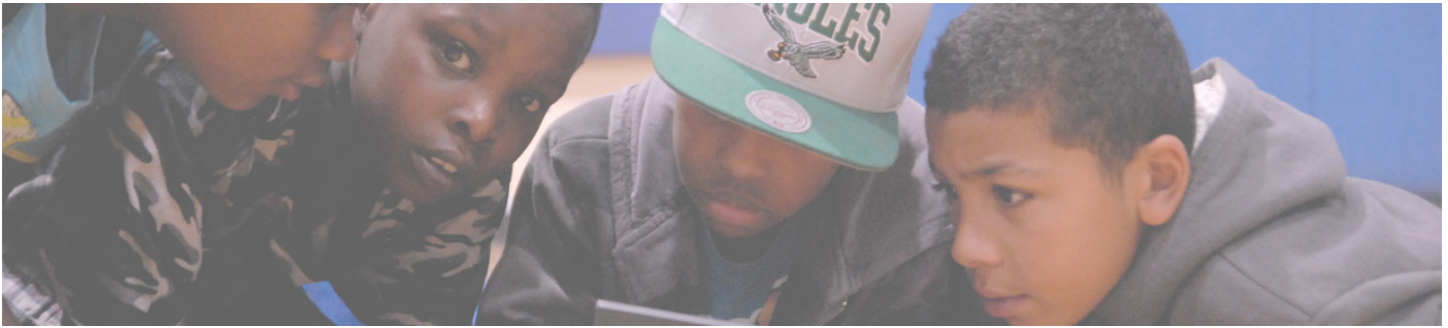


Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Youth re-entrants having a central role in their learning outcomes by helping to co-construct curriculum and programmatic structure and content (YJEP):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • youth leaders and justice education workers to work with researcher and educators to develop training module which addresses the cultural awareness and emotional considerations necessary to effectively support and service youth who are or have been involved with the criminal justice system (YJEP) 	<p>Curriculum characterized by a top down approach, inherently rigid with pre-determined expectations and mandated by the Ministry of Education and the various school boards with no student input</p>

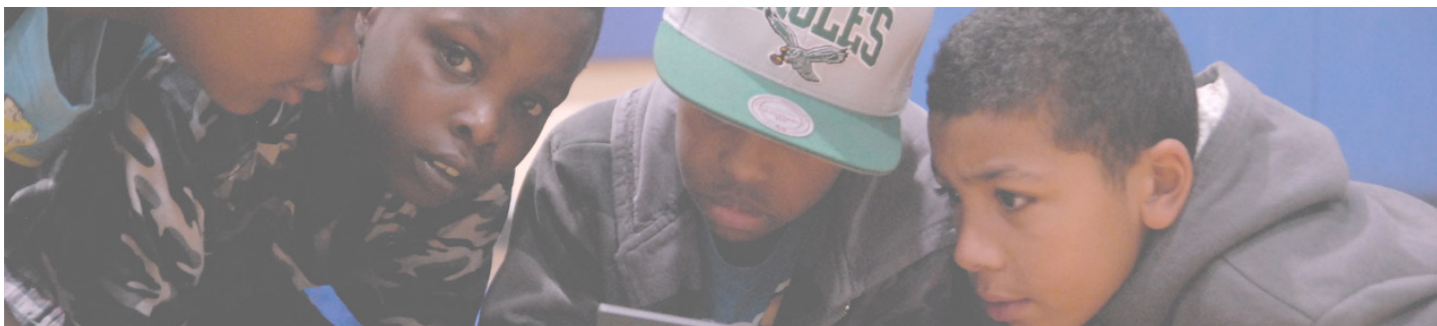
Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Daily assessment of current psychological state and or well-being:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily checking to start the day (energy level 1-10 and something good or bad that occurred in the last 24 hours). In addition to trained staff in very intimate settings who are able to identify any signs of abnormality or vulnerability 	<p>Restricted to particular Special Education and Caring/Safe School's programs. Applied in a very anecdotal way that varies from program to program...</p>
<p>Assessment of personal needs upon enrollment:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A checklist to assess the needs for items such as personal identification, housing, transportation, food etc. In addition to the "taking care of myself work sheet" which assesses interest such as fitness, recreation, music, the arts etc. 	<p>Intake process involving the youth, parenting/guardian, or advocate caregiver to provide an informed profile of needs of the students coming in. These services are offered in a very diminishing capacity in particular in the regular school system...</p>



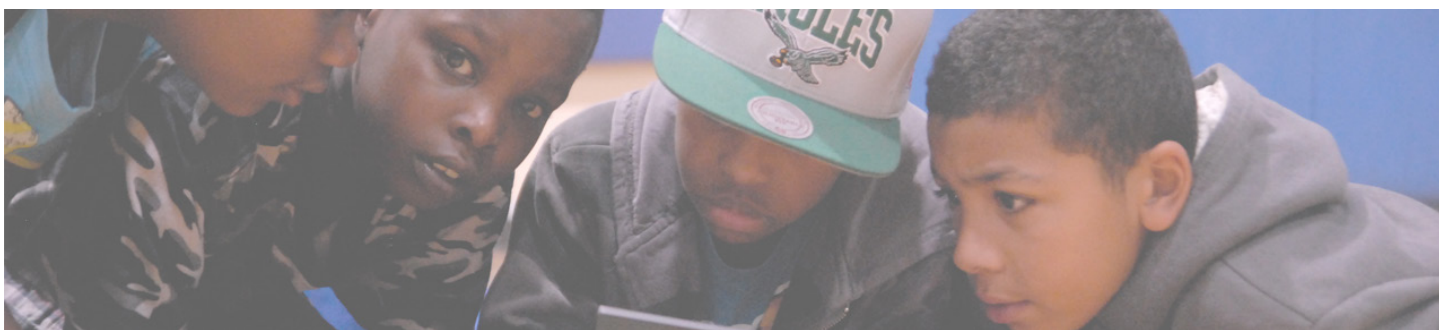
Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Drug and addiction counselling education:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intervention strategies aimed at curtailing the use of drugs in particular marijuana. The various agencies have established partnerships with various ethno-cultural agencies, such as: Across Boundaries and the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) • innovative evidenced-based cognitive behavioral, intervention targeting risk factors for substance abuse 	<p>Because of the size of most traditional schools, student re-entrants are lost in the shuffle and is rarely identified and provided with the appropriate mental health and drug addiction intervention. However when identified acknowledging the fact that school environments aren't equipped to deal with the unique challenges of student re-entrants there is a connection to internal social workers that in-turns reaches out to community partners to provide ethno-cultural and culturally specific drug and addiction counselling and education...</p>



Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
<p>Mental health support:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health support to address the psychological impact of incarceration, trauma, depression, PTSD, attachment disorders, cognitive dissonance, concurrent disorders etc. • The psychological dimension in the alternative space allows for reflective services thus allowing professionals in the field of mental health who has background and expertise dealing with the unique psychological afflictions thus allowing for cultural consideration of care for demographic of youth who perennially finds them self in conflict with the law and over representation in the criminal justice system. This is crucial given the prevalence of co-current disorders. In this regard, as well, there are pressing issues pertaining to undiagnosed illnesses and self-medication 	<p>Because of the size of most traditional schools, student re-entrants are lost in the shuffle and is rarely identified and provided with the appropriate mental health and drug addiction intervention. However when identified acknowledging the fact that school environments aren't equipped to deal with the mental health needs and other unique challenges of student re-entrants, there is a connection to internal social workers that in-turns reaches out to community partners to provide ethno-cultural and culturally specific drug and addiction counselling and education...</p>



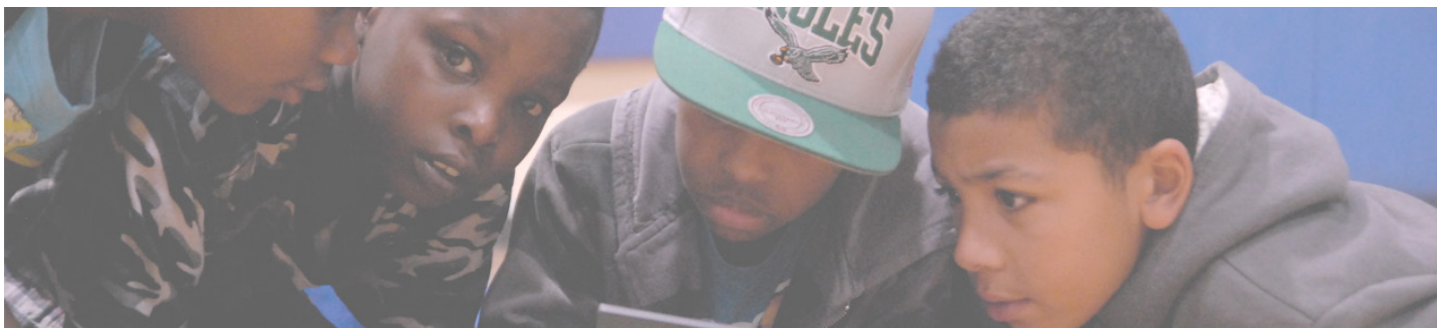
Social and Academic Needs of Student Re-Entrants	Alternative Curriculum and Programs	Standard Curriculum and Schooling
Curriculum for young men (BTC)	<p>Leadership Principles, Pro-Social Living (gang and youth exercise), Anger and Anger Awareness (emphasis on triggers where do we feel and how to identify them in addition to the development of emotional IQ through the use of the meta emotional wheel), Socialization through an exercise called a man in the box – where the social norms and expectations of men are outlined and the societal implications when men don't live up to these expectations), Communication (I statement which improves assertive communication skills which translates into scenarios involving authority figures, partners, family, and friends) Self Concept (the principles of I), Healthy Relationships, Personal Missions Statements (20 years from today what am doing), Individual Case-management, Gangs and you, Critical Thinking, Responsible Leadership, Social Capital and Community Outreach, Community Mapping/Involvement and Crime Prevention, Empowerment and Employment, Culmination Graduation and work placement (18 week employment and educational readiness through work placement which is 2 x 9 week work placement experiences with an employer 3 to 4 days/week with weekly job coaching, weekly case management, and ongoing facilitation of change through behavior and cognitive exercises using a trauma informed approach) (BTC)</p>	Standardized curriculum and programming that's ill equipped to appropriately identify and accommodate the unique needs of youth re-entrants or youth involved or at risk of involvement in guns, gangs and drugs...



Program Participants and Outcomes

	Total # of Participants	Secondary Education	Post- Secondary Education	Steady Part-Time Employment	Steady Full-Time Employment	Did Not Graduate From Program
Breaking the Cycle	128	22	20	N/A	61	21
Redemption Reintegration Services	79	46	11	55	59	3
African Canadian Legal Clinic YJEP	8	3	5	0	0	0
PEACH	31	26	0	5	0	N/A
Amadeusz	118	93	25	N/A	N/A	1
9 Heavens Healing Academy	40	36	4	17	4	0

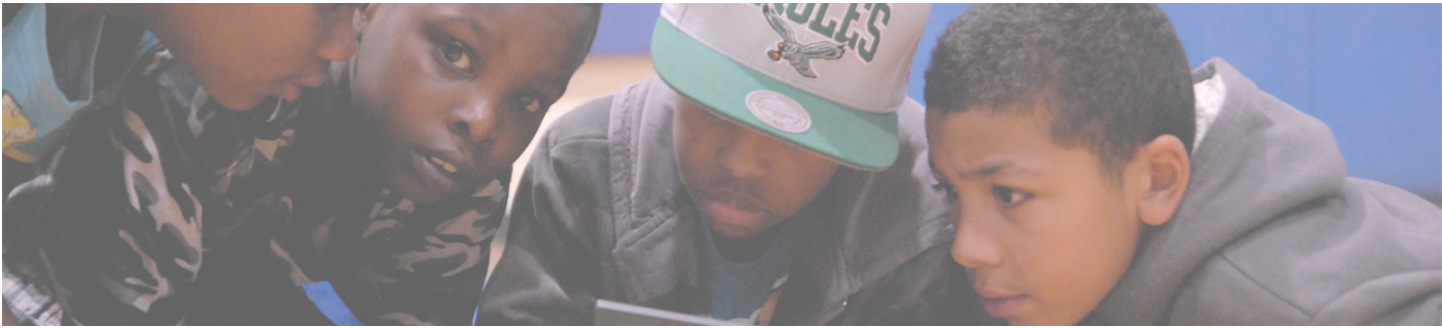
The above chart represents the total number of students in the respective programs, preceding the session prior to this evaluation. The disengagement and attrition of the cohort in question from traditional schooling environment, is well documented as stated earlier in this report. From our observations of the alternative learning environments; review of programmatic structure and content; review of curriculum; and the positive responses and sentiments of the student interviewee regarding the value of reflective services and reflective curriculum, it's not surprising that the students in the alternative learning environment are significantly more engaged and consequently more productive students.



Appendix A: Multi-Layered Priority Neighbourhood Profiles

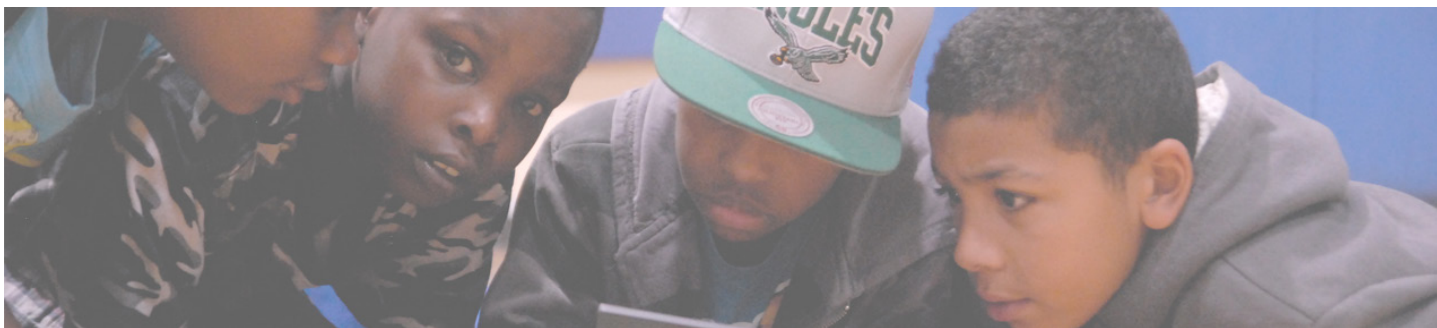
The following profiles of designated priority neighbourhoods in Toronto feature multiple indicators of marginalization with respect to socio-economic indices, school performances and patterns of criminalization. The incarceration costs, as featured in a 2009 Toronto Star investigation entitled “A Real Estate Guide To Incarceration,” are based on a one-day snapshot from 2008. The calculations flow from projections of the total expenses associated with keeping X number of people behind bars for Y number of years in Provincial and Federal correctional facilities. Data on police expenditures are taken from the 2011 Toronto Police Service Statistical Report.

Census tract data pertains to one representative tract within a specific priority neighbourhood. The percentages noted in parentheses for each social indicator speak to the difference between the specific census tract and the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) as a whole. So, for example, if 30% of the families in a census tract are headed by one parent, and if the city average is 17%, then a parenthetical indicator (+13%) will be present. In the case of median income data, the figures in parenthesis represent the difference between the census tract and the CMA. As for data regarding education, the TDSB Learning Opportunities Index ranks schools based on the learning challenges faced by students with respect to family composition, household income and so forth; the higher the ranking the greater the challenges. And, finally, the Fraser rankings measure academic performance on the basis of standardized test scores; the lower the ranking the lower the scores.



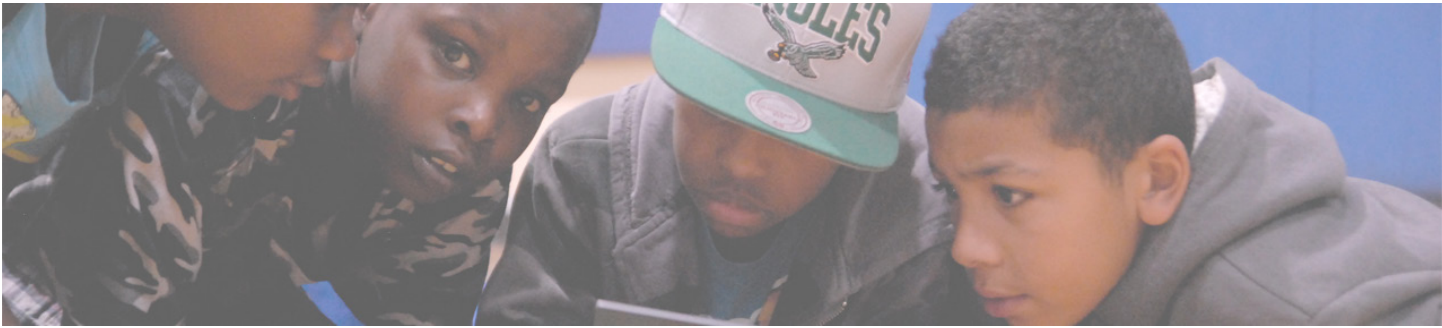
Priority Neighbourhood: Jane-Finch	
Incarceration Costs (2008)	\$36,856,603 (Postal Code M3N)
Police Expenditures (2011)	\$30,576,947 (31 Division)
Data for Census Tract 0312.04 (2005)	Percentage of families with one parent: 39% (+22%)
	Total population 15 years and over with no certificate, diploma or degree: 47% (+27%)
	Unemployment: 12.1% (+5.4%)
	Median income (All private households): \$37,056 (-\$27,072)
TDSB Learning Opportunities Index School Rankings (2011)	Westview Centennial Secondary School (1/109) Brookview Middle School (15/479) Shoreham Public School (3/479) Driftwood Public School (9/479)
Fraser Report Rankings (Secondary Schools 2011-12)	Westview Centennial Secondary School (696/725)

Chart 1, Williams, C., and Jones, D, 2013



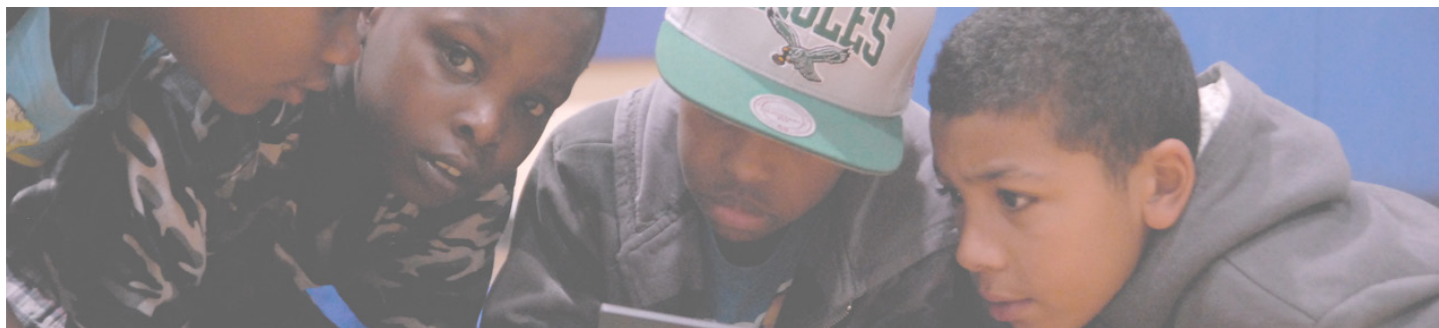
Affluent Neighbourhood: Rosedale	
Incarceration Costs (2008)	\$0 (Postal Code M4T)
Police Expenditures (2011)	\$20,965,401 (53 Division)
Data for Census Tract 0344.02 (2005)	Percentage of families with one parent: 11% (-6%)
	Total population 15 years and over with no certificate, diploma or degree: 7% (-13%)
	Unemployment: 5.5% (-1.2%)
	Median income (All private households): \$179,935 (+115,807)
TDSB Learning Opportunities Index School Rankings (2011)	Northern Secondary School (104/109) North Toronto Collegiate Institute (105/109) Whitney Junior Public School (479/479)
Fraser Report Rankings (Secondary Schools 2011-12)	North Toronto Collegiate Institute (14/725)

Chart 4, Williams, C., and Jones, D, 2013



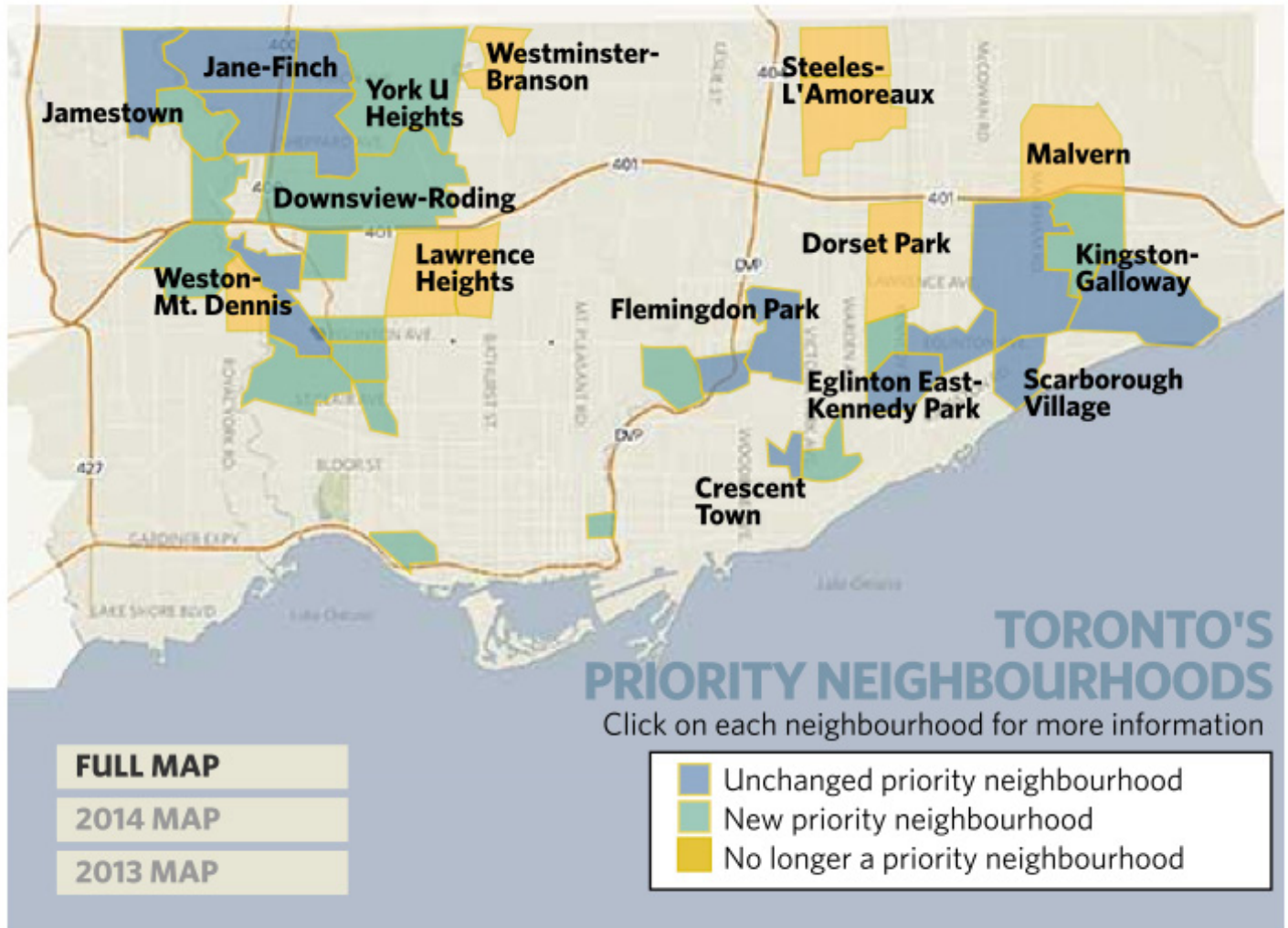
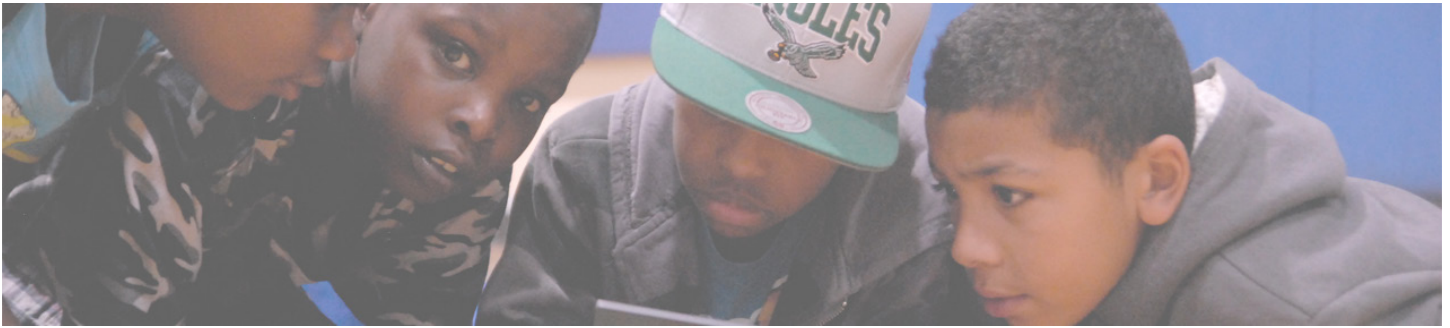
Priority Neighbourhood: Weston-Mt. Dennis	
Incarceration Costs (2008)	\$22,973,816 (Postal Code M6M)
Police Expenditures (2011)	\$22,813,706 (12 Division)
Data for Census Tract 0158.00 (2005)	Percentage of families with one parent: 26% (+9%)
	Total population 15 years and over with no certificate, diploma or degree: 36% (+16%)
	Unemployment: 10.3% (+3.6%)
	Median income (All private households): \$33,083 (- \$31,045)
TDSB Learning Opportunities Index School Rankings (2011)	York Humber High School (5/109) George Harvey Collegiate Institute (12/109) Keelestone Junior Public School (30/479)
Fraser Report Rankings (Secondary Schools 2011-12)	George Harvey Collegiate Institute (636/725)

Chart 2, Williams, C., and Jones, D, 2013

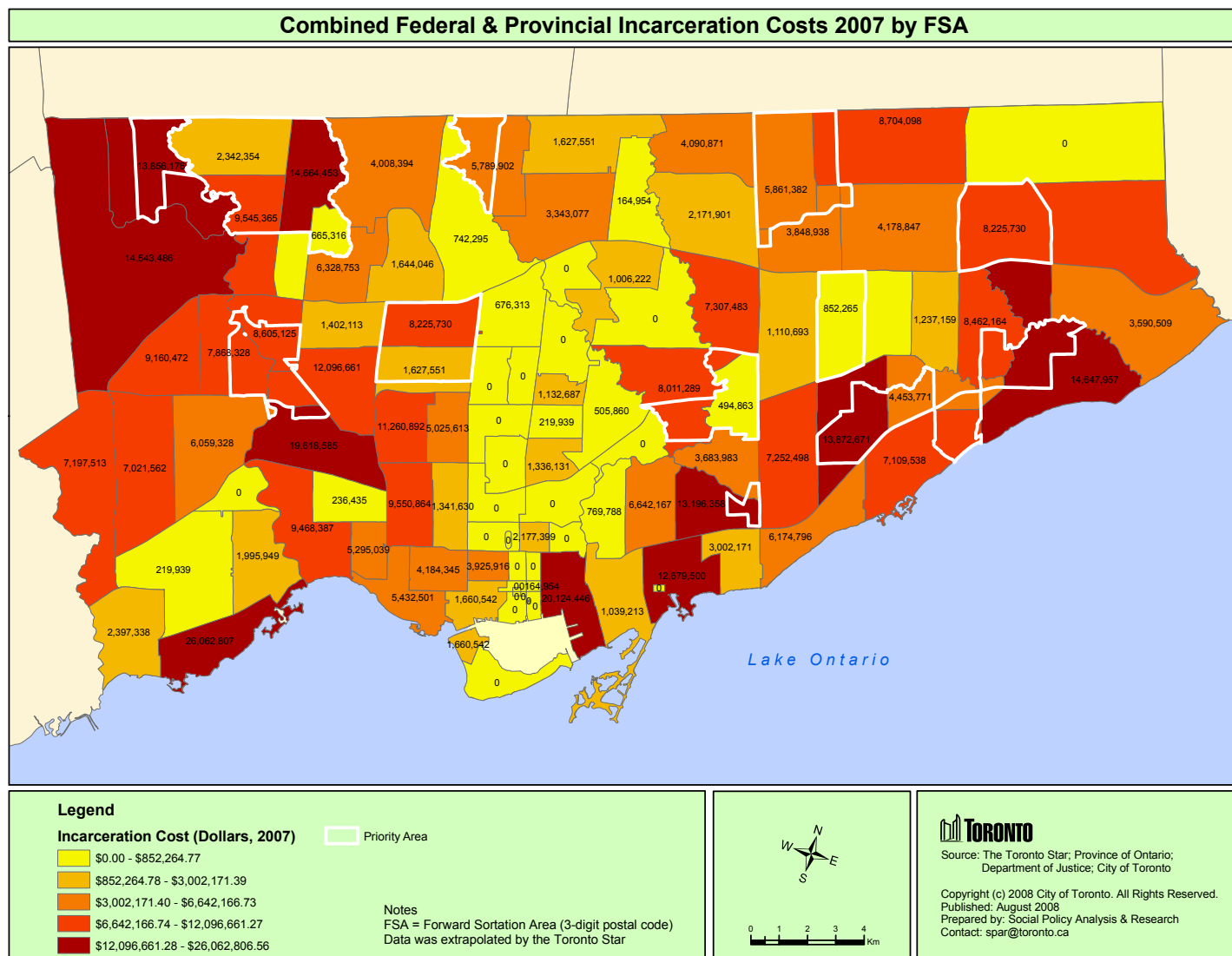
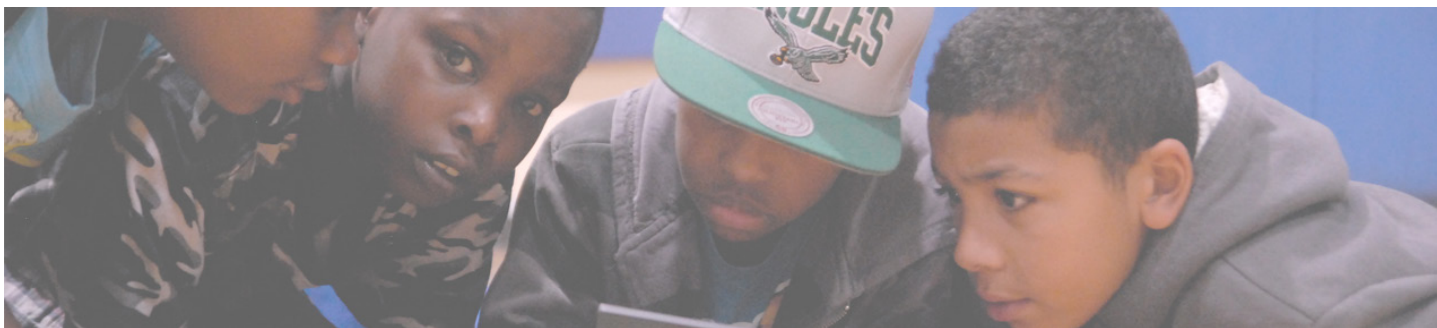


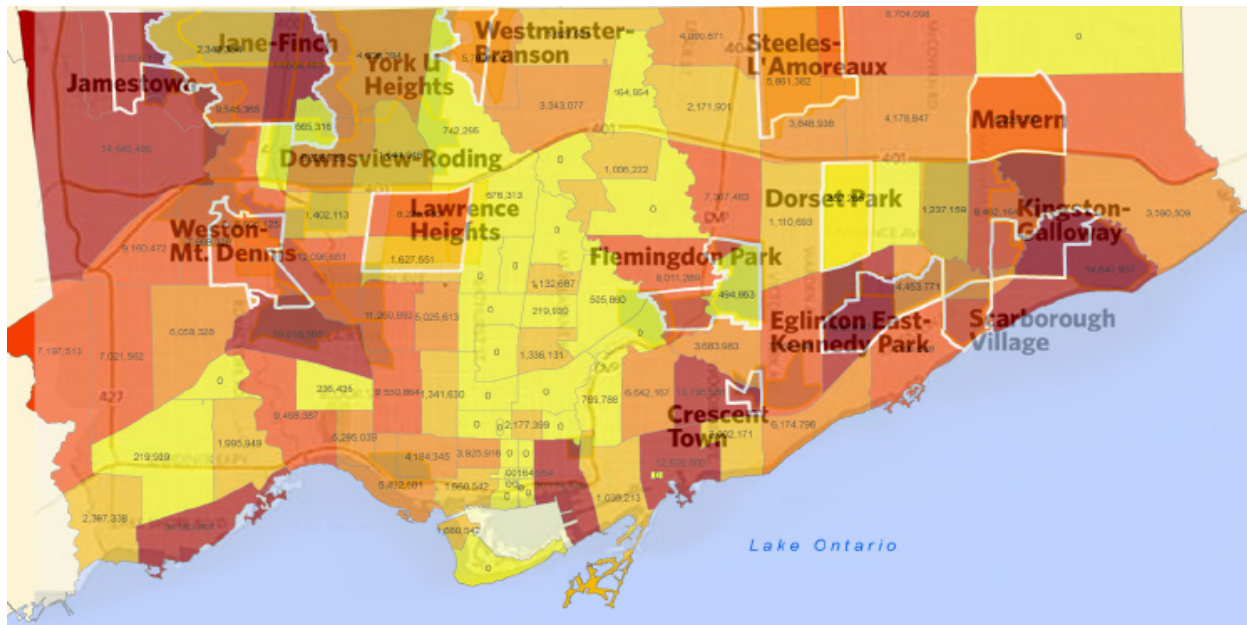
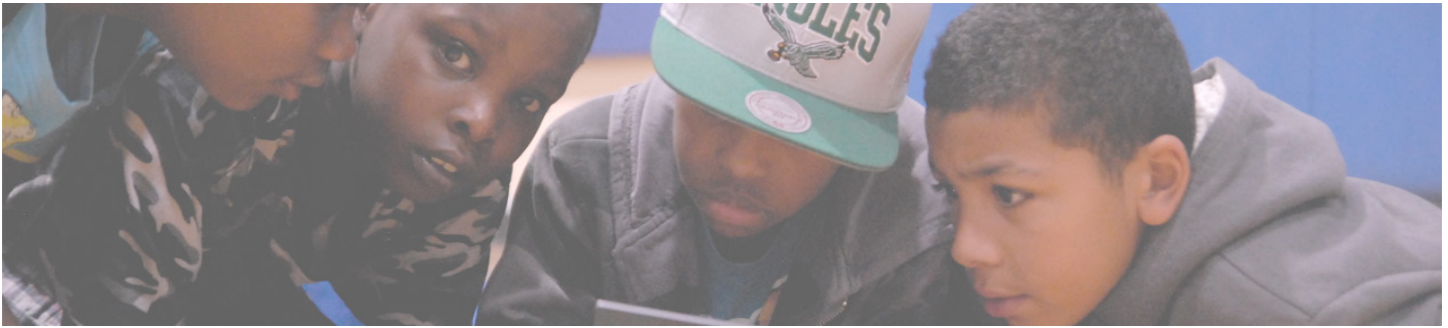
Priority Neighbourhood: Eglinton East/Kennedy Park	
Incarceration Costs (2008)	\$22,900,609 (Postal Code M1K)
Police Expenditures (2011)	\$27,884,132 (41 Division)
Data for Census Tract 0344.02 (2005)	Percentage of families with one parent: 33% (+16%)
	Total population 15 years and over with no certificate, diploma or degree: 23% (+3%)
	Unemployment: 13.5% (+6.8%)
	Median income (All private households): \$24,962 (-\$39,166)
TDSB Learning Opportunities Index School Rankings (2011)	Bendale Business and Technical Institute (18/109) Robert Service Senior Public School (120/479) Walter Perry Junior Public School (87/479)
Fraser Report Rankings (Secondary Schools 2011-12)	Bendale Business and Technical Institute (719/725)

Chart 3, Williams, C., and Jones, D, 2013

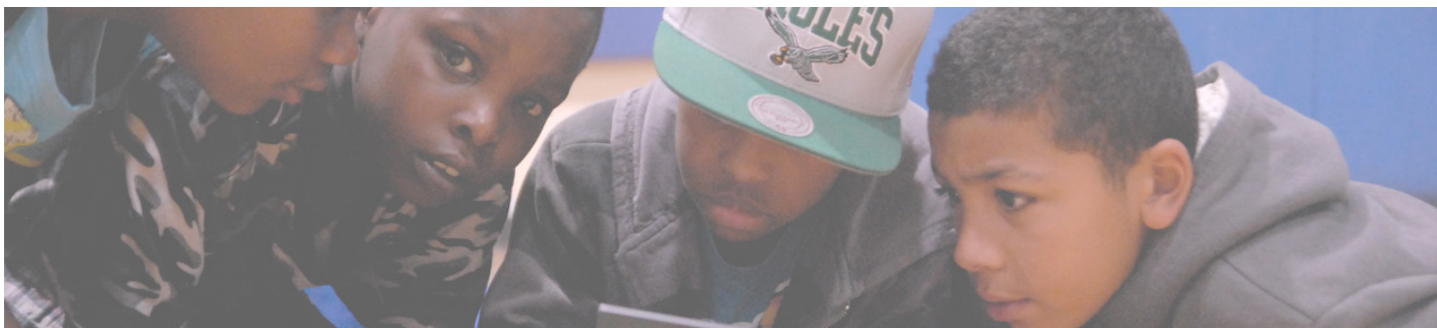


http://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2014/03/11/losers_and_gainers_in_torontos_new_priority_neighbourhoods_list.html





The maps in question shows a direct correlation between the cities poor, racialized and under-resourced communities deemed as “priority communities” following the year of the gun in 2005 and the cost associated with incarceration (provincial and federal). “In July 2008, the Toronto Star published a series of articles focused on crime and punishment in Canada – specifically the social and economic costs of mandatory minimum sentences. The Toronto Star series collected data from federal and provincial sources (one federal FOI request took 2.5 years to process), an Angus Reid national survey, interviews with academics, police, justice and corrections officials, city staff, and community members, and selected US and Canadian reports on corrections issues (Rankin, Toronto Star, 2008). In March of 2014, the City of Toronto deemed 8 communities previously considered “priority communities” as no longer deserving of that status (Malvern, Dorset Park, Westminister-Branson, Yorkdale-Glen Park, L’Amoreaux, Steeles, Humber Heights-Westmount and Englemount-Lawrence). Concordantly the City of Toronto added the following communities it deemed as worthy of the moniker of a “priority community”: Beechborough-Greenbrook, Oakridge, Elms-Old Rexdale, Regent Park, Thorncliffe Park, South Parkdale, Rockcliffe-Smythe, Rustic, Morningside, Ionview, Downsview-Roding-CFB, York University Heights, Thistletown-Beaumont Heights, Keelesdale-Eglinton-West, Weston-Pellam Park, Kingsview Village-The Westway. Many are skeptical of the new “priority” designation, because under the new structure, as is evident with the draconian cost associated with provincial and federal incarceration, many crime infested communities previously deemed as “priority communities” will lose much needed resources. The new designation also highlights the fact that many communities that weren’t previously classified as “priority communities”, based on the high cost associated with provincial and federal incarceration cost, should have been deemed as “priority communities” from the inception.



Appendix B: Excerpts from the Youth Criminal Justice Act

3. (1a) the youth criminal justice system is intended to protect the public by

(ii) promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of young persons who have committed offenses

(iii) supporting the prevention of crime by referring young persons to programs or agencies in the community to address the circumstances underlying their offending behaviour;

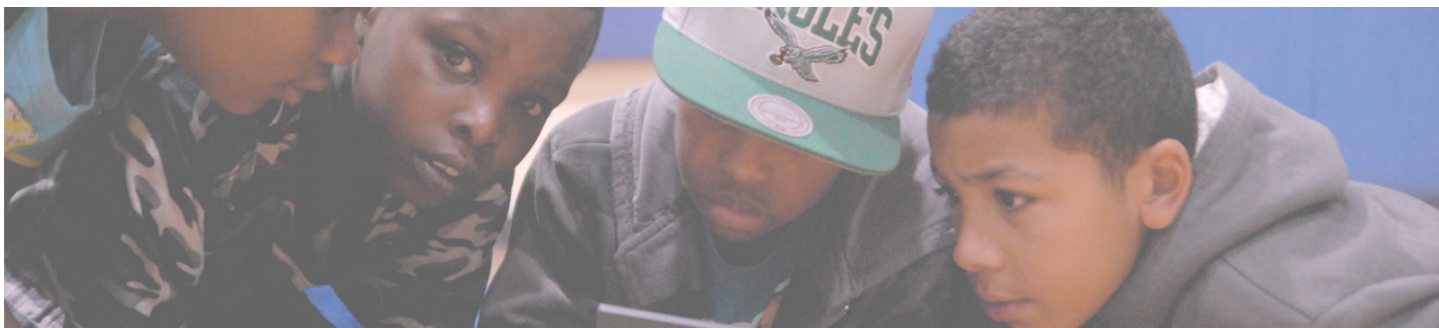
3. (1c) within the limits of fair and proportionate accountability, the measures taken against young persons who commit offences should

(i) reinforce respect for societal values,

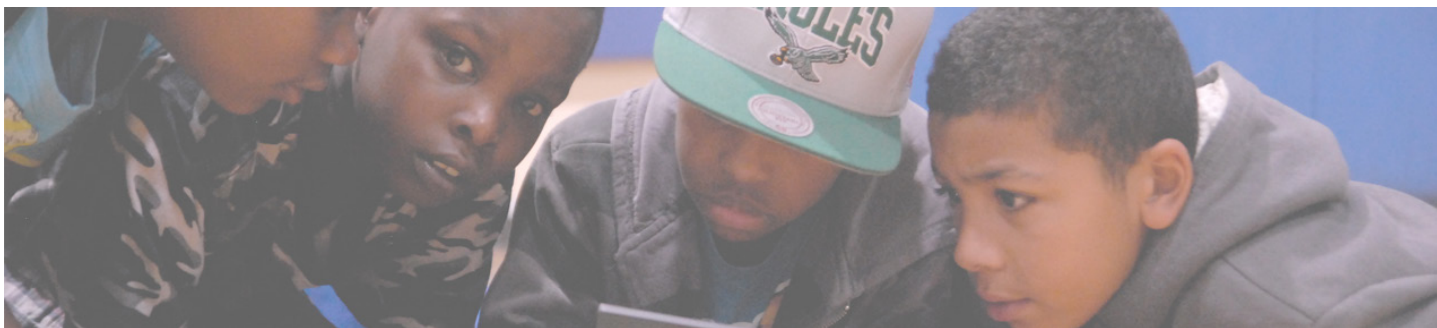
(ii) encourage the repair of harm done to victims and the community,

(iii) be meaningful for the individual young person given his or her needs and level of development and, where appropriate, involve the parents, the extended family, the community and social or other agencies in the young person's rehabilitation and reintegration, and (iv) respect gender, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences and respond to the needs of aboriginal young persons and of young persons with special requirements; and...

83. (1) The purpose of the youth custody and supervision system is to contribute to the protection of society by (b) assisting young persons to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the community as law-abiding citizens, by providing effective programs to young persons in custody and while under supervision in the community.



90. (1) When a youth sentence is imposed committing a young person to custody, the provincial director . . . shall, without delay, designate a youth worker to work with the young person to plan for his or her reintegration into the community, including the preparation and implementation of a reintegration plan that sets out the most effective programs for the young person in order to maximize his or her chances for reintegration into the community.



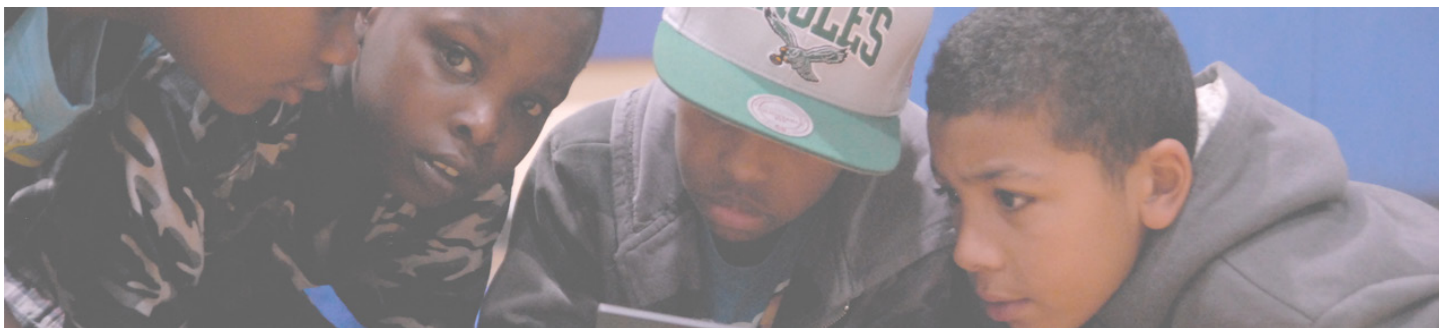
Appendix C: Critical Reflections on Legislation (YCJA), Crime, Incarceration, Re-Entry, Reintegration and Recidivism – The Narrative of K.P.

The Youth Criminal Justice Act states that from the moment a young person enters a youth justice facility, a youth worker, along with the young person, must be ready, “without delay,” to plan for the youth’s release, “including the preparation and implementation of a reintegration plan that sets out the most effective programs for the young person in order to maximize his or her chances for reintegration into the community” (90 (1). Effective, “Dawn to Dusk” programming is an integral part of that reintegration process. Our 2011 Review found the majority of youth were either not in a program, were on a wait list, or the program had been cancelled. Recently, a review of current programming showed that very few programs are offered on a regular basis; there are also questions about relevance and effectiveness (PACY 2013: 83).

The accounts of youth offenders at the Roy McMurtry Youth Center (RMYC)¹, in the 2013 report *It Depends Who’s Working: The Youth Reality at the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre*, a report commissioned by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth², stated “the majority (79%) of comments offered [by youth interviewees] reinforced that youth did not know if and/or how they would continue in programs upon leaving the RMYC (PACY 2013:83). The report further stated, “the number of youth who don’t seem to know what will happen next in terms of programming, raises questions about how well reintegration planning and/or communication about planning is working between staff and youth” (PACY 2013:80).

1. Directly operated by the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (the Ministry), RMYC was designed as a state-of-the-art facility intended to meet the distinct needs of young people. Yet, youth were calling to complain about violence, the amount and quality of food they were receiving, lack of programming, family visits being cancelled, and delays or denials of phone access to lawyers and the Advocate’s Office; the latter mandated in legislation to listen to their concerns, elevate their voices and advocate on their behalf. Taken from the report: *It Depends Who’s Working: The Youth Reality at the Roy McMurtry*.

2. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent voice for Ontario’s children and youth in and on the margins of government care. Reporting directly to the Legislature, the Provincial Advocate partners with children and youth, including those who are First Nations and those with special needs, to elevate their voices and promote action on their issues. Guided by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to be heard, the Provincial Advocate strives to be a model of meaningful child and youth participation through all of its advocacy services. Source: Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007

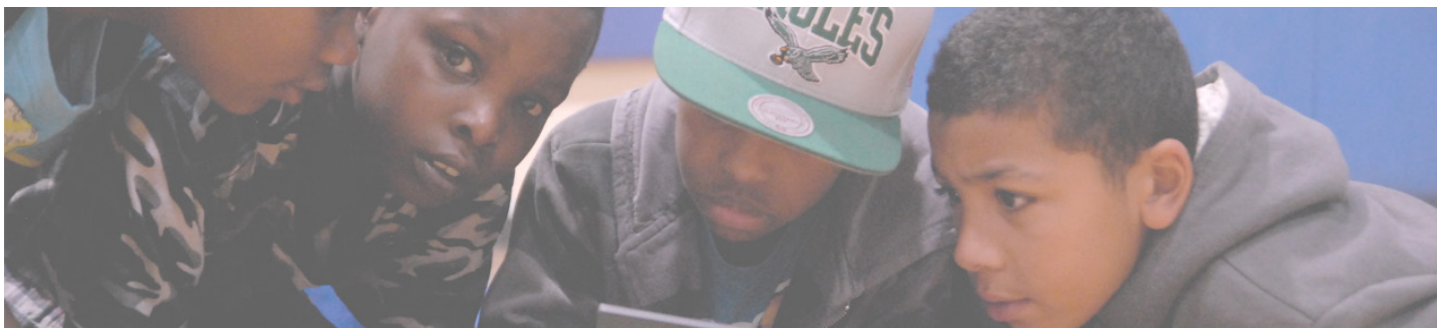


Extrapolating from the interviews we conducted with agencies and youth for the purposes of our report, the responses we garnered echo the position outlined in the PACY report: prior to reintegration and re-entry, institutions do not have access to coordinated comprehensive programming, particularly reflective community-based programs consistently available to re-entrants upon their release. The accounts of the majority of the youth at the RMYC and the interviewees for this report are inconsistent with the provisions outlined in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA). The YCJA legislates and mandates the successful rehabilitation, reintegration and re-entry of youth offenders. The act also mandates the preparation and implementation of a reintegration plan that sets out the most effective programs for the young person in order to maximize his or her chances for reintegration into the community (PACY 2013: 83). The YCJA further states:

The youth criminal justice system is intended to protect the public by: promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of young persons who have committed offenses; supporting the prevention of crime by referring young persons to programs or agencies in the community to address the circumstances underlying their offending behaviour; encourage the repair of harm done to victims and the community; and when a youth sentence is imposed, committing a young person to custody, the provincial director shall, without delay, designate a youth worker to work with the young person to plan for his or her reintegration into the community” (Taken from the Youth Criminal Justice Act).

The YCJA is, by global standards, a progressive piece of legislation that serves to encourage the just treatment of youth in conflict with the law, but is there a disconnection between the legislation on the books and practices on the ground? And is it possible that there are gaps in the YCJA itself? The fact is there is no comprehensive infrastructure supportive of intake, reintegration and re-entry; consequently there are glaring inconsistencies between theory and practice.

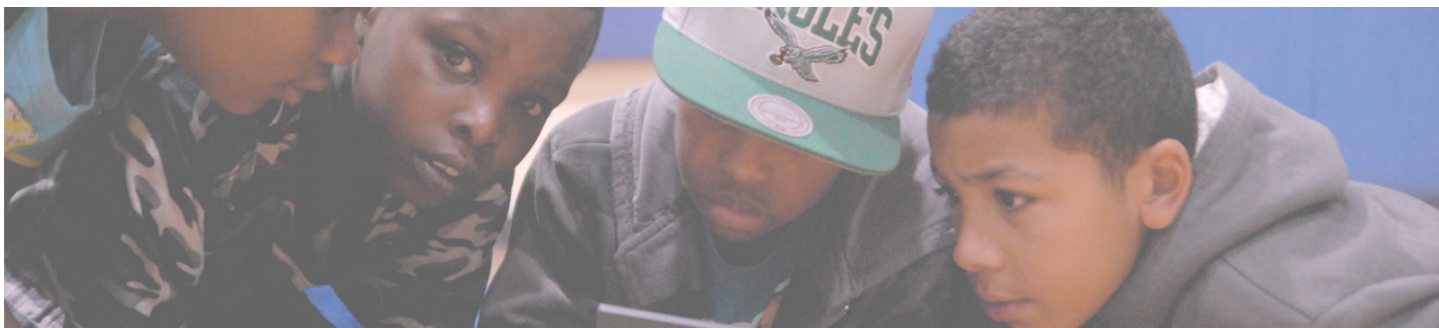
The YCJA, as previously stated, legislates and mandates the successful rehabilitation, reintegration and re-entry of youth offenders. But how can such a policy be operationalized when there is no coordinated inter-agency (*Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of Education, the school boards and community-based*



agencies) communication and synergy? The conversation around inter-agency coordination and collaboration exists at the crux of diagnosing, mapping, implementing and operationalizing the comprehensive framework necessary to address the gaps in youth re-entry and reintegration. The critical question is, accordingly, this: who would oversee the development of this prospective inter-agency infrastructure? Would it be coordinated at the federal level (e.g. the Department of Justice) or would the Office of the Provincial Advocate be the governing body?

Bearing these considerations in mind, *The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At-Risk*, noted, in a 2011 report, that “if we are to improve educational outcomes for youth in the Juvenile Justice System, inter-agency communication and collaboration would be an integral part of the process.” The report further argues:

Inter-agency communication and collaboration is a key principle and practice in addressing the unmet educational needs of youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. When child-serving agencies communicate and work with each other, and are committed to coordinating services and supports for the youth and families they serve, they become part of a more integrated system. Such a system may prove more efficient and effective than one in which child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and related agencies work in silos. (NDTAC, 2011: 10).

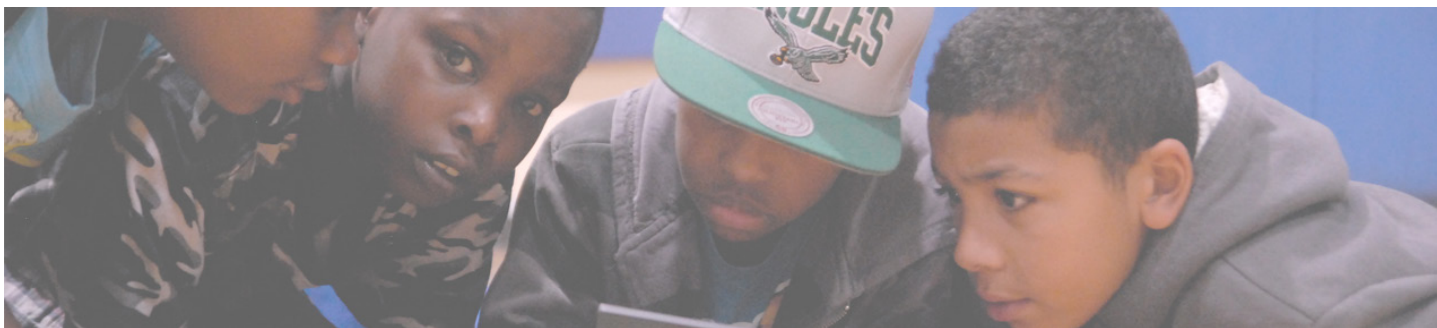


The Narrative of K.P:

The narrative of K.P., chronicled below, highlights gaping systematic issues with respect to processes of intake and reintegration. K.P.'s narrative is consistent with the youth voices interviewed for this report. A conversation and subsequent interaction with K.P., a 16 year-old youth in custody, highlighted the baleful consequences of incarceration and the complexity of reintegration, re-entry and recidivism. Describing his stay at the RMYC, K.P. stated, "Sir, if that judge thought I was a monster as he described us at sentencing, the world is going to see a monster when I get out of this hell hole – this place made me a monster, everyday day I am literally fighting for my life." Those words have always resonated with me and, accordingly, I have often reflected upon the circumstances and experiences that relegated many like K.P to the fringes of society, and often ponder how do we bring them back from the fringes to the nexus of inclusion and hope.

K.P. was one of eight children/youth in my *Boys to Men* mentorship program, who on Saturday, September 10, 2005, stumbled across the bullet-riddled body of Andre Burnett, a 24 year-old man who was gunned down on a footbridge located at Jane and Driftwood Avenue. I scanned the faces of the children that were with me, ranging in age from 10-12 years-old, and the title of a book I had just completed came to mind: *There Are No Children Here*.

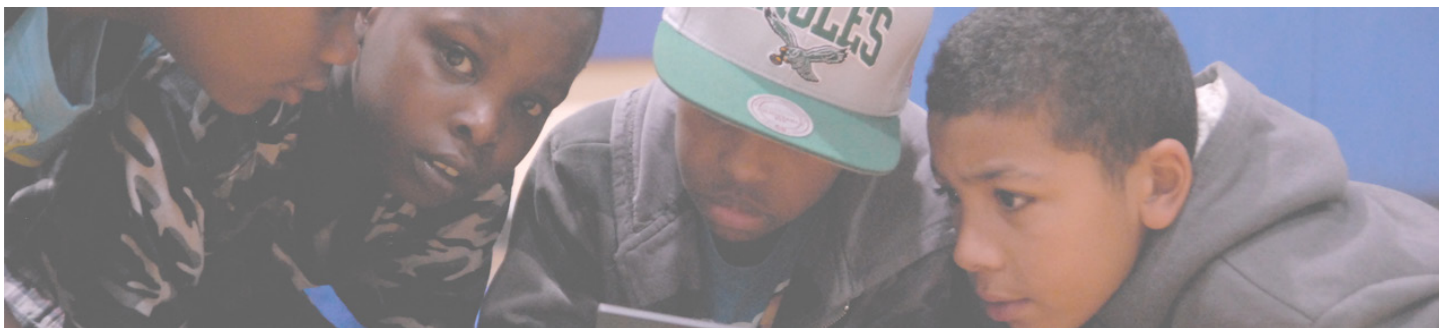
The killing of Andre Burnett on the footbridge was not the only tragedy that day. For over a decade, I have had courtside seats to the moral erosion of children exposed to the noisome of violence, apathy, racism and so forth. Jonathan Kozol's book *Death at An Early Age* speaks to the impact of children and youth exposed to such violence and carnage. The day in question changed the way I approach teaching, curriculum, programming, and advocacy for children living in the city's poor racialized and under-resourced communities. On Monday morn-



ing, September 12, 2005, when I reported to my teaching assignment (located 20 meters from the crime scene), there wasn't a grief councillor to debrief the children about what they saw a few days earlier; indeed, there was no mention of the incident. Various public entities – including the Toronto District School Board, as well as the governments of Toronto, Ontario and Canada – have, to date, no coordinated mechanisms in place to discuss these tragic incidents with the children and youth who witness them. And here is a bizarre fact worth mentioning: portions of Burnett's remains - meaning body matter and blood - were still on the footbridge on the Monday morning in question. Hundreds of children who make use of the footbridge were therefore exposed to the residual physical dimensions of the tragedy.

In addition to being demonized and maligned by the status quo, these children are victims of marginalizing processes fuelled by racism and apathy. The issues faced by these children are generally regarded as irrelevant until they come to the fore in the context of headline-grabbing incidents of gunplay: Yonge Street (December 26, 2005), the Eaton Centre (June 2, 2012), Danzig (July 16, 2012). The police in Toronto, for their part, claim to “address” gun violence by targeting children and youth from the city's marginalized communities by engineering so-called gang raids such as Project Traveller, Project Kryptic, Project Marvel, etc. These raids usually net scores of arrests to supposedly rid society of individuals deemed crime-prone, but as Royson James states, “Yes, we may have smashed the Ardwick Blood Crew but we didn't get the conditions that breed such deviants. In our hearts we must find the courage and empathy to ease the social conditions that incubate such evil” (Powell, 2010).

While in custody at the RMYC, K.P. was arrested and charged in the Project Marvel Raid. K.P. was subsequently released for time served on the initial matter and granted bail on the Project Marvel charges. A few months after his eighteenth birthday, he was re-arrested and charged with a weapon offence; as of November 30th, 2013 he was in detention awaiting the matter before the court. K.P.'s mother states that his re-arrest and current



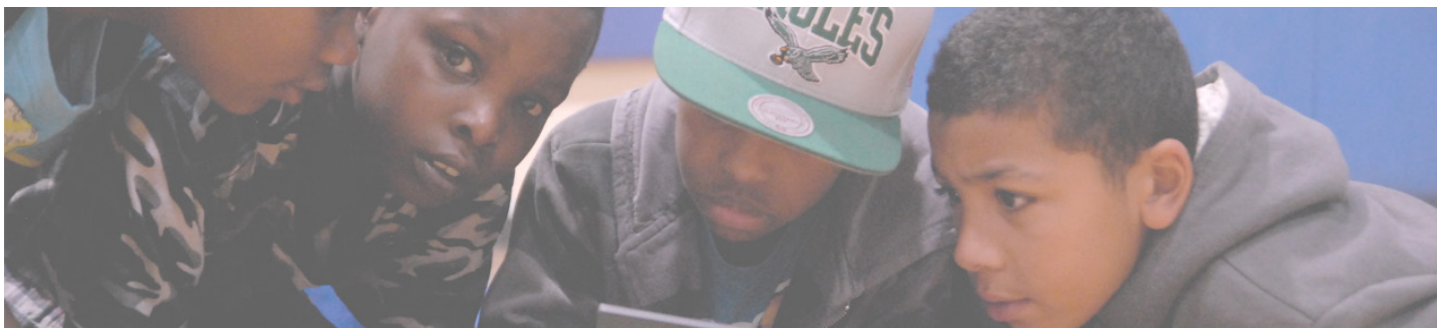
incarceration stemmed from the challenges he encountered in the course of attempting to register in school and his inability to access reflective services, those pertaining to reintegration in particular.

When K.P. was released from custody in May 2012 and attempted to enrol in school as per the conditions of his release, he, like most students exiting custody, had a very difficult time getting into school. Just think about it for a second: a student exits jail, enters a local high school with the aim of enrolling, and the principal, if she is unaware of the youth's circumstances, will likely ask, "where were you and what was the charge(s)?" The principal might also issue a quasi-demand in the form of a question: "why don't you try the school up the road?" If the student protests then various claims can be marshalled: "your co-accused attends our school," "school safety would be undermined," "we don't have your Ontario school record," and so on.

In the case of K.P. he went to his home school and was turned away. He was recommended to an alternative school program, Promoting Education & Community Health (PEACH), located south of Finch, but that placement might as well have been in another country given ongoing issues of social polarization and violence that exist between the children/youth north and south of Finch. K.P, who resides on the north side, knows that if he ventures south of Finch he does so at grave risk (Frissen, *Globe and Mail*, June 16, 2007).

He was then recommended to the Redemption Reintegration School Services Transitional School Program (RRSTSP)³. The RRSTSP is a joint initiative between the Toronto District School Board (Equitable and

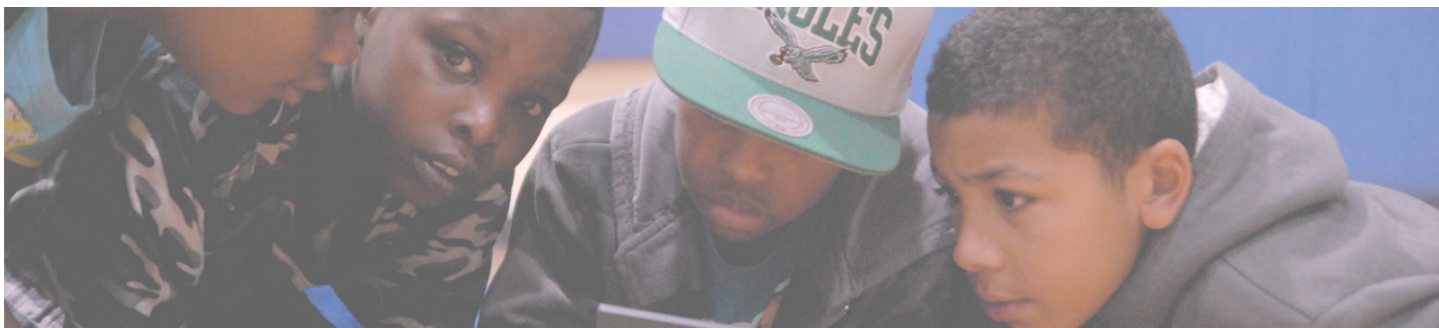
3. The Redemption Reintegration Services (RRS) and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Transition School Program is a unique pilot project that seeks to enhance academic options and reintegration services for TDSB students transitioning from Youth Justice Detention Facilities (14-17 years of age) and Community Safety and Correctional Services Facilities (18-21 years of age). The Transition School pilot project seeks to work collaboratively and communicate reciprocally with the various stakeholders and institutions: Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Youth Justice Detention Facilities, Community Safety and Correctional Services Facilities, to ensure the successful re-entry and reintegration of youth transitioning from detention facilities. The objective of the Transition School Program is to provide students coming out of custody with an alternative learning space that will address their individual and often times unique educational needs. In addition, RRS provides a plethora of wrap-around support that includes, but is not limited to:



Inclusive Schools and Caring and Safe School Departments) and Redemption Reintegration Services. However, based on the fact that one of K.P.'s co-accused was already enrolled and attending the program this would have been a direct violation of his bail conditions; he therefore had to explore more viable educational alternatives. In the process of engaging in such exploration, he re-offended. Now, then, could a well-conceived inter-agency infrastructure have reduced the likelihood of K.P.'s recidivism?

K.P.'s narrative highlights a number of needs for children residing in the city's poor and racialized neighbourhoods, specifically those exiting custodial settings: access to education, reflective programs and curriculum, and cultural considerations of care for the youth in these environments. And even more: youth forums to discuss the prevalence of violence in the city's poor and under-resourced communities, in an attempt to prevent these pat-

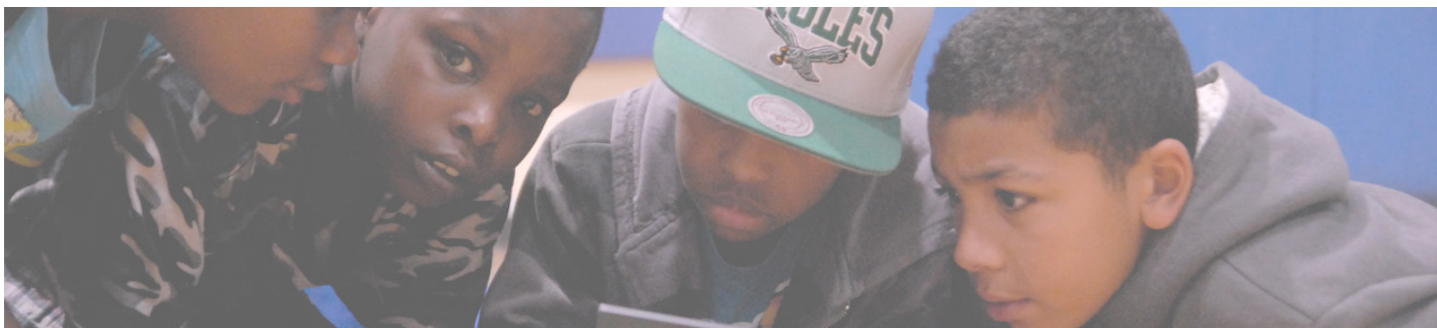
culturally reflective services, housing support, health services, reintegration services, employment services etc. The Transition School Program accommodates students, 14-21 years old, transitioning from Youth Justice Detention Facilities (open and closed) and Community Safety and Correctional Services Facilities (open and closed). Through a robust and comprehensive referral process that was developed in the first phase of the Transition School Program, these referrals are made by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services - Youth Justice Detention Facilities (open and closed) Ministry of Children and Youth Services - Probation Officers Community Safety and Correctional Services - Probation/Parole Officers and Social Workers, RRS Team, TDSB Caring and Safe Schools Advisors, Court Support Workers, Quadrant Administrators and the TDSB Equitable and Inclusive Schools Special Projects Teacher. The Transition School Program serves as a temporary placement lasting no longer than 2 semesters with the mandate of building capacity and providing students released from custody with a unique learning environment, comprehensive wrap-around support, culturally reflective services and cultural consideration of care. The Transition School Program's pedagogical approach, instructional content and resources are designed to be culturally reflective and congruent to the lived experiences of the students in question. By placing students at the center of the learning and instruction, it enables unique teachable moments that will ideally infuse academic outcomes, address the gaps in learning and expedite the opportunity for successful achievement along the learning continuum. The culturally relevant educational approach seeks to engage students in a context that is congruent to their lived experiences and lived realities. The pedagogical and pro-social approach place emphasis on the following: identity, resilience, opportunity, accountability, self-advocacy and respect. The transition school programming also speaks to "smart choices" and provides a comprehensive analysis of the criminal justice system and meticulously explores current and impactful legislation. The unique 'wraparound' model also serves to mitigate the various social conditions that often compromise academic, social, and civic engagement. The social conditions in question includes: poverty, systematic apathy, mental health, unemployment, housing, health and well-being, poverty and access to education. Transportation and healthy nutritious meals are provided daily to help ensure student success. The culturally reflective pedagogical approach and 'evidenced based' 'wraparound' model is carefully structured to enable the efficient transition into schools and communities enhancing the likelihood of our students' success when they transition from the RRS/TDSB transition school program to the various TDSB institutions, apprenticeship programs or post-secondary institutions to continue their studies or apprenticeship. Experienced and caring professionals are committed to the progress and success of each student. The Transition School Program seeks to mitigate recidivism through educational engagement, which will better enhance social and civic inclusions. Transition School Program locations are: 1460 Midland Ave (east-end location) and 116 Industry St. (west-end location). Students attend classes Monday through Friday 9:30 am to 3:30 pm daily.



terns from being accepted or normalized; and addressing the reality of mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, that are linked to exposure to violence. We highlight population segments from such communities (officially designated as Priority Neighbourhoods) because, as outlined in Appendix A, when we correlated the data there were overlaps and linkages between academic attrition, rates of incarceration and postal codes, such that Priority Neighbourhoods ranked highest in terms of negative social indices.

The fact is, black youth from the communities in question are disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system and should therefore be equipped with resources upon re-entry and reintegration that will reduce the likelihood of recidivism. If we are pretending that the issue of race is not a problem, then why would we create infrastructure to accommodate the affected cohort? The issue of race is a problem because at the RMYC, between January 2011 and April 2011, they housed 177 male offenders; of these, 123 (70%) were black youth (PACY, 2013:16). Black males constitute 4% of Toronto's population and the disproportionate overrepresentation of black youth at the RMYC is therefore troubling. If on the front end we fail to name the issue of race, then on the back end we will not put the appropriate mechanisms in place to accommodate children from the city's poor and racialized communities, as it relates to re-entry, reintegration, culturally relevant/reflective services and culturally reflective curriculum.

Many are arguing that inaction on the part of youth criminal justice functionaries is fuelling the considerable rise in recidivism among youth offenders and that the same patterns are continuing into adulthood. The Correctional Investigator of Canada, Howard Sapers, has drawn attention to a 50% increase in the black inmate population over the ten year period ending in 2011 and, with respect to the matter of disproportionality, though blacks comprise 2.5% of the general population they constitute over 10% of the federal prison population. Concordantly, he also stated that he shared similar concerns regarding Aboriginals, who make up 4% of the general population but 20% of the federal prison population (Richard Brennan, *Toronto Star*, December 15, 2011).

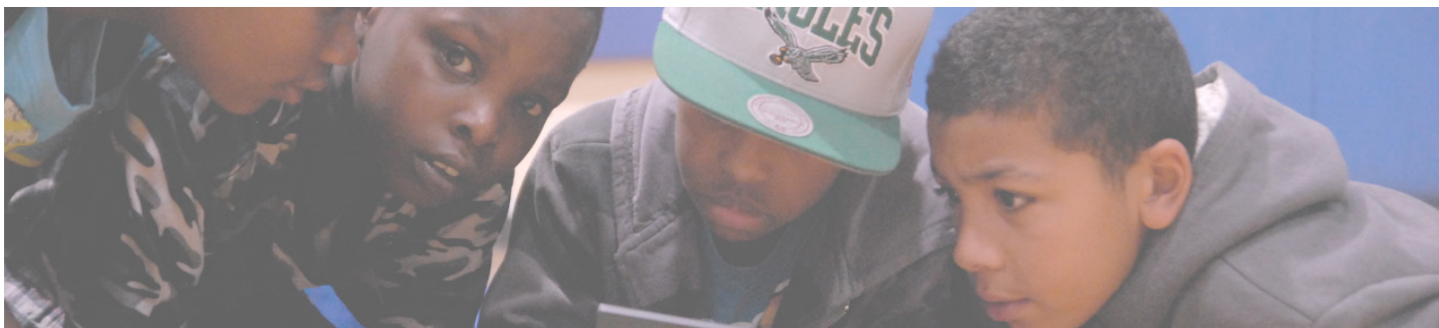


Stephen Lewis, in his report prepared for Bob Rae in 1992 after the Yonge Street riots, emphasized the salience of anti-black racism in Ontario in a host of institutional realms. He wrote:

First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of ‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target (Lewis, 1992: 2).

Let us go back to K.P.’s narrative. If the appropriate infrastructure was in place and he transitioned to a program that addressed the issues around re-entry, reintegration, cultural specificity of care and culturally relevant/reflective services and curriculum, would he be locked up in an adult jail today?

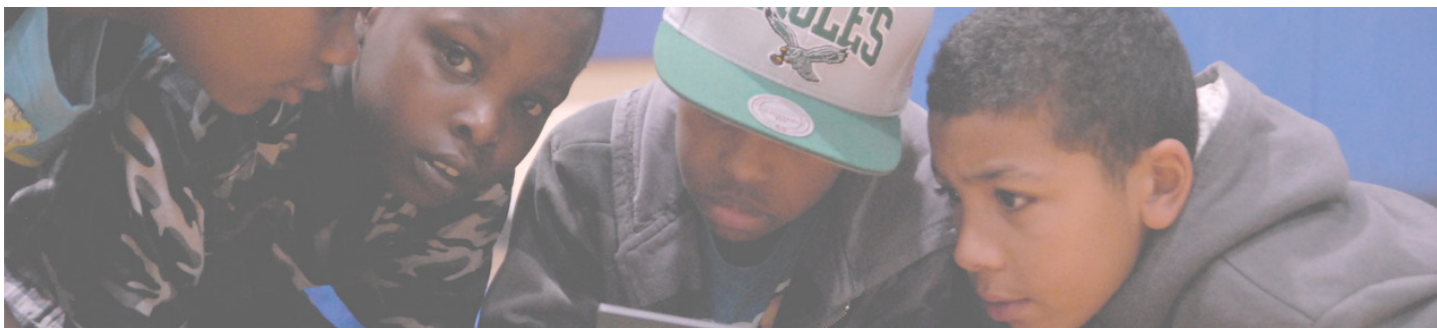
Analysis of the existing infrastructure, the student and agency voices in our survey, and a review of the current literature points to the fact that the challenges K.P. experienced upon re-entry are disturbingly typical. Let us be clear: we are not contending that nothing is in place. We are, however, asserting that based on the volatility of this cohort, the burdensome costs associated with recidivism and continued incarceration into adulthood, not to mention potential implications for public safety, it is only prudent that we are proactive in terms of meeting the educational and reintegration needs of this vulnerable group of students. Consequently, infrastructure that speaks to re-entry and rehabilitation should be comprehensive, seamless and coordinated on an inter-agency basis. The processes associated with being arrested, charged, convicted, incarcerated, released and (hopefully) reintegrated will shed some light on the points of intersection among various agencies/institutions, while illuminating the challenges flowing from inter-agency disconnections and synchronized communication, or a lack thereof. For



contextual purposes, the RMYC will be our focus at this point, the same custodial setting that was the subject of the aforementioned reports produced by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY).

When a youth is remanded into custody he/she is deemed as short stay (less than 14 days) or long stay (more than 14 days). If the youth is deemed as long stay then he/she attends the school at the Youth Justice Facility. The first issue of inter-agency disconnect is quite frequently the youth justice facility, and the difficulty in obtaining the Ontario Student Record (OSR) from the student's home school in a timely and expedient manner. The first challenge is that most, if not all, of the youth justice facilities (closed custody facilities) are outside the jurisdiction of the TDSB. The school at the RMYC is operated by the Peel District School Board (PDSB). This poses a challenge because most of the youth in custody are TDSB students. The RMYC claim is that there are TDSB schools with which they have established relationships, thereby ensuring efficient communication and transfer of the necessary information in a timely fashion. However, they frequently have great challenges and encounter great obstacles when trying to access the required student information. When a youth is transferred to any of the youth justice facilities, the school within the facility has to obtain the Ontario Student Record (OSR) from the school the student attended prior to incarceration. The inability to obtain the OSR or the credit counselling summary in a timely manner means that the student will have to redo courses they have already completed or the youth justice facilities will not be able to program appropriately because they do not have the student's history to deliver the best and most effective program. As one student communicated to me at the RRSTSP, "this is my fourth time doing grade 10 math, sir. I was in, out, in and out - and each time I had to start the same course from scratch, I started grade ten math four times – in custody and when released."

What is missing here is a comprehensive infrastructure around intake and reintegration. A youth is remanded in custody and is being housed at a particular youth justice facility. What needs to be instituted is a

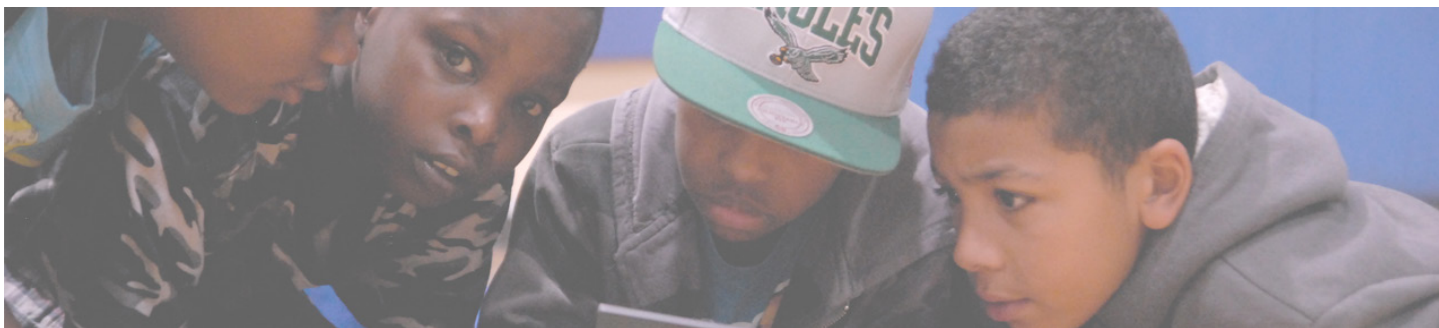


central intake process that will ensure the youth justice facility receives, at least, the credit counselling summary within the first 24 hours of the youth arriving at the facility, in contrast to the youth justice facility calling individual schools directly. The various school boards, including the TDSB, should have a central intake process in place. Central intake would have access to credit counselling summaries in real-time, and would be able to immediately forward such documents to the requesting facilities.

Central intake would then ensure that the OSR and all other relevant materials are transferred in an expedient and efficient manner. When NDTAC spoke of inter-agency coordination, this would be a perfect example. This would also allow seamless coordination and synchronization between TDSB, PDSB and the MCYS. We are uncertain if the Department of Justice, MCYS, TDSB, PDSB or the Advocates Office would institute these recommendations, but this recommendation relating to intake is critical based on the students voices and the frustrations voiced by the youth justice facilities in obtaining student records and information in a timely fashion.

As much as the intake process is compromised on the back end, the process of reintegration and re-entry expose the inmates to a greater level of volatility. K.P. communicated that his experience in prison made him “a monster.” Where was the wrap-around support, where was the mental health support, where was the reintegration support, where was the culturally reflective programming/curriculum? The conditions in most youth justice facilities are violent and volatile to say the least. This is, in part, due to the fact that group-based polarization in various communities – here gang activity is what we have in mind – contributes to patterns of violence that often spill over into custodial settings.

Although this report pertains to youth offenders, similar dynamics unfold in the lives of 18-21 year-old school age males, who occasionally complete their sentencing in youth justice facilities or adult jails. For those

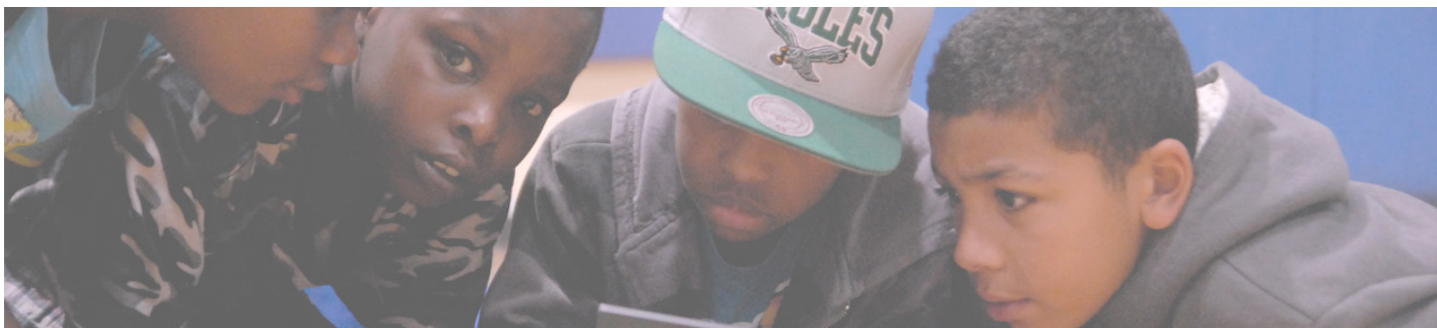


of us on the ground, it is untenable to declare, “well, since he is 18-years-old, a technical adult, we will not deal with him anymore.” On the contrary, we deal with young people irrespective of age, race or class and so, in our view, public sector bodies such as the Department of Justice and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services must consider expanding their programmatic parameters to accommodate youth in the 18-21 age range.

K.P., describing his experiences at the RMYC, declared that every day constituted a fight for his life: “You cannot be caught slipping.” The 2011 review of the RMYC by the PACY voiced some of the same concerns regarding the prevalence of violence at the RMYC.

During the 2011 Review, we learned that tension and violence affect youth life at RMYC. The sheer number of youth comments about violence, the frequent references to emergency “code blues” (a sound transmission identifying situations requiring officers’ assistance) and the detailed descriptions of bullying, peer aggression and assaults, tell a concerning story. 79% of youth offered comments regarding violence and safety issues. The majority of youth interviewed offered comments regarding violence and safety issues some remarking extensively, further suggesting that violence and safety issues affect life at the facility. Five youth mentioned “fighting” and “altercations” as their first response to a general question about what it is like to live at RMYC. Throughout the interviews, youth spoke of violence they experienced themselves, and/or violence they witnessed. They described situations where their peers hid in their rooms or didn’t attend school to protect themselves. Comments like the following were repeated: “What happens on the street comes in here—no guns, so just fights”; “It depends on if you ‘pissed’ someone off”; “The people just have to hide in our room. If you have a beef—and many enemies here—it is not safe.” Youth also described staff using violence when physically restraining youth—those comments are provided in the section on intrusive procedures and excessive force.

As compromised as the intake process is, the process around reintegration is even more perturbing. As illustrated through K.P.’s narrative, we have students released from custody who are left to their own limited devices, meaning they attempt to register themselves in schools or try to find appropriate programming on their own. We cannot emphasize the words “coordinated,” “synchronized,” “comprehensive” and “proactive” enough. If the central intake is in place then such an infrastructure would not only act as a liaison on the front end, it would also ensure



that on the back end there is a mechanism to ensure meaningful access to education and appropriate programming irrespective of the discharge scenario:

1. Youth with Disposition:

- picked up by parents or guardians at the gate and driven home
- pick up by CAS at the gate and taken to group home/new foster family
- travels back to home town via TTC, VIA Rail train service or Greyhound bus service (may arrive at station and not know how to reach final destination)
- driven home by youth centre staff, if public transportation does not service a suitable drop-off location

2. Youth Released from Court

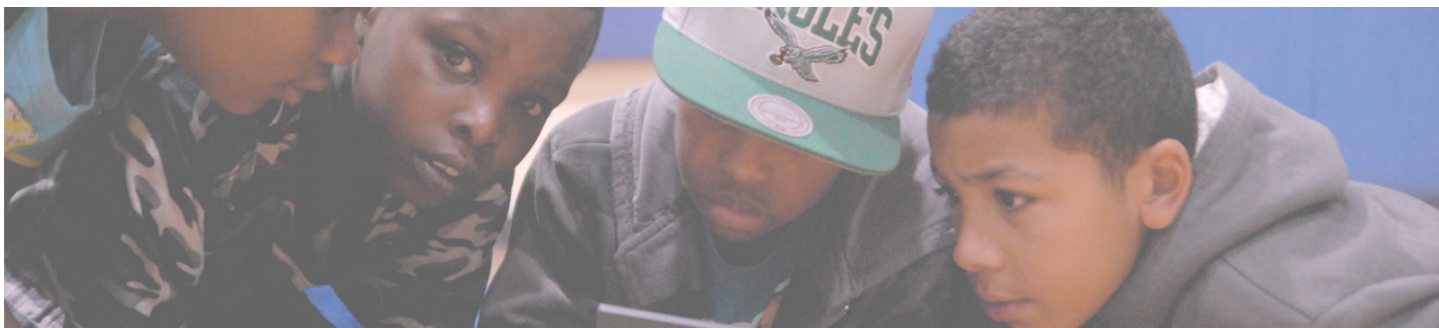
- go to court in transport; released to custody of parents/guardian on bail
- go to court in transport; charges dropped and youth is free to return home
- go to court in transport, found guilty and is sentenced to “time served” or probation
- go to court and eventually released on his own recognizance

Note: Youth may be released dressed in his “burgundies” (clothes issued by the youth centre) and without his personal belongings.

3. Youth Transferred at Court or Other Facility

- go to court in transport; transferred to open custody facility on judicial disposition
- go to court in transport; transferred to alternate secure custody facility because outstanding charges are in different jurisdiction or because of security issues at Youth Center

The majority of students at the RMYC are residents of the city of Toronto and are housed at the Youth Justice Facility by the MCYS and educational services is provided by the PCDSB. Generally, when they are released from custody they are transitioned back to Toronto with the hopes of attending a TDSB school. Based on the discharge scenario, there are no coordinated process to ensure the students have full access to education and access to culturally relevant services, programs and curricula. In this specific regard, various programs and

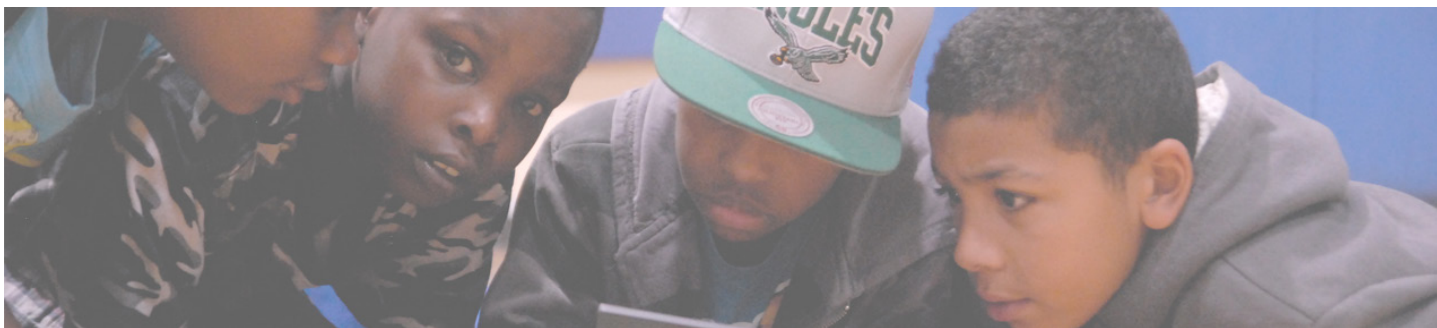


organizations such as: 9 Heavens Healing Academy, the African Canadian Legal Clinic, Amadeaus, Breaking the Cycle, Promoting Education & Community Health [PEACH] and Redemption Reintegration Services [RRS]), are effectively addressing issues around culturally reflective care education and services.

This stimulates a key question: “how do we create a seamless process which incorporates these agencies as parts of the equation prior to youth release or re-entry?” Through relationships with probation officers and court support workers, some students are placed in these programs, but, in fact, many students rarely access court support workers and many are not assigned probation officers. And consider this: there are four court support workers servicing the GTA, making it impossible for them to service hundreds of youth in conflict with the law, particularly when it comes to the issue of re-entry.

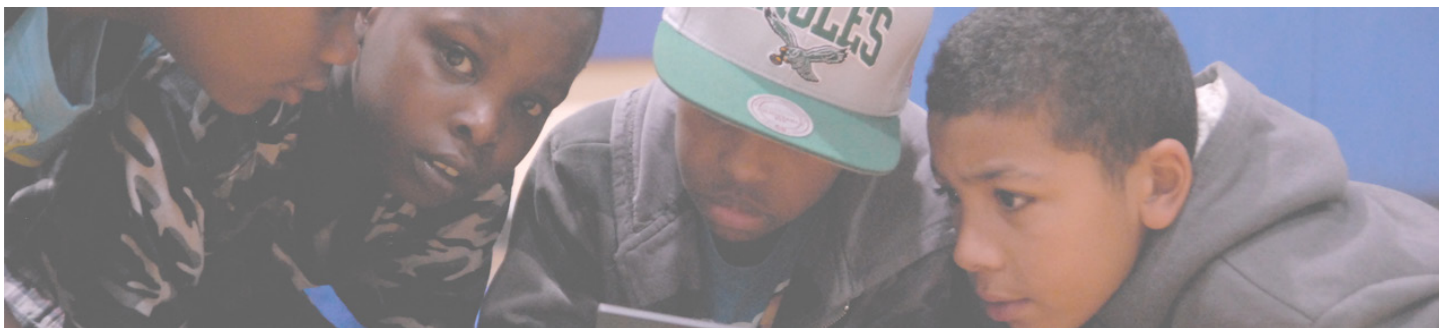
Reading through the transcripts featuring comments by students who experienced re-entry and reintegration through alternative educational programs, we could not ignore the constant positive references to those environments and their curricula. Students communicated how impactful it was to learn about themes that were congruent with their lived realities. In contrast, they constantly noted that traditional schools and curricula were not accommodating and in many cases quite alienating. PACY spoke not only of the absence of programming but also of the irrelevance/ineffectiveness of the programs when they are offered (PACY 2013:83). Our student interviewees also observed that processes of reintegration were compromised by traditional approaches to pedagogy and, further, that these approaches intensified existing patterns of marginalization.

To say that traditional schooling and curricula exacerbate marginalization is a proposition in need of more exploration. This is disturbing because if we are saying that traditional schools are problematic in accommodating students, in particular poor racialized students, who perennially underachieve, then how could such spaces serve students entering from youth justice facilities?

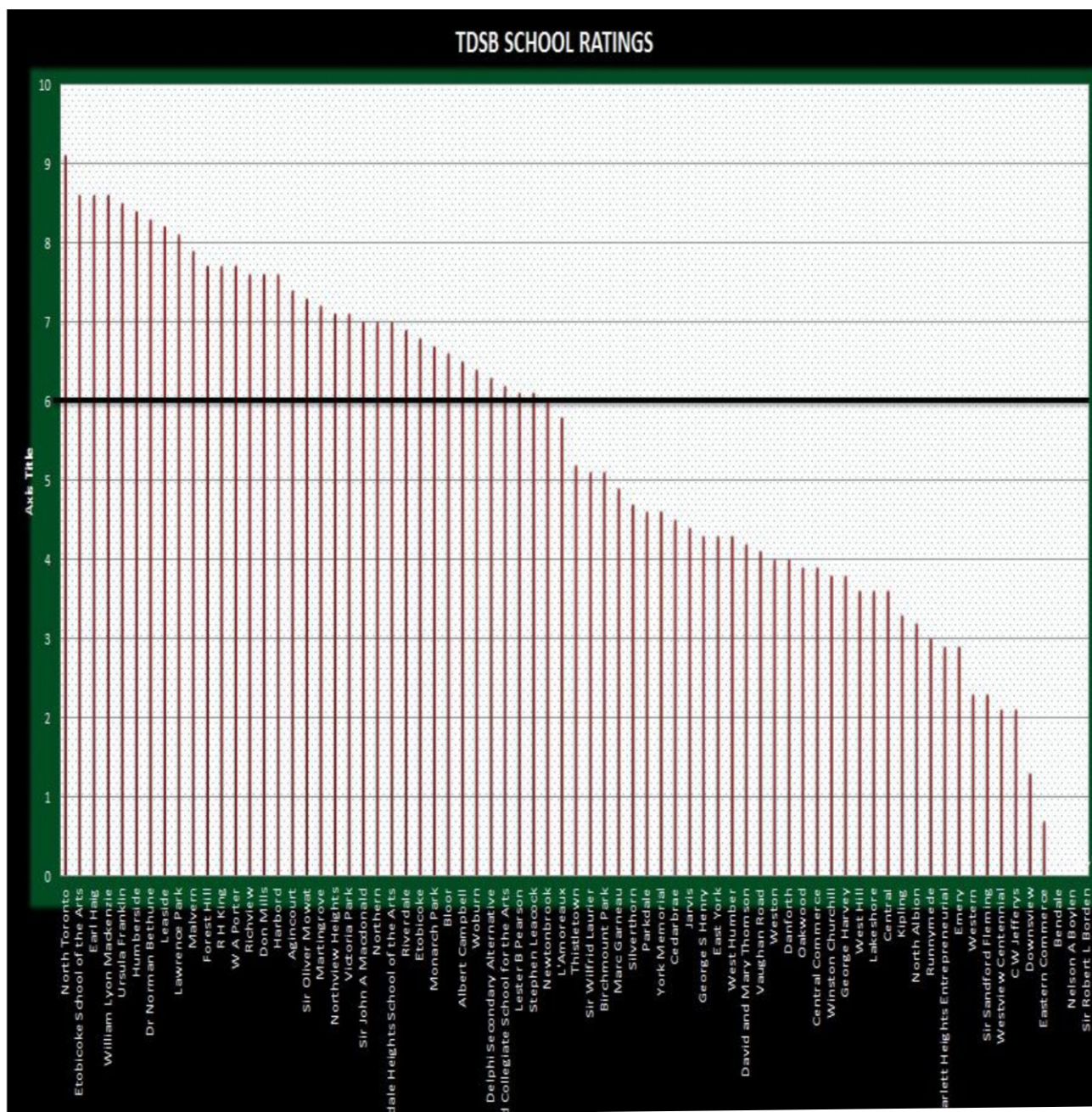
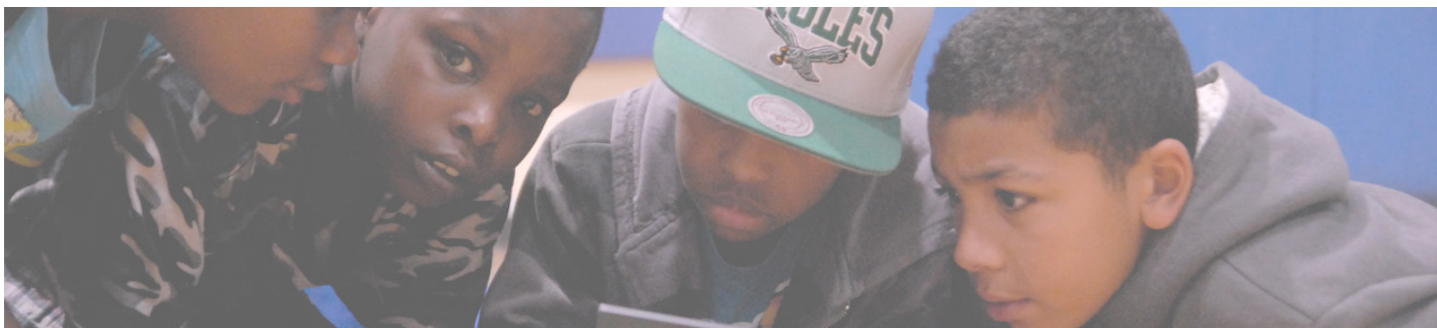


A recent document published by Mahad M. Hori assessed the effectiveness of TDSB schools using standardized test scores (as contained within the Fraser Report), leading him to conclude that the schooling system was not meeting the needs of its students, especially those from marginalized communities. In the course of arriving at this conclusion, he contends that the system is “structurally violent” towards poor, racialized students. Hori’s definition of structural violence and its connection to marginalization is a position we cannot simply dismiss, because in Appendix A of this report have illustrated correlations between academic underperformance, low-incomes, prison costs and police expenditures. According to Hori, “structural violence is the designed, apathetic and systematic approach that impacts students negatively and unapologetically causing them to under-achieve, further relegating them to the fringes of society.”

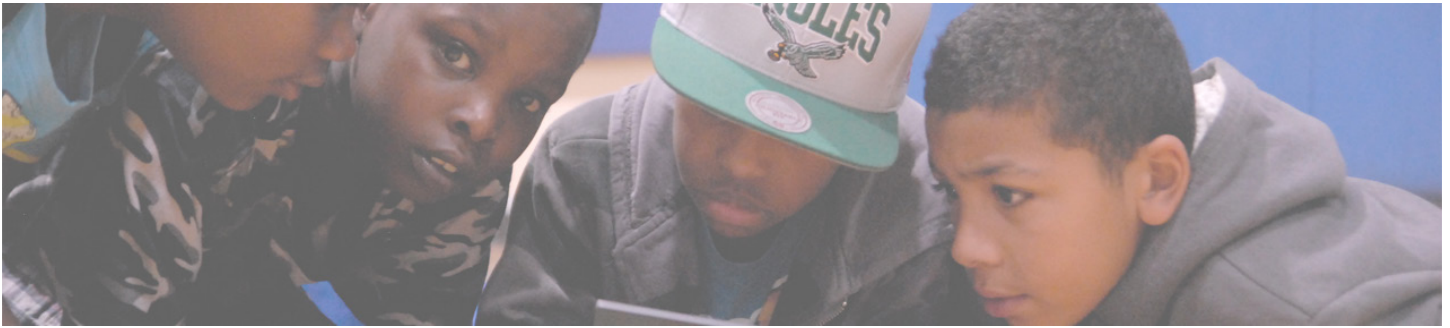
Structural Violence in Our School System - Johan Galtung’s definition of violence: ‘That which is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual abilities are consistently below their potential abilities’. Definition of structural violence: The arrangements of, and relations between the parts or elements of a complex whole, which as a consequence of their assemblage, create a state of affairs where human beings are being influenced so that their actual abilities are below their potential abilities. Does the Toronto District School Board’s structural violence satisfy the categories which define Johan Galtung’s concept of ‘structural violence’? The TDSB is structurally violent, because the institutional structure of the TDSB has created a state of affairs, where marginalized students are being negatively influenced by their schools and teachers. Students have negative educational experiences (they hate school) and this negatively impacts their educational abilities (they don’t learn). This makes the marginalized student’s actual educational abilities worsen, and therefore she/he will never reach their potential educational abilities (graduating, going to university, etc). Additionally, violence is undeniably present because the resources to bridge the gap between the disadvantaged student’s actual educational abilities, and potential educational abilities exist, but are not employed by the TDSB. Essentially, if the TDSB transforms its policies into actual practices, then the Structural Violence in Our School System disadvantaged students from the 13 priority neighbourhoods would receive a proper education. If the TDSB’s Equity and Human Rights policies were actually transformed into practices, then every child from the 13 priority neighbourhoods would have the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty.



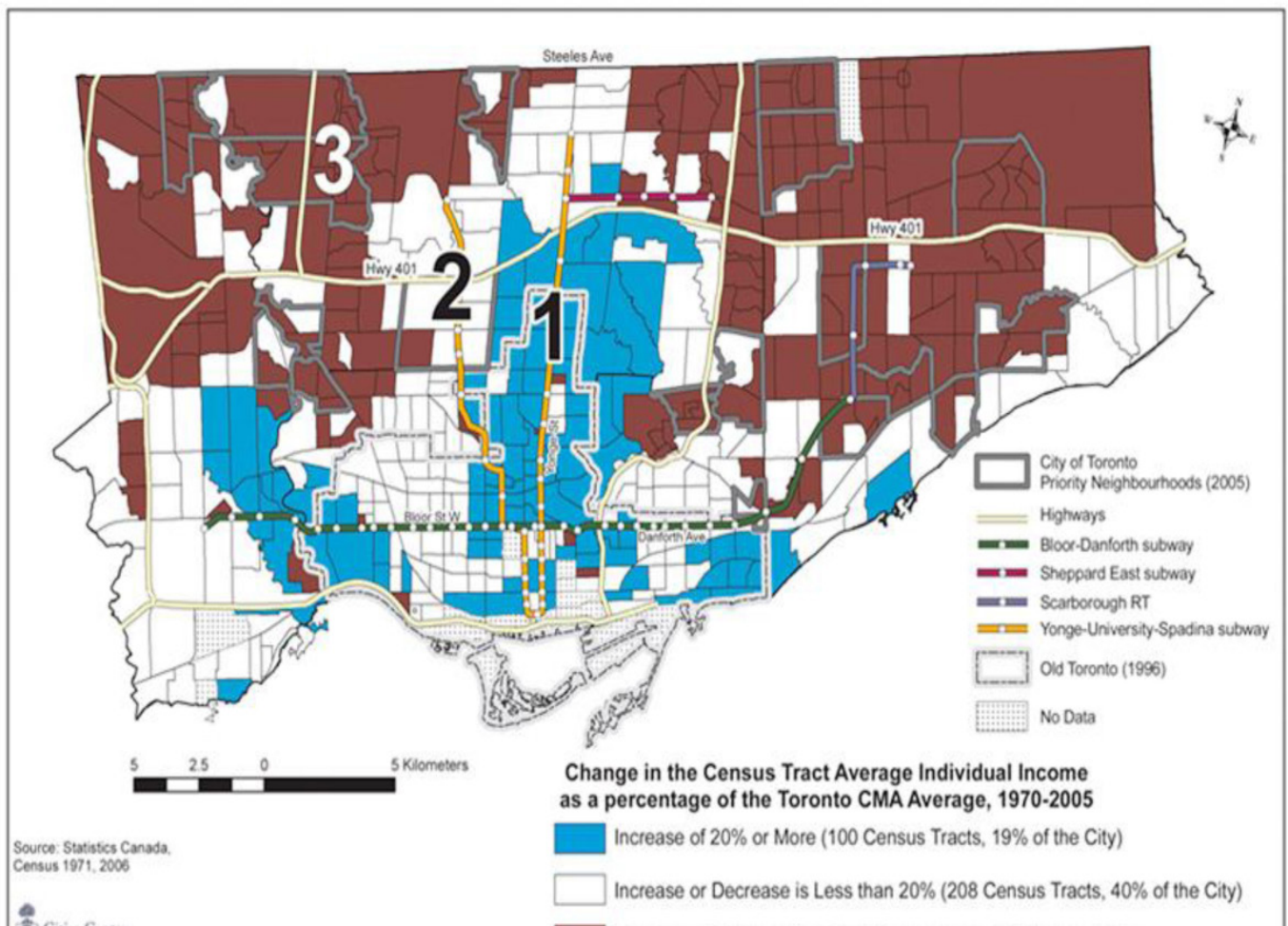
Hori just didn't make his claims; he substantiated them with the Fraser Report⁴ and EQAO⁵ data. His graphs (featured below) paint a picture of a school board characterized by pronounced inability to accommodate students from the city's poor and racialized communities. Thus the claim that traditional schools exacerbate marginalization, and thereby relegate students to social peripheries, is valid.



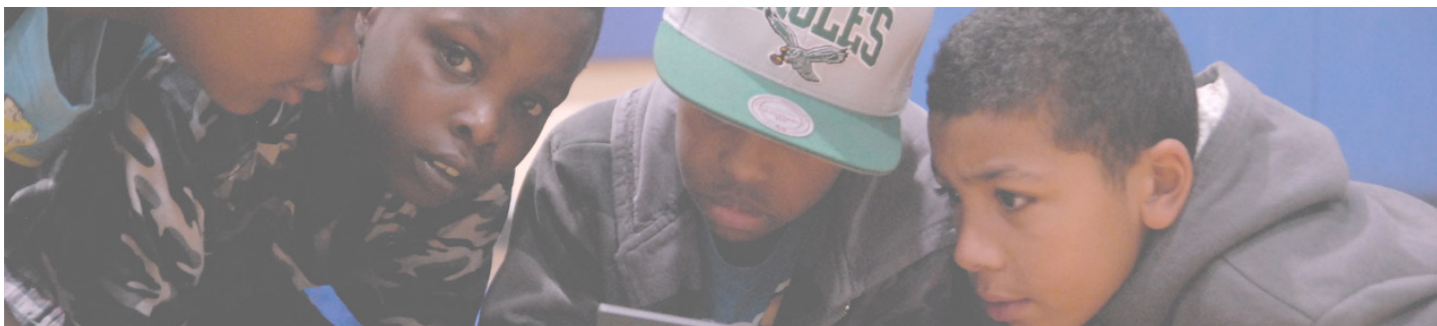
1. Graph: This graph was created using the statistics from the Fraser Institute. The x-axis has the TDSB's 73 Secondary schools. The y-axis has the ratings from 1 to 10. The Black line, number 6, is the provincial passing grade. (Hori, 2013)



Average individual income from all sources, 15 years and over, census tracts

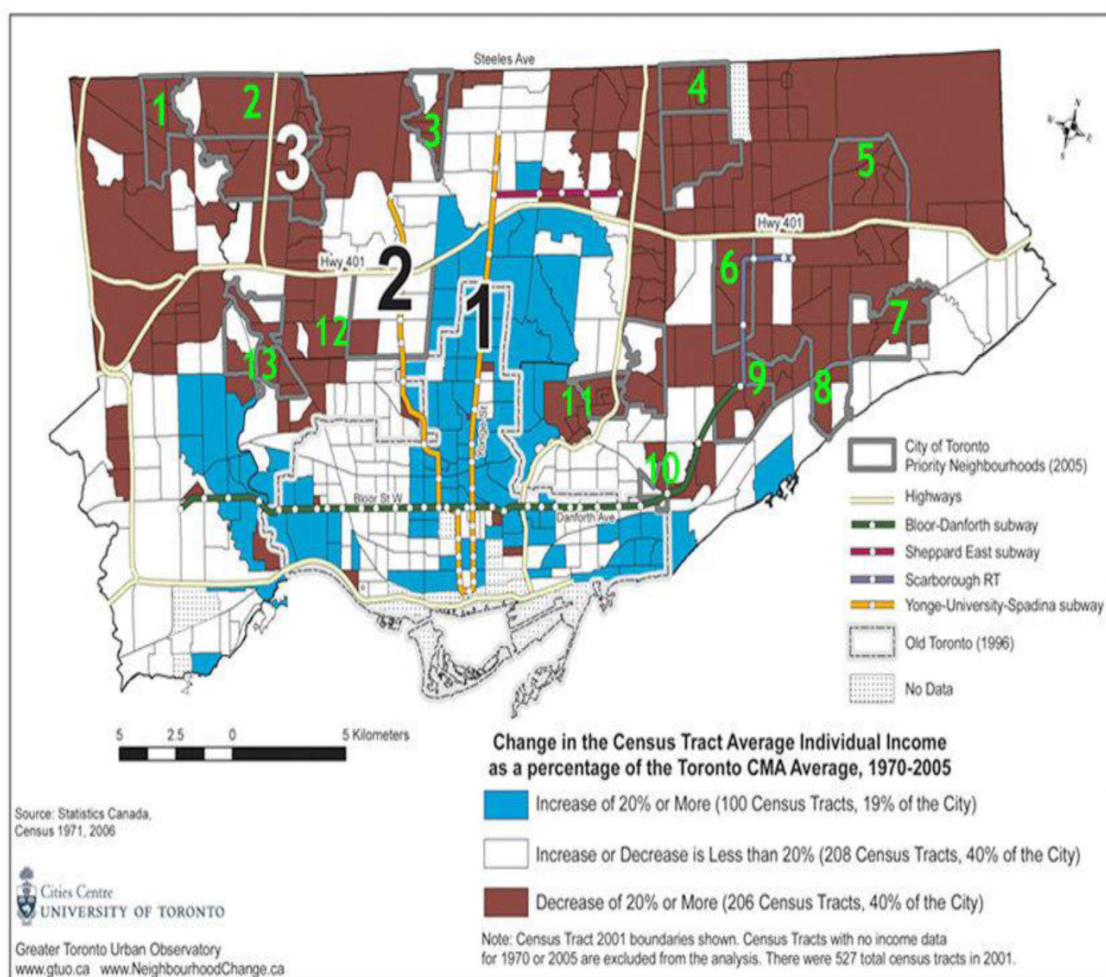


2. Graph: The below map was extracted from David Hulchanski's 3 cities report. The areas shaded brown are the Low- income (city 3) areas in Toronto. The areas shaded white are the middle-income areas (city 2). The areas shaded blue are the high-income areas (city1) (Hori, 2013)

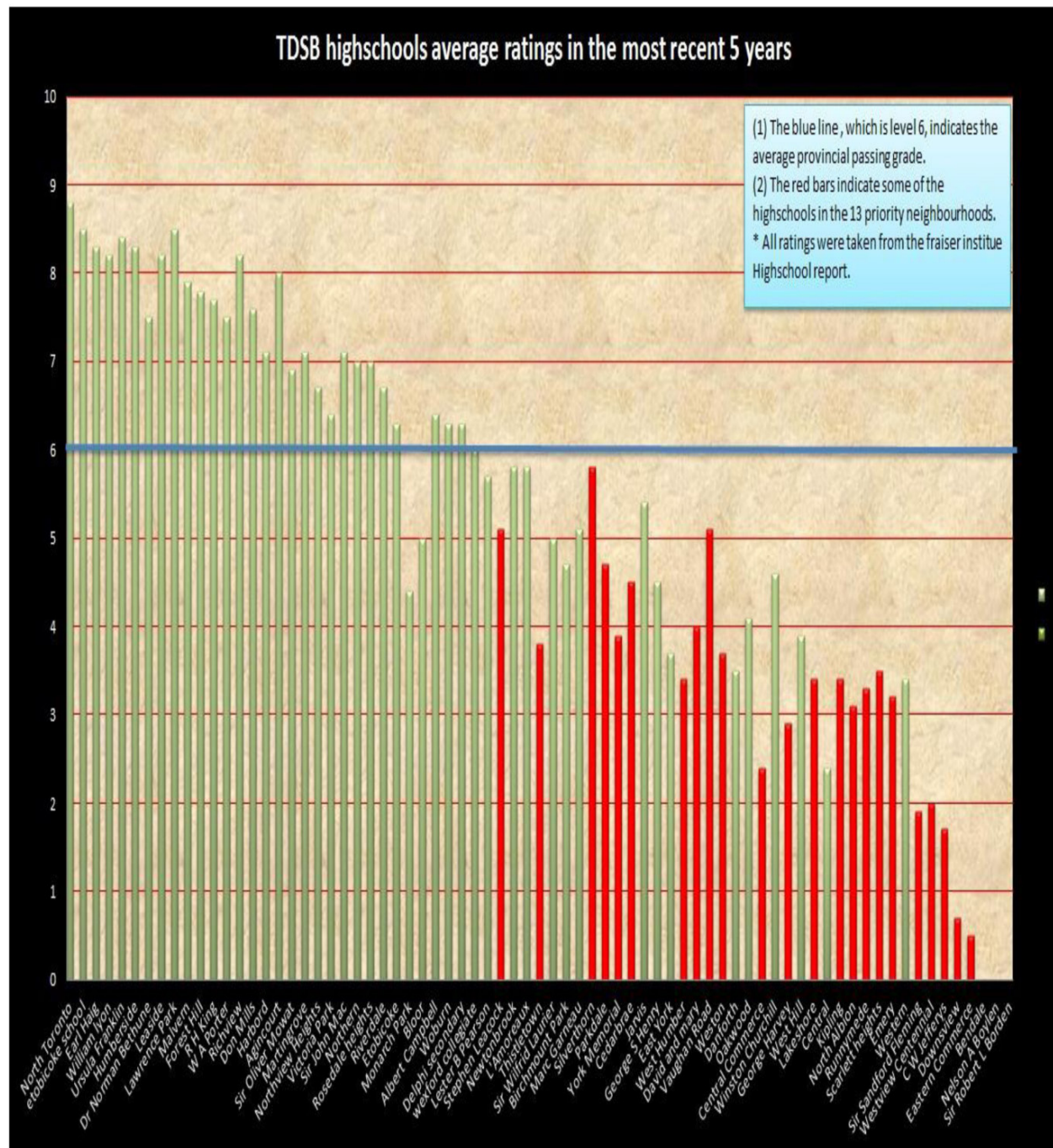
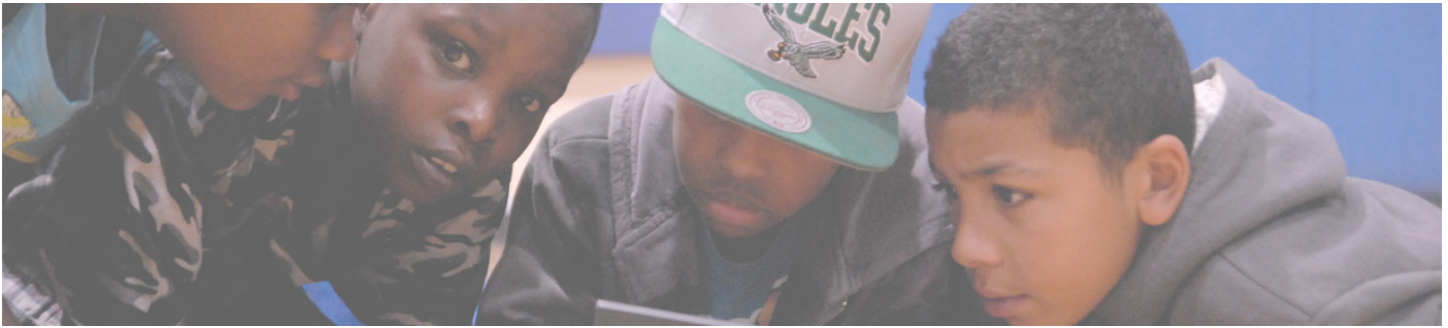


MAP 1: CHANGE IN AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL INCOME, CITY OF TORONTO, RELATIVE TO THE TORONTO CMA, 1970-2005

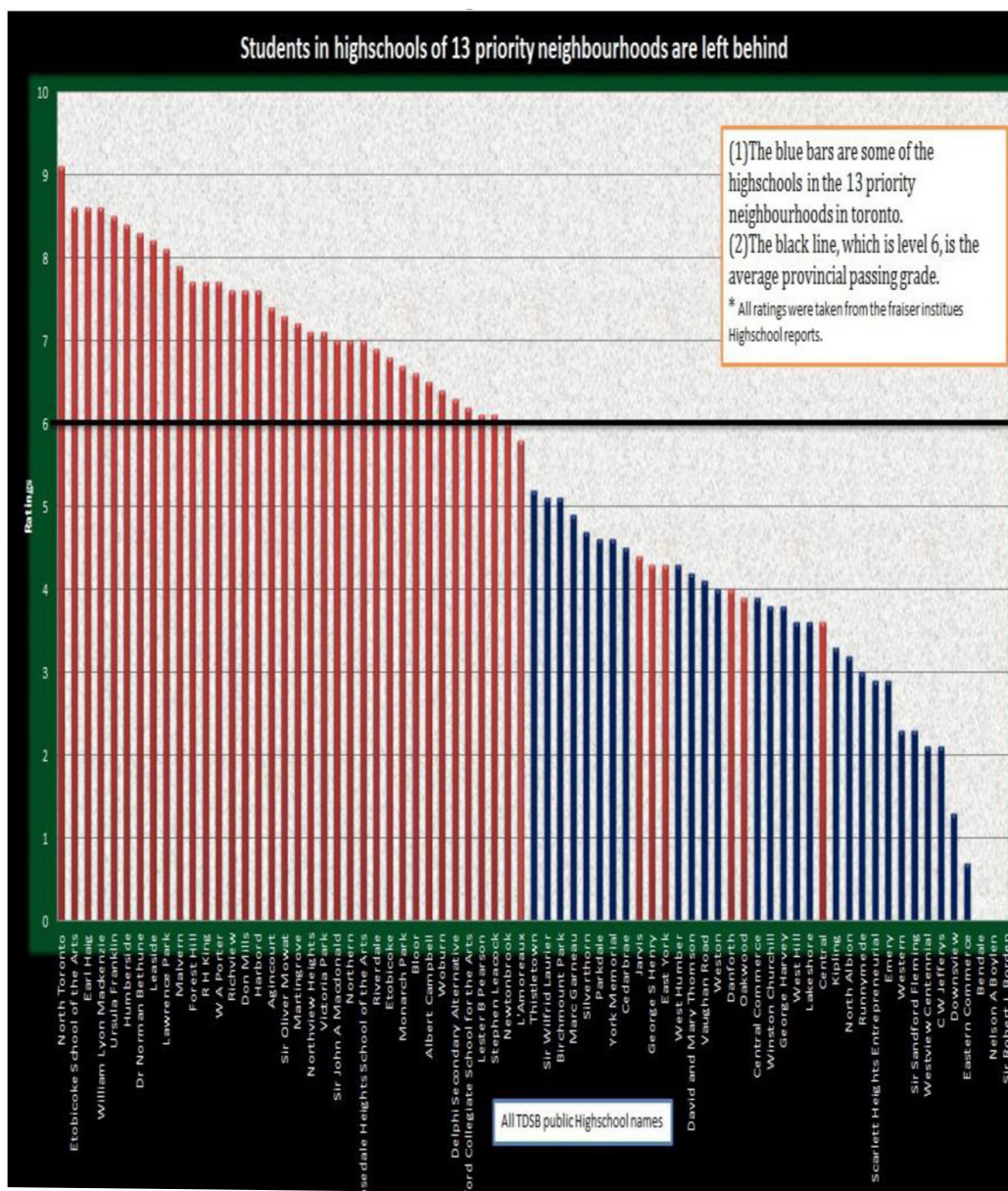
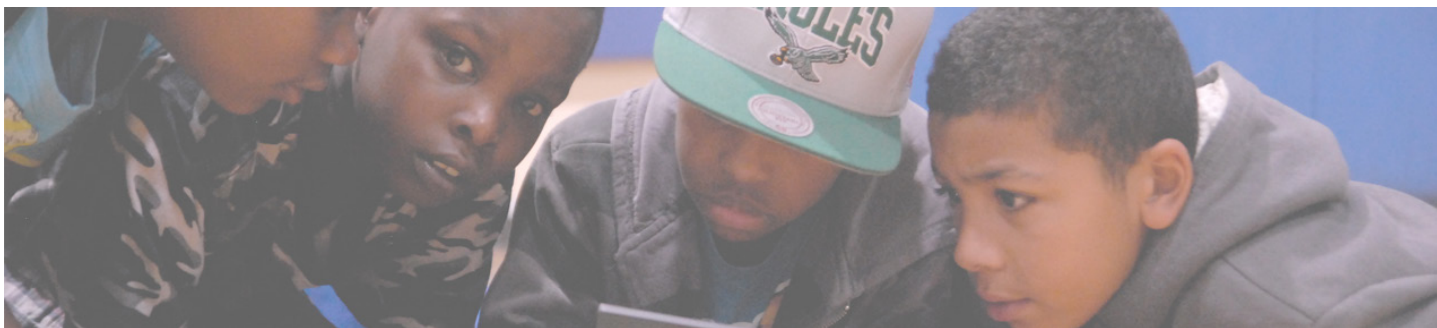
Average individual income from all sources, 15 years and over, census tracts



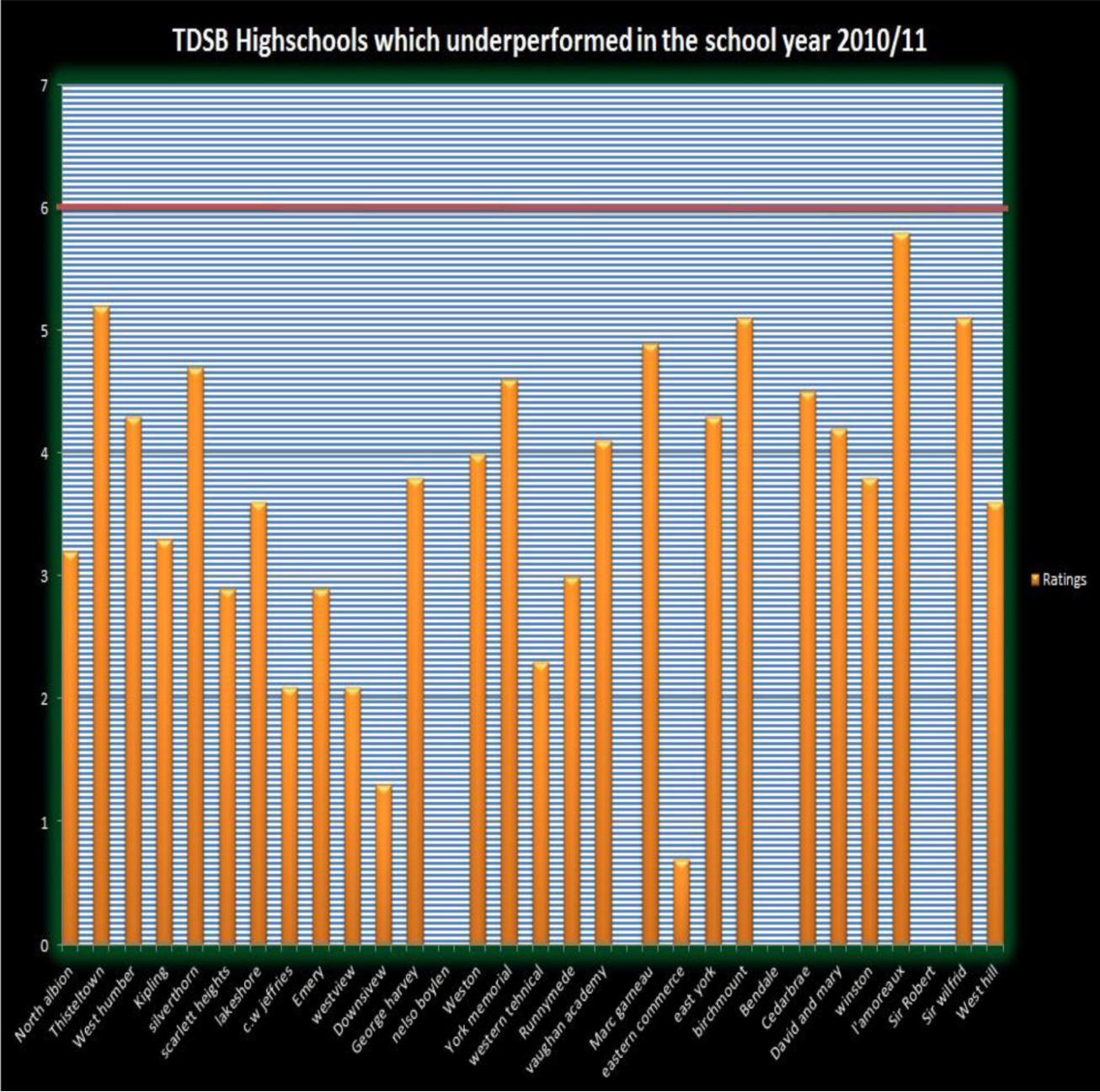
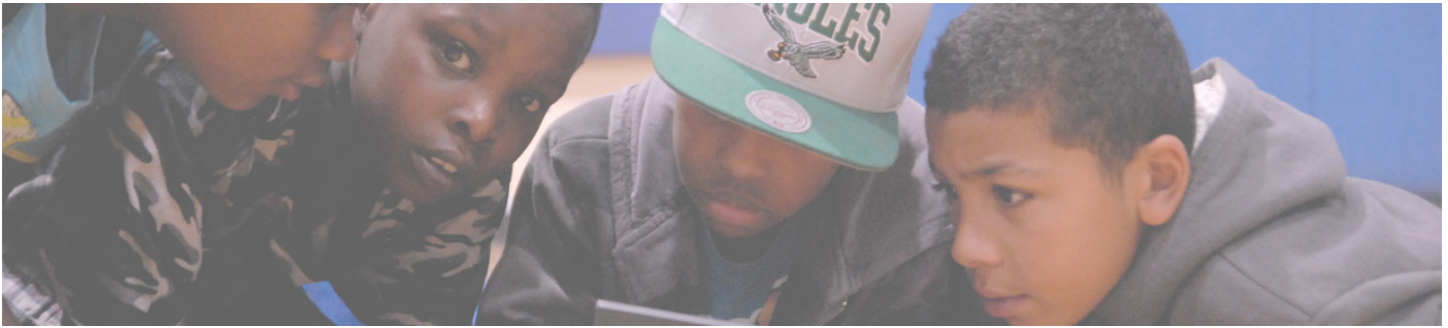
3. Graph: The below map identifies the 13 priority neighbourhoods within David's 3 cities map. (Hori, 2013)



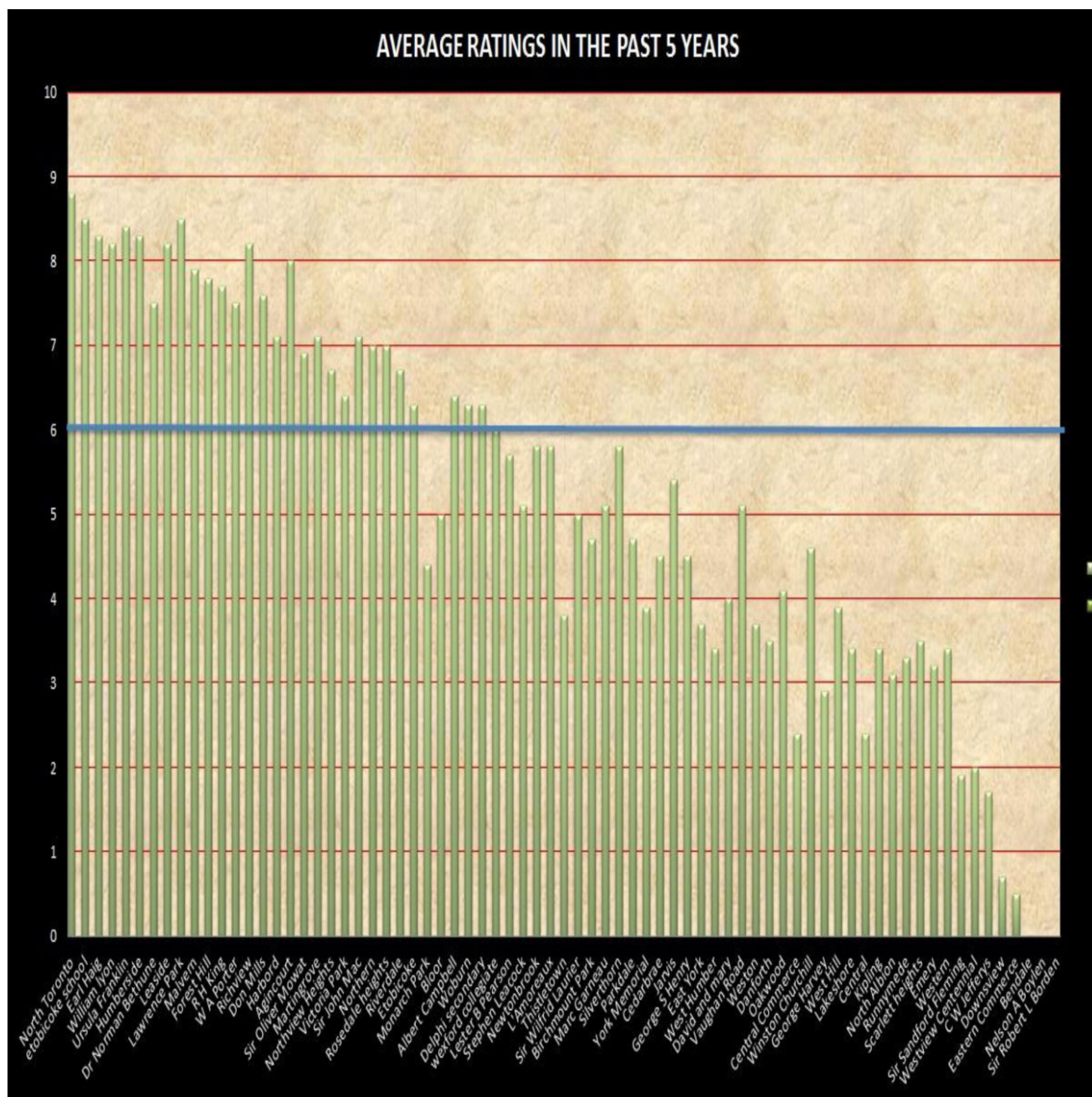
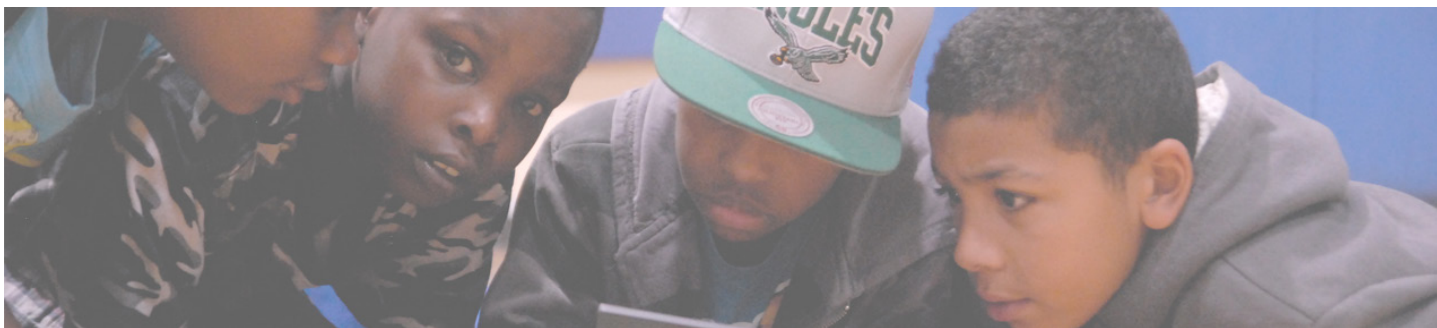
4. Graph: This graph was created using the statistics from the Fraser Institute. The x-axis has the TDSB’s 73 Secondary schools. The y-axis has the ratings from 1 to 10. The Blue line, number 6, is the provincial passing grade. The ‘past 5 years’ mentioned in the graph’s title refers to the years (2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007) (Hori, 2013)



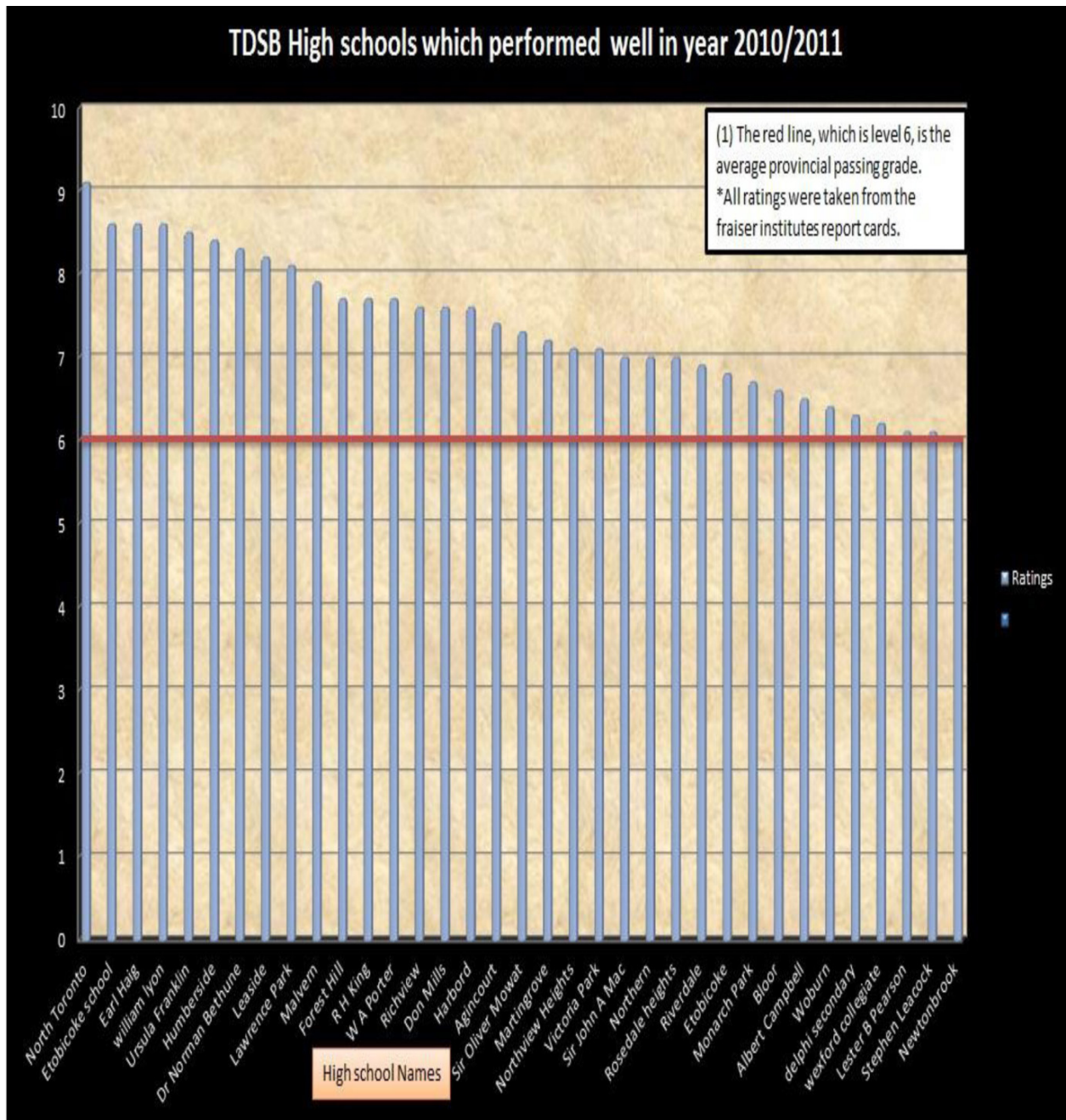
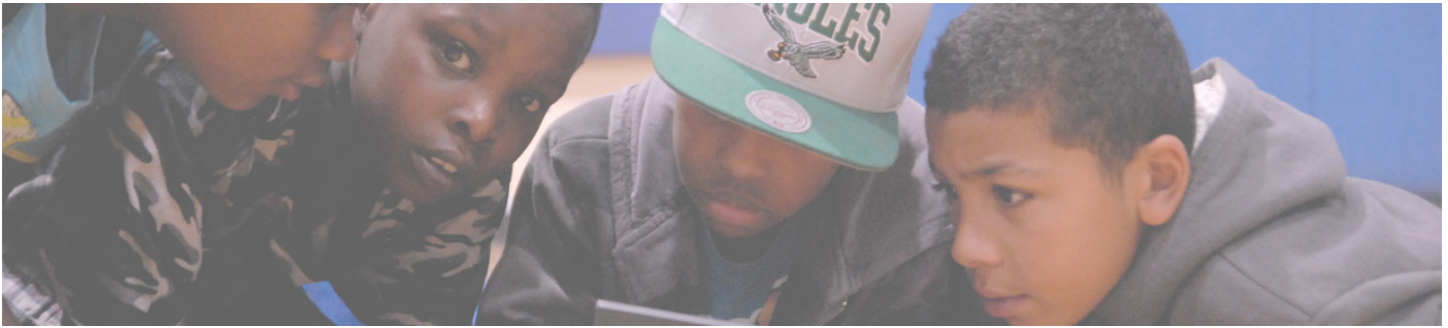
5. Graph: In the following graph, the black line is the provincial passing level, the blue bars are some the High schools in the 13 priority neighbourhoods, and the red bars are the rest of the 73 High schools. These are the ratings from the school year 2010/2011. (Hori, 2013)



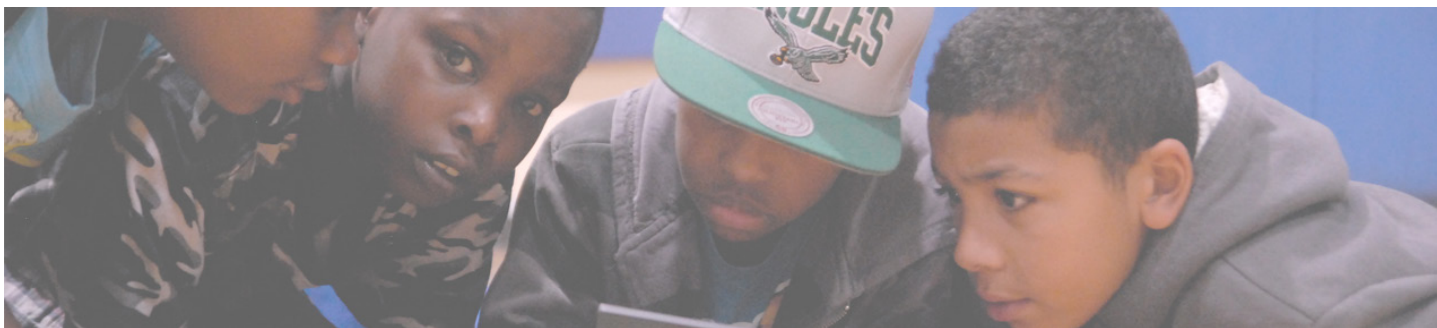
6. Graph: In the following graph, the red line, which is level 6, is the provincial passing level. The orange bars are some the most defective high schools in Toronto. Some schools have ratings of 0. (Hori, 2013)



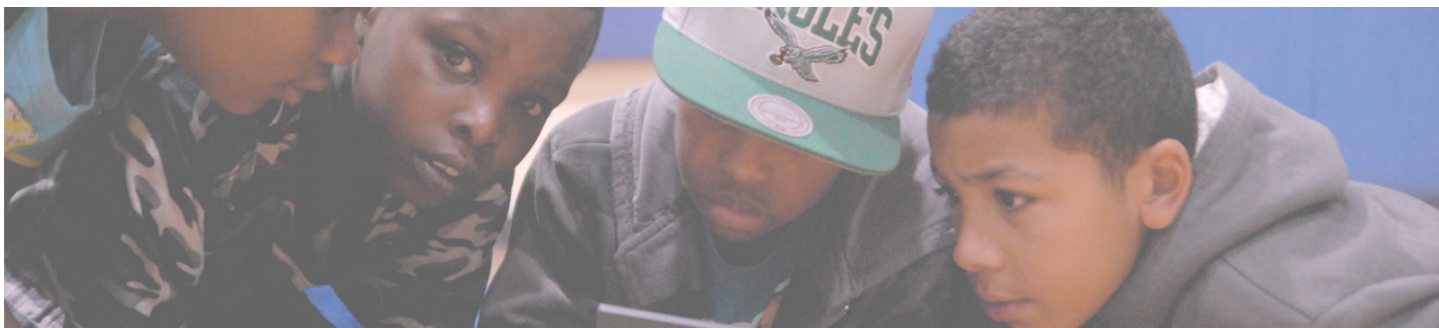
7. Graph: In the following graph, the blue line is the provincial passing level, the red bars are some the High schools in the 13 priority neighbourhoods, and the green bars are the rest of the 73 schools. The 'Most recent 5 years' mentioned in the graph's title refers to the years (2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007) (Hori, 2013)



8. Graph: In the following graph, the red line, which is level 6, is the provincial passing level, the blue bars are some the schools which performed well in year 2010/2011. (Hori, 2013)

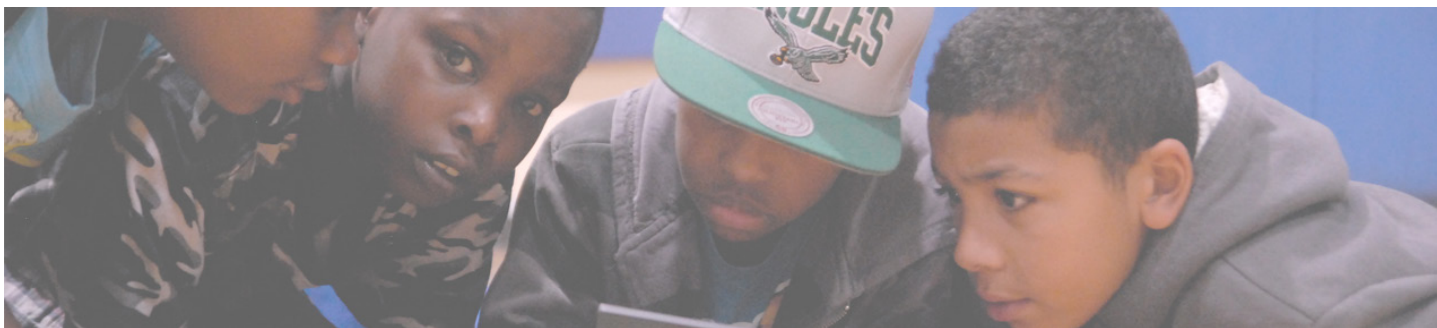


Hori's scathing indictment of one of the most progressive school boards in North America might sound unfair despite the empirical data and anecdotal accounts of students - is he justified? With that said, the TDSB is one of the most progressive school boards in addressing issues around equity in education. The assertions by Hori resonate, because if one of the most recognized school boards is described as impotent in meeting the needs of marginalized students, we can tell you with utmost certainty, most if not all, the school boards have fallen down in this end. The School Community Safety Panel commissioned post death of Jordan Manners, a student gunned down in a TDSB school. In its report entitled, *The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety*, some of the same assertions as Hori were made. The report posits that, "the TDSB has made significant achievements in the area of curriculum and boasts a prestigious record in its ability to maintain academic standards amongst engaged youth. However, the crisis of confidence that hangs over the TDSB relates to the Board's inability, thus far, to successfully address the needs of the more marginalized youth who are not engaged and who are not succeeding academically. It is, of course, a sad reality that these are the students who also represent the greatest safety concern as they are the students who are disengaged as a result of the failure to address their socio-psychological health needs (A final report on school safety :7). In fairness to the TDSB, it didn't create the social conditions that nurtured or compromised the demographic in question, but if education is the key to locking the cycle of attrition disengagement, and ultimately involvement in the criminal justice system, then any entity mandated with educating children and youth must be dynamic and vehement in its approach – "No child left Behind". Educational entities must take on the approach that 'no child' will be left behind' not to mention generations and entire communities of children and youth, in particular those dealing with re-entry and reintegration challenges. Echoing the aforementioned point, the *Report on School Safety*, suggested that "while the TDSB did not create poverty, racism, sexism or classism, it has the power and opportunity to shelter youth from its harshest effects. The Panel maintains that charting a new direction for safety in TDSB schools means charting a new direction for how the Board responds to complex-needs youth (A final report on school safety :9).



The case against traditional schools as institutions that further relegate marginalized children is well outlined as adversely affecting the schooling experience of students already occupying the fringes of society. As it relates to re-entry, reintegration and recidivism, many argue that what is at play is a stunningly comprehensive correlation between traditional schooling and incarceration, a process coined as the “School to Prison Pipeline.” In the academic journal, *“Rethinking Schools – Stop the School to Prison Pipeline,”* the authors argue that “the School to Prison Pipeline is really a Classroom to Prison Pipeline. The journal asserts that a student’s trajectory to a criminalized life often begins with a curriculum that disrespects children’s lives and does not center on things that matters to that child (Volume 26 no2 – Winter 2011 to 2012: p2).” Carl James argued against the inherent danger in cultural freedom (multiculturalism) racial neutrality (colour blindness) and the one size fits all culture of the schooling experience and curriculum, invariably mask the fact that race matters. According to James, “what is needed, is for educators to recognize how the hegemonic schooling policies, programs and practices perpetuate stereotyping that are oppressive to racialized students (James 2011: p22). James further states, “the schools, curriculums, policies and practices, inability to recognize and validate its racialized students, cause these students to actively contest and reject school spaces consequently inflaming the behaviour pattern – for example, poor academic performance and disruptive conduct which are the basis for their at-risk designation – teachers and others come to feel justified in the truth of their stereotypes and assessments (James 2011: p22). Throughout the interviews, the students echoed the following – “traditional schooling spaces did not reflect us”. Alternatively, they spoke of validation in the alternative schooling space, based on the fact that the environment, curriculum, and ambiance were congruent to their specific needs and their lived realities. James went on to say:

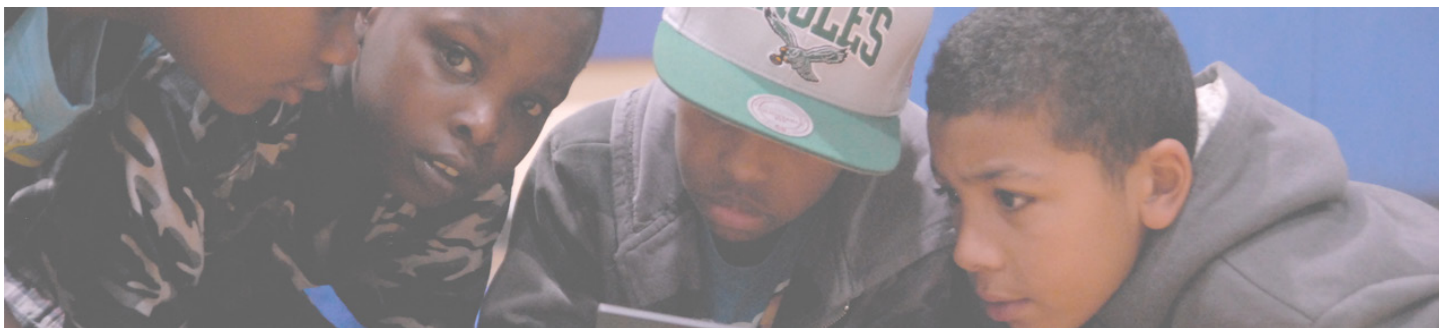
The reality is; Black youth are caught in a disaffirming, inequitable and marginalizing schooling structure which understandably they are resisting or will resist in their struggle for an education that is just, affirming and empowering. Therefore, educators have a responsibility to work to change the structure and culture of schools such that Black males are regarded with respect and provided with support and resources so that they develop a sense of hope, possibilities and empowerment (James, 2010, p. 15)



The YCJA has legislation in place that mandates, “a reintegration plan that sets out the most effective programs for the young person in order to maximize his or her chances for reintegration into the community,” however as outlined in the PACY report, and the accounts of the interviewee (youth and agencies) for this the *Beyond Margins Report* and many other credible sources we interviewed, there is a big disconnect between the YCJA policy, legislation and practice. The following points highlight the disconnect: there is no comprehensive plan for release; the lack of a reintegration planning that seeks out the reflective and appropriate programming; the lack of reflective and relevant programming and the lack of effective ‘dawn to dusk’ programming. MCYS has made attempts to close the gap between legislation and practice but the results of such initiative are ineffective at best. Two such attempts are the Partnership Action Committee (PAC) and the Case Management Process (CMP). PAC was designed to strengthen the relationship between the community and the RMYC (PACY 2013: 82). PACY outlined the following mandate as it relates to the PAC committee:

PAC was established to strengthen the relationship between the facility and the community; ascertain community programs that could be implemented at RMYC to specifically address the reintegration needs of short-stay youth; and to increase connections for youth released from the centre that support successful participation in school, employment training and other supports required (PACY 2013: 82).

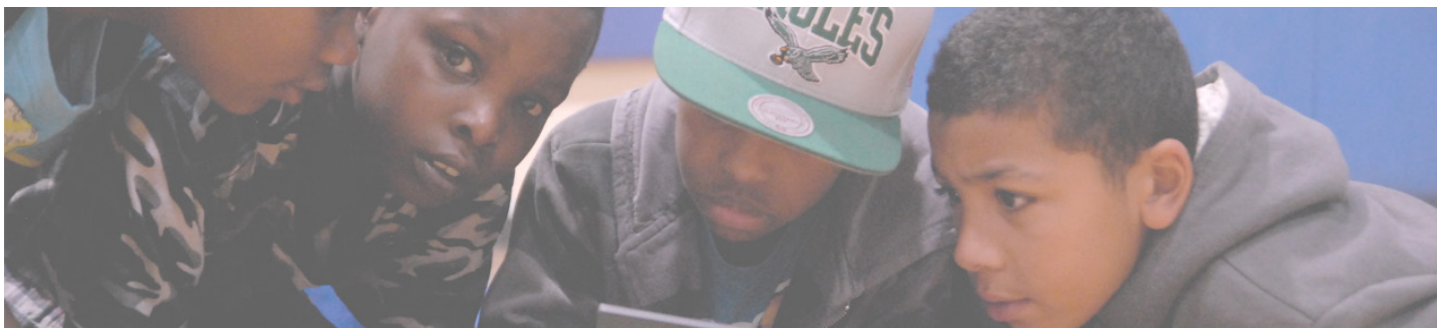
However, many of the agencies we interviewed felt that the PAC committee consisted of grand-fathered institutions that had long storied relationships with MCYS, but little understanding of the unique needs of the new and emerging demographic of over-represented youth – racialized youth from the city’s poor and under-resourced communities. In addition they point to the fact that such a committee exist in one facility – the RMYC. One would assume, if the MCYS realized that such a committee was as effective as it claims, then it should ensure the formation of a more centrally and encompassing committee, with the mandate of enhancing dialogue and ultimately effective programming for students in conflict with the law, those involved in guns drugs and gangs



and those in youth justice facilities. In our recommendations, we suggest the formation of such committee. This committee would also provide traction for CMP. The CMP is an initiative that would allow the allocation of a probation officer for all in youth justice facilities. Prior to release, all youth would be automatically assigned a probation officer to help with an individualized community release plan (PACY 2013: 82). Again, the heralding of inter-agency dialogue and synergy resonates. Regardless if all the youth are assigned probation officers, if there aren't access to reflective services, reflective programs/curriculum and cultural consideration of care for them to access in community as per the accounts in the interviews for this research project and the accounts of the youth interviewed in the 2013 PACY report; the youth in question will continue to be relegated to the margins of society, floundering academically, high rates of recidivism, and posing the greatest danger to public safety.

One of the resounding theme in the *Roots of Violence Report*, a report commissioned by then Ontario's Premier, Dalton McGuinty and compiled by the Honourable Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling, in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of high school student, fourteen year old Jordan Manners, was the importance of identifying the root causes of violence and the factors which gives rise to them. Conversely, since the homicide of Jordan Manners on May 23 2007, there has been over 100 homicides of school aged children and youth (children and youth under 21 years old) in the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto Star, 2013). According to the authors of the report "our experience and our work on this review make it clear to us that most youth who feel connected to and engaged with the broader society and who feel valued and safe and see a positive future for themselves will not commit serious violence (Volume 2, 2008: pages 5-6)." The report went on to further suggest that, "While no set of factors can explain all violence, we are persuaded that youth are most likely to be at immediate risk of involvement in serious violence if they:

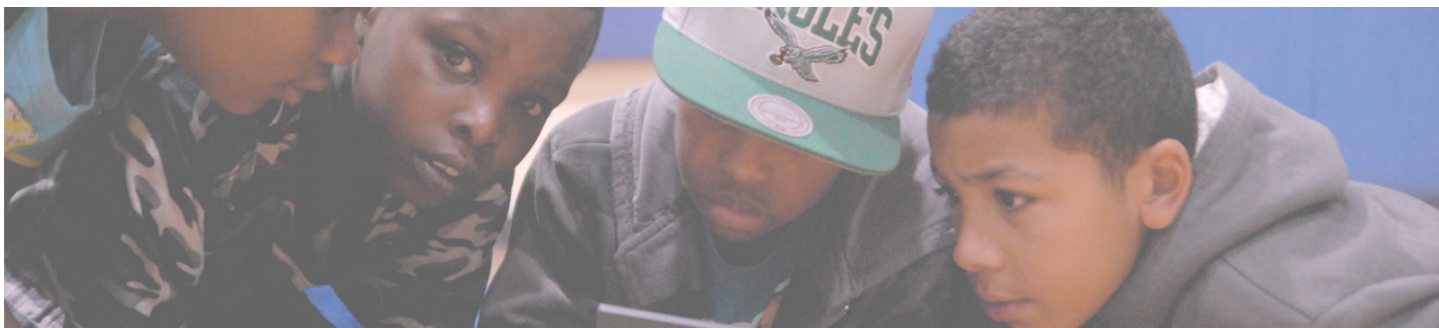
- Have a deep sense of alienation and low self-esteem
- Have little empathy for others and suffer from impulsivity



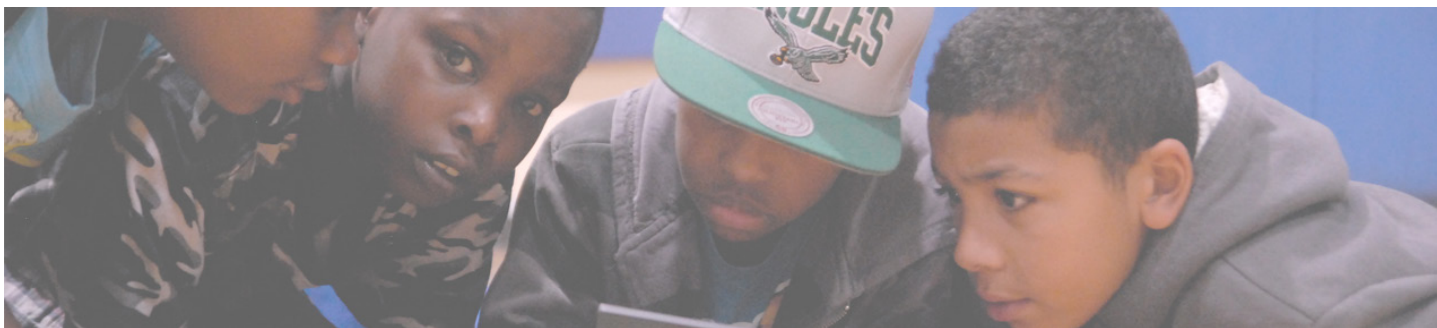
- Believe that they are oppressed, held down, unfairly treated and neither belong to nor have a stake in the broader society
- Believe that they have no way to be heard through other channels
- Have no sense of hope”

The Roots of Violence Report, advanced education and social engagement as mechanisms of hope to counter the myopic realities which that and facilitates the perpetration of violence and social exclusion. “Education is universally seen as one of the best ways out of poverty and as a sound investment in the future of individuals, families and communities, and thus in the social fabric of our entire society (Volume 2, 2008: page 10).” The report conceded that, “the Province must remove the barriers and disincentives to education that exist for many children and youth.” K.P’s narrative highlights a number of needs for children residing in the city’s poor and racialized neighbourhoods, specifically those exiting custodial settings: access to education; reflective programs and curriculum; cultural consideration of care for the youth in these environments

In summary, students like K.P dealing with noisomes of incarceration, re-entry, reintegration, guns, gangs or drugs aren’t standardized students and consequently the aforementioned cohort must be accommodated by non-standardized strategies that will ensure engagement, achievement and participation in the larger society. These accommodation include but is not limited to: cultural consideration of care; reflective curriculum; and reflective services. The disconnect between the YCJA’s legislation and the current culture of inaction around re-entry/reintegration, exacerbates academic attrition, recidivism, the draconian cost of incarceration and ultimately public safety. As previously indicated, operationalizing a comprehensive inter-agency consortium (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of Education, The School Boards and Community Based Agencies) is critically in actualizing the various provisions outlined in the YCJA crafted to mitigate recidivism and promote inclusion and reintegration. Such a consortium would leverage synergy, communication and a

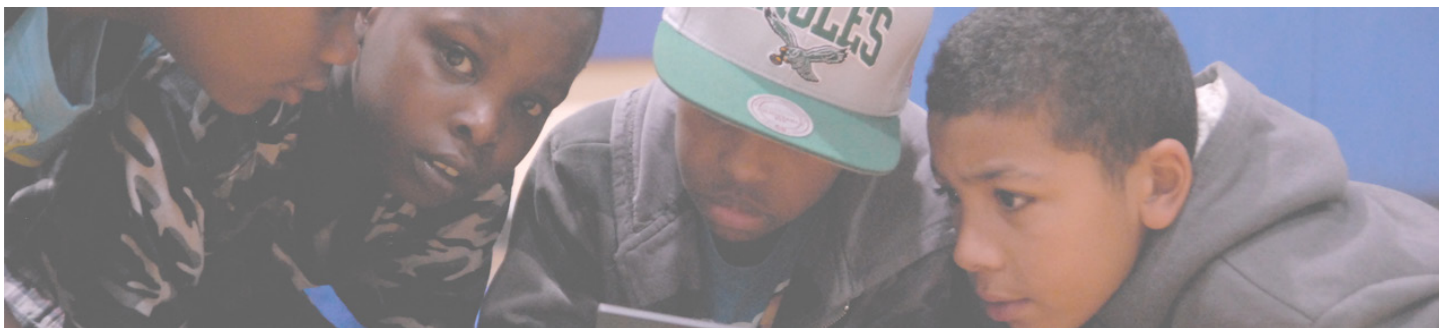


better understanding of the intricacies compartmentalized in the various institutional silos. Synergy between the various institutions and stakeholders would undoubtedly mobilizing the youth in question. Failure to act in a concerted and comprehensive way will continue to fuel academic attrition, social marginalization, over-representation of racialized youth in particular black youth in the youth and adult criminal justice systems, recidivism, draconian incarceration cost and ultimately public safety.

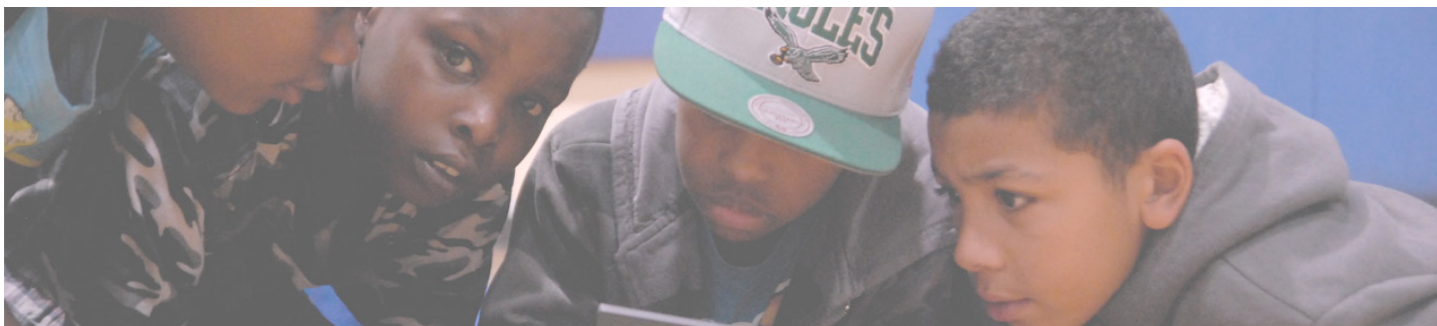


Recommendations

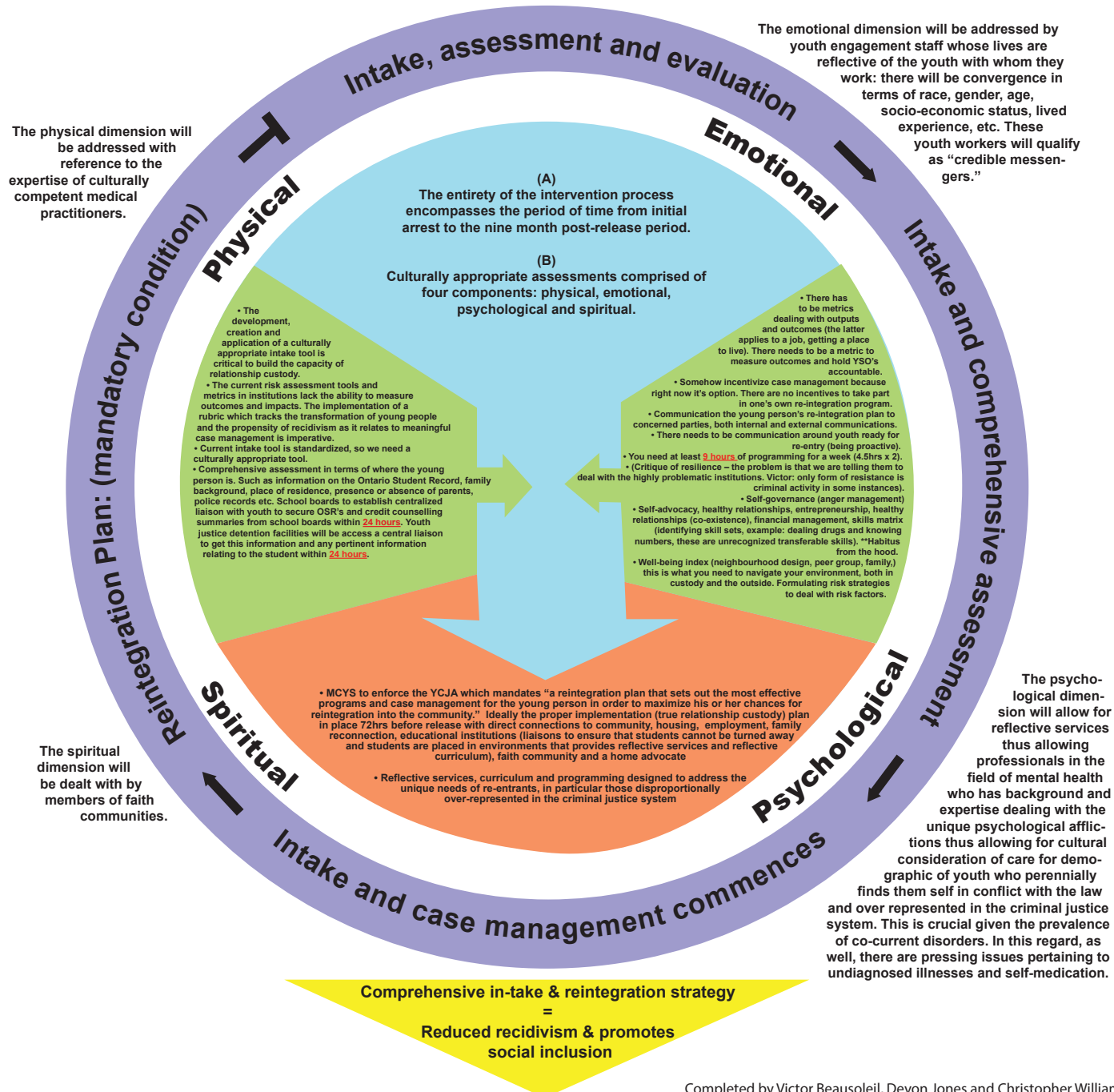
1. The immediate creation of an objective advisory committee chaired by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and or the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY), charged with the mandate of formulating a framework around seamless intake, re-entry and reintegration
2. Central intake and central liaison between the Ministry of Education, the various school boards, Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the various services delivery agencies, as it relates to intake and reintegration; thus ensuring that credit counseling summaries, OSRs, etc, are transferred in a timely manner and that particular institutions are aware of the various transitioning of the respective student(s). This particular recommendation would ensure that all youth entering custody and leaving custody would be the beneficiary of coordinated process between the Ministry of Education, the various school boards, MCYS, and the particular service delivery agencies
3. Mental health support for re-entrants prior to them entering schools and the community post release from Youth Justice Detention facilities
4. Federal, Provincial, and Municipal support for the agencies providing cultural support and reflective services to re-entrants and youth involved in guns, drugs and gangs
5. The creation of designated centers and facilities with the sole purpose of addressing issues around re-entry, reintegration and culturally reflective services. An assessment of the current transfer payment agencies and their ability to engage re-entrants
6. The creation of curriculum and programming designed to address the unique needs of re-entrants, in particular those disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system
7. The Ministry of Education and MCYS to implement policies around re-entry, reintegration and the creation of specialty centers focused on vocation, job readiness and culturally consideration of



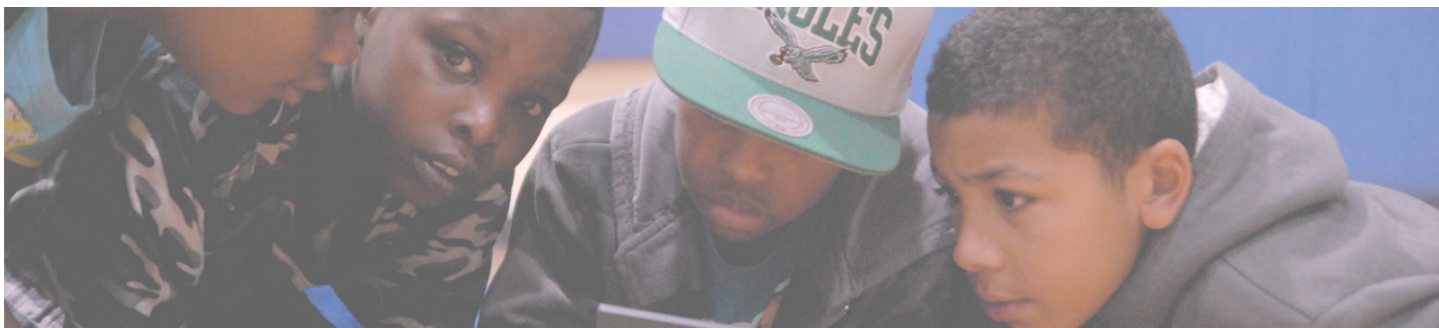
care. DOJ and PACY to ensure that the Province – MCYS implement legislation and policies in addition to operationalizing a comprehensive framework around re-entry and re-integration



Intake and Re-entry Framework for Youth Entering and Leaving Youth Justice Facilities

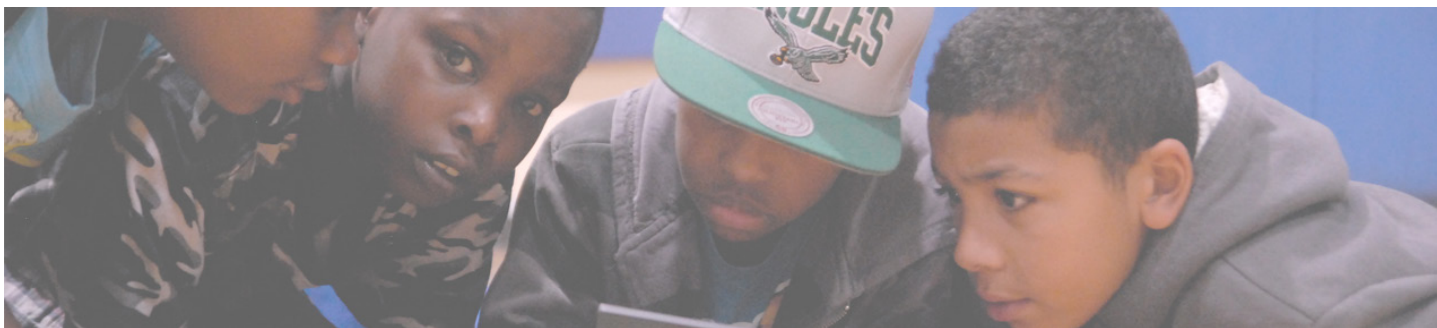


Completed by Victor Beausoleil, Devon Jones and Christopher Williams



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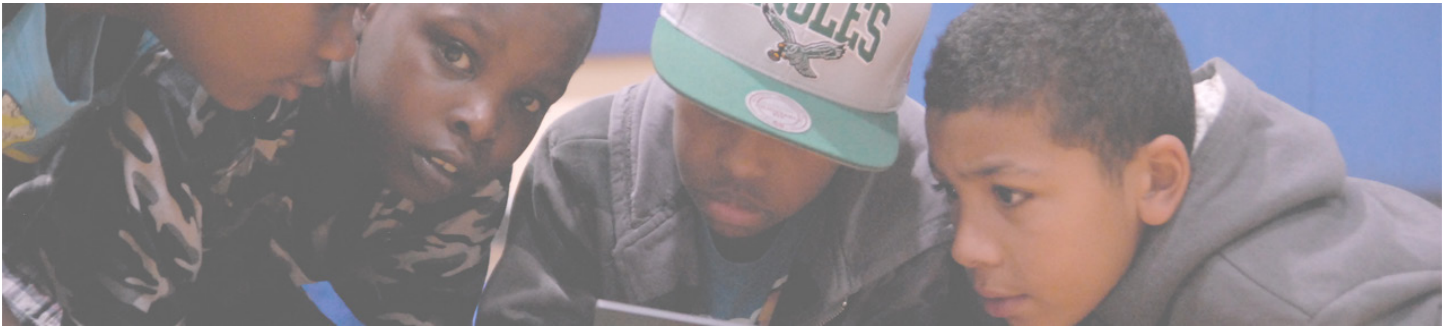
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Appendix D: Research Tools

Basic Profile – Organizations

Organization Name: _____ Code: _____

1. Organizational Lifespan

of Years in Existence _____

2. Organizational Definition of Youth (Age Range)

Age _____ to Age _____

3. Ethno-Racial Composition of Youth Served

(a) 0-29% visible minority (b) 30-49% visible minority

(c) 50-79% visible minority (d) 80% or more visible minority

4. In-House Curriculum Development Yes _____ No _____

5. Experience Delivering Curriculum to Youth in Conflict with the Law

of Years _____

6. Has your program been evaluated? Yes _____ No _____

7. Number of staff working with youth? _____

8. Are the youth paid to attend your program? Yes _____ No _____

9. Are the youth mandated to attend your program?

Yes _____ No _____

10 Ration of staff to youth: _____

Organization Observation Sheet

Organization Name: _____ Code: _____

1. Where is the program located:

2. What do you see around the room/ on the walls?

3. How many rooms does the program operate from?

4. How many youth are currently in the space?

5. Other visual details:

Basic Profile – Staff

Organization Name: _____ Code: _____

Staff Name: _____

1. Gender

(a) Male (b) Female (c) Transgender

2. Highest Grade Completed: _____

3. Length of time with Organization: _____

4. Number of year in the field: _____

5. How many youth do your manage/ Case load? _____

Organizations: Interview Questions

1. What does curriculum look like in your organization?
2. Please provide us with samples of materials that show us the curriculum in your organization.
 - a. What do the teacher's use?
 - b. What do the students take with them/ receive?
3. Who delivers the curriculum and why?
4. Do you go outside for "external resources"? (e.g., speakers that visit and/ or speakers that the students visit; field trips etc.)
 - a. Describe the setting / learning environment for the students
5. What works? What doesn't?
6. Please describe methods used to evaluate the curriculum (i.e. indicators of success).
7. Please provide any promotional material(s) from your organization
8. Are the participants paid or provided with incentives in any way to attend this program?
9. If you had a chance to redesign this program, what would you add to enhance it?

Building Curriculum Team:

- Devon Jones, Project Coordinator
- Dr. Laura Mae Lindo, Lead Researcher
- Dr. Chris Williams, Lead Researcher
- Rose-Ann Bailey, Project Administrator

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in an interview to help us understand the types of curriculum that exist for young people in custody, on probation and those transitioning from custody and to consider how the needs of youth are addressed when they participate in these programs. Should you have any questions about the purpose of this interview you can ask to clarify the project at any point during this interview.

Description of the Study:

You have been asked to participate in an interview to discuss curriculum needs for young people in conflict with the law. This interview will contribute to strengthening our understanding of the needs of young people whose educational needs are being addressed in programming outside of traditional school settings. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts:

If an interview question makes you feel uncomfortable or anxious you do not have to answer the question, can ask to move on to another question and are free to leave the study any time.

Benefits of the Study:

We cannot guarantee any benefit, however participants are contributing their ideas, thoughts and experiences to the future development of effective curriculum for youth in conflict with the law. You may also learn about strategies for yourself and for your organization to help increase the success of your educational initiatives for young people.

Confidentiality:

The research team will be the only people who have access to the information that you provide. All information collected will be stored securely on encrypted USB keys in a locked filing cabinet in the YAAACE office. Those members of the Building Curriculum team transcribing the information from audio recordings will make use of codes and will not reveal your identity. The master list of study participants will be kept separately from the transcriptions to ensure that transcripts are not linked to participants. The members of the Building Curriculum team who analyze the transcripts will only be provided with coded transcriptions without identity markers to further ensure that your identity is not revealed during the process. A report will be published presenting the overall findings of the study. Your name will not appear anywhere in any draft or final report.

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates:

- ☐ I have read the information in this agreement and I agree to be in the research project.
- ☐ I am providing permission for interviews of young people in this program who have given me their consent to participate in your program.
- ☐ I am aware that all names for youth and for myself will be confidential and will not be revealed in the final report.
- ☐ I have agreed to be audiotaped and have had a chance to ask questions regarding confidentiality.
- ☐ I am aware that I can change my mind and withdraw my consent to participate at any time. Young people participating in the program who are interviewed can also withdraw their consent at any time.
- ☐ I have been told that by signing this consent agreement I am not giving up any of my legal rights.

I Agree to be Audio taped (Please Circle One): YES NO

Name of Participant (please print)

Name of Organization (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Demographic Information – Youth Interviewee

Youth Name: _____ Code: _____

1. Gender

(a) Male (b) Female (c) Transgender

2. Birth Year: _____

3. Country of Origin

(a) Born in Canada

(b) Born Outside of Canada

4. Year of Arrival (if born outside of Canada): _____

5. Residential Location (postal code): _____

6. Parental Proximity

(a) Living with both parents. (b) Living with one parent.

(c) Living with no parents. (d) Living with Grandparents

7. Highest Grade Completed: _____

8. Number of Credits Acquired: _____

9. What do you self-identify as: _____

10. Current organization attending: _____

Youth: Interview Questions

1. What programs have you participated by the age of 17?
2. Why did you join / participate in these particular programs?
3. How did they help?
4. What didn't work/ what do you wish you had?
5. What do you need from here?
6. What are your motivations to attend these types of programs?
7. What are your career aspirations?
8. Is the current learning environment moving you along that path to meet those career aspirations?
9. If you had a chance to redesign these programs, what would you add to enhance them?

Building Curriculum Team:

- ☐ Devon Jones, Project Coordinator
- ☐ Dr. Laura Mae Lindo, Lead Researcher
- ☐ Dr. Chris Williams, Lead Researcher
- ☐ Rose-Ann Bailey, Project Administrator

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in an interview to help us understand the types of curriculum that exist for young people in custody, on probation and those transitioning from custody and to consider how the needs of youth are addressed when they participate in these programs. Should you have any questions about the purpose of this interview you can ask to clarify the project at any point during this interview.

Description of the Study:

You have been asked to participate in an interview to discuss curriculum needs for young people in conflict with the law. This interview will contribute to strengthening our understanding of the needs of young people whose educational needs are being addressed in programming outside of traditional school settings. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts:

If an interview question makes you feel uncomfortable or anxious you do not have to answer the question, can ask to move on to another question and are free to leave the study any time.

Benefits of the Study:

We cannot guarantee any benefit, however participants are contributing their ideas, thoughts and experiences to the future development of effective curriculum for youth in conflict with the law. You may also learn about strategies for yourself and for your organization to help increase the success of your educational initiatives for young people.

Confidentiality:

The research team will be the only people who have access to the information that you provide. All information collected will be stored securely on encrypted USB keys in a locked filing cabinet in the YAAACE office. Those members of the Building Curriculum team transcribing the information from audio recordings will make use of codes and will not reveal your identity. The master list of study participants will be kept separately from the transcriptions to ensure that transcripts are not linked to participants. The members of the Building Curriculum team who analyze the transcripts will only be provided with coded transcriptions without identity markers to further ensure that your identity is not revealed during the process. A report will be published presenting the overall findings of the study. Your name will not appear anywhere in any draft or final report.

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates:

- ☐ I have read the information in this agreement and I agree to be in the research project.
- ☐ I am aware that all names will be confidential and will not be revealed in the final report.
- ☐ I have agreed to be audiotaped and have had a chance to ask questions regarding confidentiality.
- ☐ I am aware that I can change my mind and withdraw my consent to participate at any time. Young people participating in the program who are interviewed can also withdraw their consent at any time.
- ☐ I have been told that by signing this consent agreement I am not giving up any of my legal rights.

I Agree to be Audio taped (Please Circle One): YES NO

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

NOTES



Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.C.E.)
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