

# What Makes a 'Good Life?'

## Perspectives from Black Youth in Ontario

### Beyond Invisible Teach-In

Rahma Siad-Togane and Kamau Davis-Locke  
Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange  
York University

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# The Ontario Youth Compass Research Project

- About the Ontario Youth Compass Research Project
  - Research Objectives
  - Methodology
- Emerging Findings
- Implications of Findings for Youth Work



# About the Ontario Youth Compass Research Project

# The Ontario Youth Sector Compass (OYC):

- A research project by YouthREX in collaboration with the York Research Chair in Youth and Contexts of Inequity.
- The OYC is focused on understanding what supports young people in Ontario need to thrive and what supports youth workers need to work with young people as healthily as possible.
- The OYC takes an equity-based approach in understanding the experiences of youth and youth workers by merging quantitative data from surveys and stories from qualitative interviews to provide rich insights about different groups of youth and youth workers across Ontario.

# Research Objectives

- What issues are youth in Ontario experiencing?
- How have these issues been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How are Ontario youth involved in education, employment, activities, and communities?
- What do youth want and need to have a Good Life in Ontario?
- What does youth work look like in Ontario?
- What are the issues, gaps, and barriers encountered by youth workers?
- How are youth workers responding to the challenges they are experiencing?
- How might we engage and leverage 'systems' to better support youth and youth workers?

# Methodology

## Online Survey

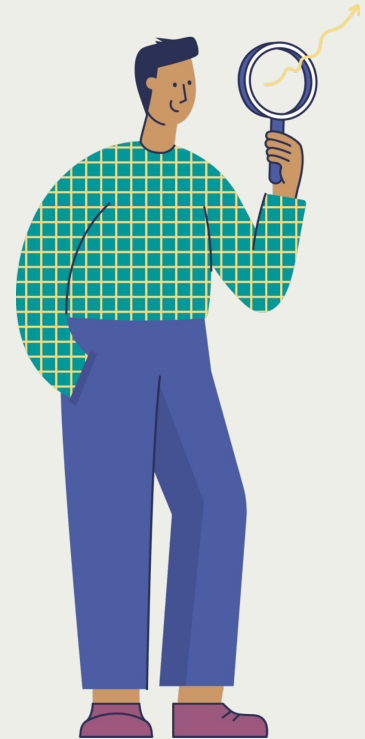
- Completed by 3,670 youth and 423 youth workers across Ontario
- The final sample for analyses: 3343 youth and 356 youth workers
- 249 out of the 3343 youth identified as Black.

## One-on-one in-depth interviews

- 81 youth and 73 youth workers

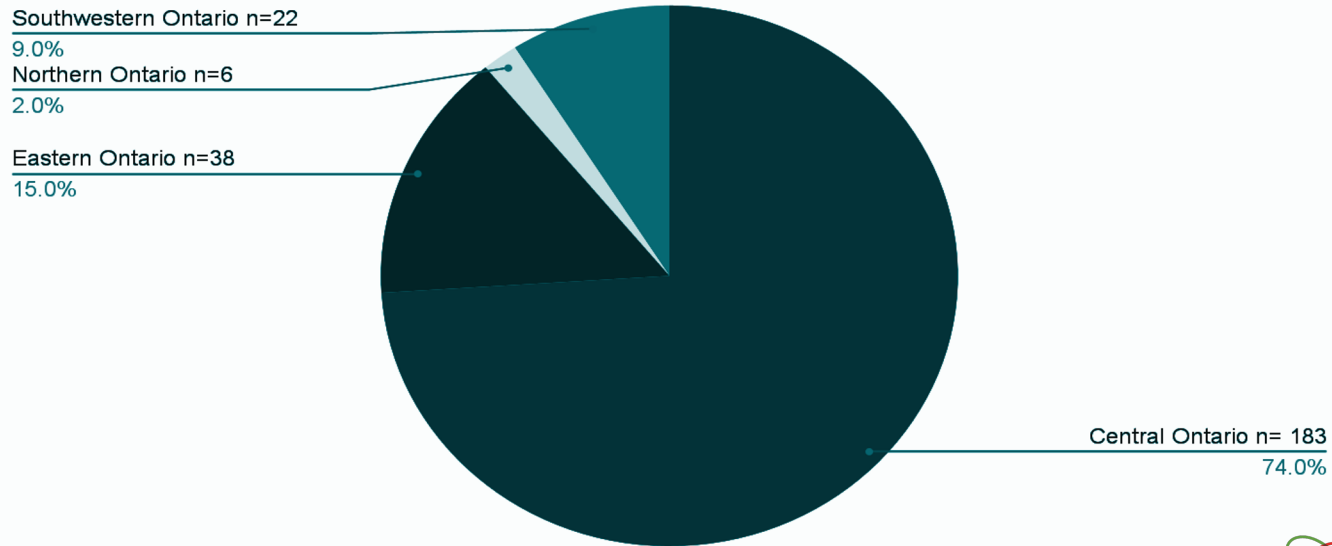
# Methodology

Our presentation focuses on the responses of the 249 Black youth who completed the online survey, including a thematic coding of their open-ended responses



# Demographics of Black Youth Participants

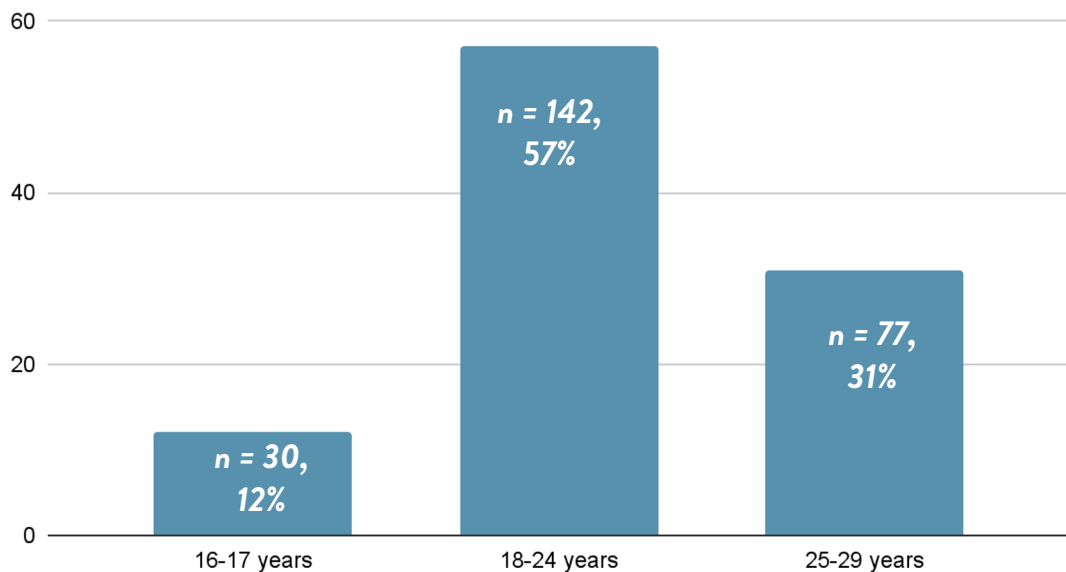
Percent of Black Youth by Region (n=249)



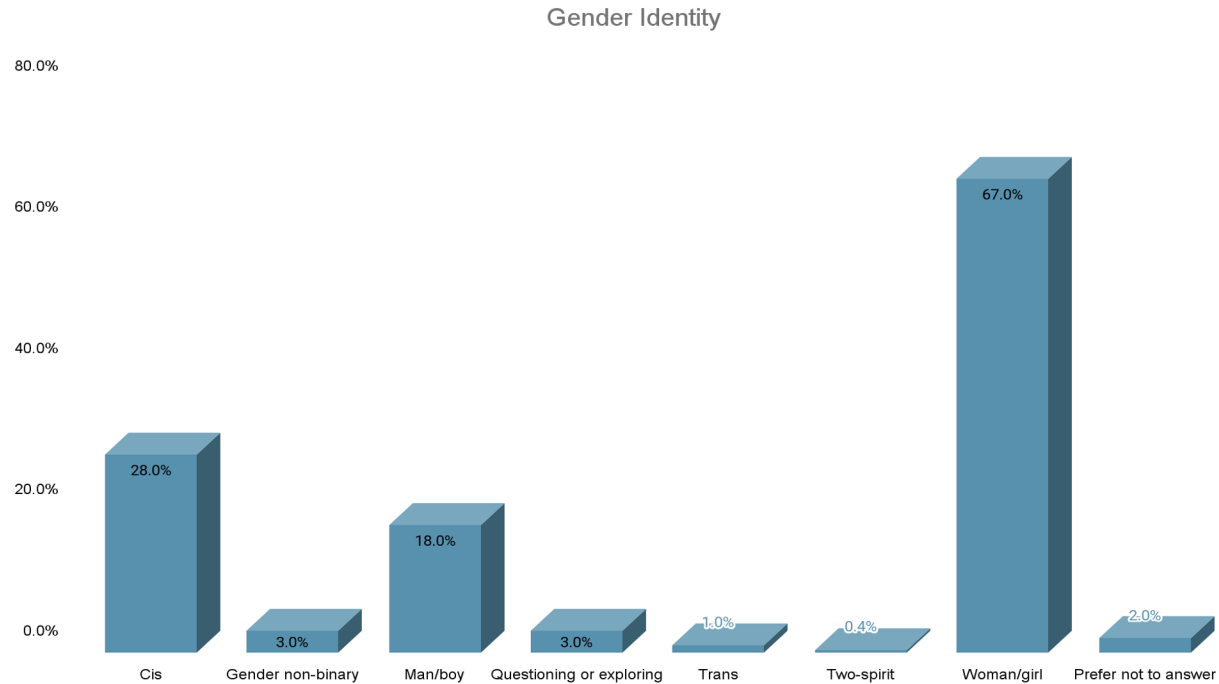


# Demographics of Black Youth Participants

Percent of Black Youth by Age Group (n=249)




# Demographics of Black Youth Participants





# Emerging Findings: Four Main Themes



- 
- #1: Why mental health matters for Black youth**
  - #2: What a “Good Life” means to Black Youth**
  - #3: Barriers to a “Good Life” for Black Youth?**
  - #4: Changes needed in Ontario for a “Good Life”**



# **Why mental health matters for Black youth**

# #1: Why Mental Health Matters for Black Youth

How Did Black Youth Rate Their Mental Health? (n=248)

1 out of 2\* Black youth rated their  
current mental health as **Below Average**

\*n = 126, 50.6%

# #1: Why Mental Health Matters for Black Youth

Are Black Youth Currently Living a *Good Life*? (n=246)

Only 1 out of 4\* Black youth felt they were **currently living a Good Life**.

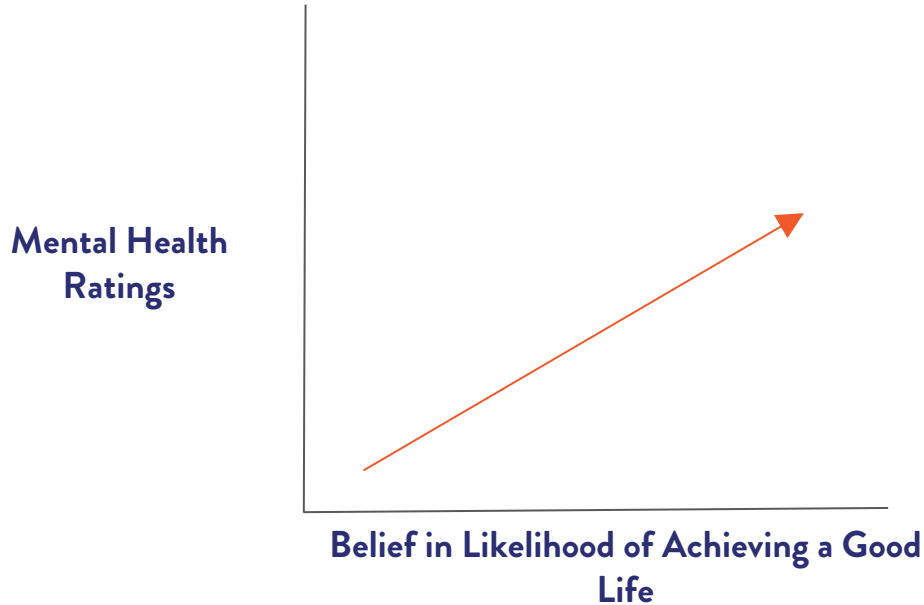
*but...*

**More than half\*\*** of Black youth felt it was **likely** that they could  
**achieve a *Good Life* in the future.**

\*n = 64, 25.7%

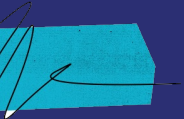
\*\*n = 139, 56.5%

# Relationship between Mental Health and Living a Good Life





## #2: What a “Good Life” means to Black Youth



# We asked youth to tell us:

*“...how Ontario youth define a Good Life and the things that contribute to this. A Good Life might be considered the kind of life you dream of living and would include things you want for yourself as well as things you want to see in the broader community and world”.*

## #2: Defining a 'Good Life'

#2a. Mental health, Self-Awareness,

#2b. Love and relationship

#2c. Financial stability



## #2a: Mental health, Self-Awareness, Aspirations

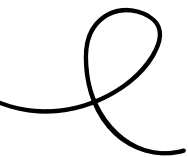
A desire for happiness/worry-free lifestyle & building self-awareness and self-sufficiency are important components of how they conceptualize a “Good Life”.

- Includes subthemes related to access to health care and mental health supports

## #2a: Mental health, Self-Awareness, Aspirations

“Having a Good Life to me means that I am well-rounded and balancing my mental, emotional and physical health. Tending to my interpersonal and familial relationships and being at one with myself.” (Participant 18)

“Having a good life means a lot to me. Being able to walk freely in the streets without being discriminated against or bullied. Also, being able to maintain my mental health would mean the world to me.” (Participant 2)



## #2b: Financial Stability

Sufficient financial means was cited as a contributing factor in a “Good Life”. Financial stability is through:

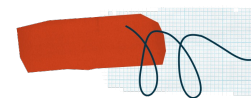
- Affordability of basic needs
- Access to employment
- Education and social supports
- Job satisfaction and income security
- Income that supports long-term goals
- Financial freedom



## #2b: Financial Stability

“A good life to me is one where I can have my own place to call home, be able to pay my bills, be able to go out with the people I care about, and to be able to treat myself when I need to.” (Participant 31)

“....a "Good Life" starts with a solid financial foundation. It means living debt-free and being able to not only cover all my expenses but enjoy luxuries like vacations, massages, a house, and a car. A life where I am able to have a career because I am passionate and not just because of how much the salary is. A life where I can afford to take days off and have more control and flexibility with my work hours. I would spend more time with my family and doing things I enjoy than at work in this ideal situation...” (Participant 6)



## #2c: Love & Relationships

Love and relationships were identified as precondition in living a “Good Life” and were defined as:

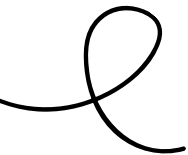
- Reciprocity within a support system
- Community building
- Support and social connections



## #2c: Love & Relationships

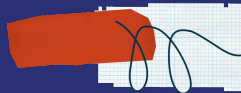
“A happy place. A life where there isn’t much mental health issues. A life where the ones u love are important to you as much as you are important to them. A life of comfort and independence. A life full of love.” (Participant 15)

“A Good Life means having friends, family members, and other people in the community value you no matter what. Being able to do most if not all of the things I strive to accomplish in my life, ex. traveling” (Participant 5)





# **#3: Barriers to a “Good Life” for Black Youth**



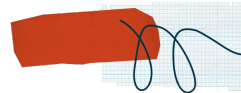


## #3: Barriers to a 'Good Life'

#3a: Mental (ill)health as a barrier

#3b: Structural and socio-economic barriers

#3c: Insecurity, self-blame, and barriers to personal growth



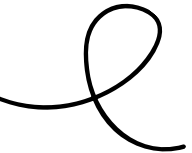
## #3a: Mental (ill)health as a barrier

- Mental health state is an inhibitor to the pursuit of a “Good Life”.
- There is a relationship between socioeconomic status and mental health—i.e., difficulties accessing mental health services or experiencing poor mental health because of stressors related to SES.

## #3a: Mental (ill)health as a barrier

“Depression and Anxiety (diagnosed), Unaffordable Rent and Housing Market, Poverty Wages, Lack of Good Jobs, Medical Conditions (both diagnosed and waiting for diagnosis), Ableism, Complex Trauma, Toxic Triggering Family Dynamics and Personal Stressors, Loneliness, Financial Instability, Food Insecurity.” (Participant 18)

“Mental health issues (probably undiagnosed), lack of network to navigate education system and professional spaces.” (Participant 2)



## #3b: Structural and socio-economic barriers

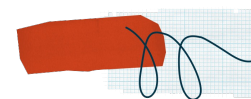
Structural and socio-economic factors are a barrier to achieving the “Good Life” and include:

- barriers to employment, lack of affordable housing, accessing public health care and social services, inaccessibility to education, and financial insecurity



## #3b: Structural and socio-economic barriers

“It is hard to get access to employment opportunities that offer benefits and a living wage. As of right now, the minimum wage is not enough to make ends meet. *There is a lot of pressure on me to be successful so I can take care of my family which can have a negative impact on my mental health and overall productivity.* As of right now, I am still trying to find out what truly brings me happiness and what I am passionate about.” (Participant 14)



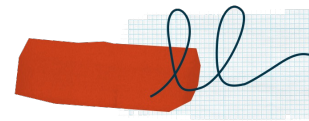
## #3b: Structural and socio-economic barriers

*“I feel like things were rigged for me from the beginning* because I have been paying rent since I left high school. I went from high school to paying rent, to risking it and getting in debt for college and now I’m back to just paying rent. Not having a support system means letting go of dreams I’ve had for basic survival. People with support go places.” Participant 35



## #3c: Insecurity, self-blame, and barriers to personal growth

Black youth expressed feelings of worthlessness and perceived ‘deficiencies’ in attributes and perceptions of having made the ‘wrong choices’ that stand in the way of self-actualization and realization of the “Good Life”.

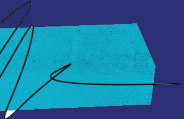


## #3c: Insecurity, self-blame, and barriers to personal growth

“Being negative minded having no hope no motivation scared of making mistakes not letting go of the past comparing myself to others taking things too personal worrying about the future scared of failing” (Participant 9)

“I don’t have any confidence in myself or my abilities, and I’m hesitant to build strong relationships with others in fear of judgment” (Participant 7)

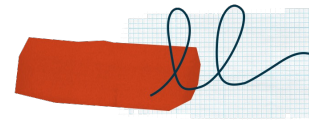
# #4: Changes needed in Ontario for a “Good Life”



## #4: Changes needed in Ontario for a “Good Life”

#4a: Mental health services that are more affordable, long-term, and tailored to youth and more awareness and education around mental health.

#4b: Affordability and cost of living in Ontario, including housing; income and affordability; tuition and student debt, and childcare



## #4a: Mental Health Services

“In Ontario, mental health services are far and few in between. A person having a mental health crisis may have to wait hours to see a medical professional, and even when they do, their situation may not be taken as seriously as it should be. *A lot of key actors in our communities such as teachers, police officers, and guidance counsellors are not adequately trained to support youth dealing with mental health issues*” (Participant 3)



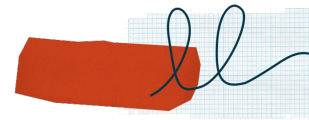
## #4a: Mental Health Services

“Affordable mental health services, easy to access mental health services, non-discriminatory healthcare” (Participant 21)

“Free therapy for teenagers, at least for the ones that live in low-income families” (Participant 28)

## #4b: Affordability and cost of living in Ontario

- The cost of living and income levels in Ontario, including housing; income and affordability, tuition and student debt; childcare
- The stresses and challenges that come from the cost of living. Some participants called for a “living wage” while others pointed to a basic income guarantee
- There was also the need to lower the cost of food, gas, education and other living costs.



## #4b: Affordability and cost of living in Ontario

- Housing was the largest issue raised when discussing affordability and the cost of living in Ontario, including homelessness and the risk of homelessness, high rents, lack of accessible housing, and the need for different kinds of housing options, especially for low-income individuals.
- Responses also included concerns about the real estate market and government interventions that are needed.



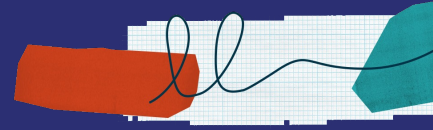
## #4c: Affordability and cost of living in Ontario

“Build more public housing, build more subsidized social housing with eco-friendly renewable technology, more greenspace less urban concrete metal jungles...” (Participant 22)

“More support: - affordable therapy maybe grants - more access to affordable housing - money grants for people who are going through mental instability” (Participant 12)

## #4c: Affordability and cost of living in Ontario

“Serious overhaul of the rent and housing market. Rapid affordable housing developments, rapid social and subsidized housing developments, Transition CERB and CRB into UBI (Universal Basic Income) and GLI (Guaranteed Livable Income), more low-barrier grants, bursaries, scholarships, student awards, and low-interest loans, more paid job training programs for youth including older youth in their late 20s and early 30s, universal pharma care, include therapy and counselling as a part of public healthcare, universal vision care and dental care. *These ideas might seem 'radical' to some, but we will never pull a significant portion of the population out of destitution, desperation, despair, depression, and demoralizing darkness if they are struggling in poverty with a day-by-day, paycheck-to-paycheck, survivalist mindset.* Many people feel stuck and trapped in their circumstances due to financial constraints that act as a major barrier to them achieving higher levels of fulfillment and self-actualization. There is a lot of untapped potential/human capital for larger economic growth, including hindered or untapped talent and entrepreneurial potential because people's dreams have been crushed by trauma, poverty, or both”. ( Participant 26)



# Implications of Findings for Youth Work



## For Black youth, relationships matter:

- Healthy connections with friends, family, educators and community
- Mentorship opportunities: Support, guidance, navigating systems

## Structural Barriers & Self-Blame/Confidence:

- They name and cite structural barriers, and yet they assume some level of personal blame for those barriers (lacking something), creating feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence



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# Thank you!

[Rahmasiadtogane@gmail.com](mailto:Rahmasiadtogane@gmail.com)

[Kamau@youthrex.com](mailto:Kamau@youthrex.com)

[www.youthrex.com](http://www.youthrex.com) | [@REXforyouth](#)

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