



EVIDENCE BRIEF

Economic Empowerment of Black Youth: Programmatic Interventions for Jobs and Retention

Black youth are more likely to be unemployed, overrepresented in low-income and precarious employment, and experience racial discrimination in hiring, promotion, and within the workforce. They require programs that equitably support them in their search for meaningful, safe, and dignified employment that is aligned with their career aspirations.

The content for this Evidence Brief is informed by the report *Outcomes Framework: Economic Empowerment of Black Youth in Ontario*¹ developed by YouthREX to support community stakeholders as well as relevant government institutions to build a shared understanding of possible interventions and outcomes under the Economic Empowerment Stream of the Black Youth Action Plan.

The Outcomes Framework is informed by the *SIDE Theory of Change for the Economic Empowerment of Black Youth* that includes four quadrants of change grounded in an understanding that an economic empowerment stream for Black youth must provide opportunities for them to develop skills and capacities but must also include institutional change strategies that address systemic barriers that they face.

TWO PROMISING PROGRAMMING INTERVENTIONS

Barriers to the meaningful employment of Black youth include:

- a mismatch between skills supply versus skills demand;²
- the trend towards precarious and low-wage jobs;³
- racial discrimination in hiring and promotion;^{4,5}
- racial discrimination in the workplace;⁵ and
- lack of access to professionally-relevant social networks.⁶

Programs that address employment and job retention among Black youth should include one or more of these interventions (see Logic Model on page 4):

01. HOLISTIC EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES.

Many Black youth in low-income settings do not have the same networks and relationships that provide their non-Black peers with access to job leads, internship opportunities, and other employment-related supports in prosperous fields.⁶ While racially- and economically-marginalized youth also find employment through personal connections, these connections lead them to jobs that, in keeping with the status of their networks, are lower-paid and more precarious.⁷ Wealth and hiring power are racially-concentrated, and employment norms ensure the maintenance of this racial concentration.

Studies also show that Black youth in elementary and secondary settings are subject to lower expectations from their teachers and guidance counsellors and are often denied information about fruitful academic and career pathways from the very people charged with encouraging them and facilitating their success.⁸ Black youth are not accessing the data and analysis that could support their informed decision-making about post-secondary education.

As a result, Black youth often lack the skills that other peers inherit through familial and community networks and through previous employment experiences, with respect to learning how to successfully self-present and self-promote in the job market.

Holistic employment support services can help to overcome this self-perpetuating racialized economic exclusion. Specifically, these employment support services should address gaps to economic and employment integration:

- **Information** is needed to provide data and guidance on the economic landscape in order to facilitate informed decision-making on academic and employment pursuits. This should include information on emergent fields, and timelines and activities needed to enter them, as well as provide support to match skills, experiences, and interests with available jobs and possible careers.
- **Networking (including apprenticeship programs)** is necessary to compensate for the lack of pre-existing professional connections among Black youth. Networking services constitute two areas of activity, both of which can facilitate personal and professional connections that align with young people's occupational skills and interests. First, there should be those that informally expose Black youth to employers and industry leaders, such as through job fairs or other socializing events. Second, there should be those that match Black youth with apprenticeship and internship opportunities, allowing them to gain industry connections, as well as relevant job skills and resume-worthy experience. Importantly, apprenticeship and internship opportunities should be paid in recognition of the prohibitive financial barriers to unpaid work, ones that often preclude low-income individuals from career-advancing internships.
- **Skills-based (job search, resume development, apprenticeship, sector-specific) programs** are needed to compensate for the lack of skills, tangible and intangible, that facilitate entry into the workforce. Job search and resume development constitute the general and baseline competencies that every aspiring employee should have. More specialized and sector-specific skill sets, particularly in emergent fields, should also be facilitated, such as through apprenticeship-matching and workshops with industry experts.

Collectively, providing holistic employment support services should contribute toward **improved knowledge and skills that match career choices**, as well as **increased social capital** for Black youth, as they are better

informed about, and connected to, the economic opportunities that complement their skills and interests, and that facilitate their career growth and financial prosperity. Over time, this should generate statistical evidence of **increased number of Black youth in longer-term employment** and, as workplace environments become more inclusive, an **improved sense of belonging for Black youth**.

02. ANTI-BLACK RACISM TRAINING FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES SO THEY CAN RESPECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF BLACK YOUTH.

The implicit racial discrimination that denies Black youth the skills and connections to attain meaningful employment is compounded by explicit racial discrimination. While the majority of jobs are secured through personal connections, those that are distributed through public networks are nonetheless subject to prejudicial filtration. Indeed, research has shown that employers tend to favour both the applications and in-person meetings of white-sounding and white-appearing candidates. Intersecting marginalizations exacerbate this – for example, as Black youth are more likely to have a criminal record⁹ – impacting upon the success of their applications. Beyond entry into the workplace, racial discrimination presents challenges with respect to job retention and advancement. Racial microaggressions by colleagues create uncomfortable and even untenable working environments, and racialized promotion practices deny qualified Black candidates from ascending the organizational hierarchy.⁵

Anti-Black racism (ABR) training for employers and employees can help to address the racism that circulates the organizational environment, by training all members to reflect upon and challenge the internalized biases that result in unfair treatment at the interpersonal level and the policy level, and to grapple with the broader reality of racism for which all members of society are responsible for addressing, within and beyond the employment context. Providing ABR training to employers and employees not only

ensures that the human rights of Black youth will be respected, but can address and contribute to removing discriminatory policies, practices, and procedures within the workplace and ensuring equitable pay and benefits for Black youth.

ABR training, for employers and employees, should result in **raised critical consciousness** among all staff, and hence **improved work environments that are safe, respectful, equitable, and enable advancement and growth**, as anti-racist learnings penetrate individual and communal understanding, and thus create shifts in workplace culture that engender positive results for Black youth. This should also yield **increased opportunities and increased skill attainment (upskilling) within the workplace**, as Black youth are presented fewer racial barriers to their success. These gains should, in turn, contribute toward **increased social capital** for Black youth, as they are able to advance

the organizational hierarchy and experience work environments that are respectful and celebratory. Over time, workplace ABR trainings should support an **increased number of Black youth in longer-term employment**, as well as an **increased number of Black youth advancing within their workplaces**, as racialized obstacles are removed. At the qualitative level, these measures should also ensure an **increased number of Black youth and young adults feel supported and empowered in their workplaces**, and an **improved sense of belonging for Black youth**.

SUMMARY

These two programming interventions should, in combination and over time, facilitate employment and job retention among Black youth, and facilitate an **increased number of Black youth in meaningful employment**.

Logic Model for Pillar #2: Jobs and Retention¹

Situation: Black youth are more likely to be unemployed, overrepresented in low-income and precarious employment, and experience racial discrimination in hiring, promotion, and within the workforce. They therefore require programs that equitably support them in their search for meaningful, safe, and dignified employment that is aligned with their career aspirations so they can succeed in the job market and contribute to Ontario's economic prosperity.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Anucha, U., Fiissel, D., Attygalle, K., Cromwell, C., Kanji, K., & Oradubanya, N. (2021). **Outcomes Framework: The Economic Empowerment of Black Youth in Ontario**. Youth Research & Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). <https://youthrex.com/report/outcomes-framework-the-economic-empowerment-of-black-youth-in-ontario/>
- 2 Spaulding, S., Lerman, R. I., Holzer, H. J., & Eyster, L. (2015). **Expanding economic opportunity for young men and boys of color through employment and training**. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/expanding-economic-opportunity-young-men-and-boys-color-through-employment-and-training>
- 3 Block, S., & Galabuzi, G.-E. (2018, December 11). **Persistent inequality: Ontario's colour-coded labour market**. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/persistent-inequality>
- 4 Conference Board of Canada. (2017). **Racial wage gap**. <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/provincial/society/racial-gap.aspx>
- 5 The Black Experience Project. (2017). **The Black Experience Project in the GTA: Overview report**. <https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/black-experience-project-gta--1-overview-report.pdf>
- 6 Bird, K., & Okoh, C. (2016). **Employment pathways for boys and young men of color**. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. <https://youthrex.com/report/employment-pathways-for-boys-and-young-men-of-color-solutions-and-strategies-that-can-make-a-difference/>
- 7 McDonald, S., Lin, N., & Ao, D. (2009). Networks of opportunity: Gender, race and job leads. *Social Problems*, 56(3), 385-402
- 8 James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). **Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area**. York University. <https://youthrex.com/report/towards-race-equity-in-education-the-schooling-of-black-students-in-the-greater-toronto-area/>
- 9 Goraya, J. (2015, March 9). The overrepresentation of minority youth in Canada's criminal justice system. *The Public Policy and Governance Review*. <https://ppgreview.ca/2015/03/09/the-overrepresentation-of-minority-youth-in-canadas-criminal-justice-system/>
- 10 Youth Research & Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). (2018). **Working together to do right for Black youth**. <https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/YouthREX-Working-Together-To-Do-Right-for-Black-Youth.pdf>
- 11 Hosotsuji, A., Hall, D., & Mwanaisha, J. (2015). **10 ways to meaningfully engage underrepresented youth: Organizational & adult readiness in fostering youth leadership development**. Youth Research & Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). <https://youthrex.com/factsheet/10-ways-to-meaningfully-engage-underrepresented-youth/>