

**REIMAGINING SAPACCY AND THE
MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PROJECT:
A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STORY**



CREDITS

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Black Health Alliance (BHA)

The BHA is a community-led organization working to improve the health and well-being of Black communities in Canada. The Black Health Alliance led the Mental Health Promotion Project.

Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH) - Provincial System Support Program

The CAMH Provincial System Support Program works with communities, service providers and other partners across Ontario to move evidence to action to create sustainable, system-level change. The CAMH Provincial System Support Program supported the Black Health Alliance to implement the Mental Health Promotion Project.

Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX)

YouthREX's mandate is to make research evidence and evaluation practices accessible and relevant to Ontario's youth sector through capacity building, knowledge exchange, and evaluation leadership. YouthREX partnered with the BHA to support the evaluation of stakeholder engagement on the Mental Health Promotion Project.

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INTRODUCTION

The Black Health Alliance has been working with Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth since 2016 to increase awareness of the need for the program and to advocate for more resources to meet community needs.

The **Black Health Alliance (BHA)** is a community-led organization working to improve the health and wellbeing of Black communities in Canada. Driven by ground-breaking research and strong partnerships, they continue to mobilize innovative solutions with the goal to create lasting change in the lives of Black children, families, and communities.

Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth (SAPACCY) provides support to African and Caribbean Canadian youth under 25-years-old across Ontario who are dealing with problem substance use and mental health concerns. SAPACCY programs offer mental health and addictions counselling and support in accessing resources to assist youth and their families/caregivers in reducing harm, moving toward recovery, and making the best choices for themselves and their family.

The **Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH) – Provincial System Support Program (PSSP), Centre for Addiction & Mental Health – Health Equity**, and the BHA agreed to partner on supporting a backbone structure to support sustain the expansion of SAPACCY, including processes to rename, rebrand, and create a new program website focused on Black youth.

This report presents the findings of the first phase of the evaluation of the BHA’s **Mental Health Promotion Project and SAPACCY rebranding and renaming initiative**, providing:

- a review of the need for dedicated support for Black youth mental health in Ontario
- brief context about the partnership between the BHA and CAMH PSSP/SAPACCY
- an overview of the evaluation methodology
- an overview of the findings from the interview, focus group, and survey data, **focusing on the process of stakeholder and youth engagement and experience of project participants**
- a summary of the findings and lessons learned



NEED FOR THE PROJECT

Youth mental health concerns in Canada have reached crisis levels, impacting an estimated 1.2 million Canadian youth (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017). Multiple studies have shown COVID-19 exacerbated the crisis, indicating youth mental wellness decreased during the pandemic (Hawke et al., 2021; Salami et al., 2024; Samji et al., 2022). Among Canadian youth with mental health concerns, fewer than 20% receive appropriate treatment (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017), which is particularly concerning given that early intervention is critical to reducing the burden of mental illness across the lifespan (Wilens & Rosenbaum, 2013). The Canadian mental health sector has work to do to better meet the needs of young people.

The sector must go even further to meet the unique needs of Black youth, as the individual and systemic experiences of racism have serious mental health consequences (Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020; Gajaria et al., 2021; Goff et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2020). Anti-Black racism is institutionalized, normalized, and rendered invisible through white supremacy to dominant mainstream society.

One study found that institutional and individual anti-Black racism represented a major barrier to mental wellness for Black and Caribbean girls in Toronto, specifically citing the lack of funding increases at SAPACCY as an example of diminished mental health support for Black

youth (Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020). YouthREX found that among 1,500 Black youth and their families, widespread anti-Black racism was the number one concern and mental health was among the top 10 concerns (Anucha et al., 2017).

Black youth face unique barriers to accessing mental health care, including racism and discrimination from providers (Chow et al., 2003), lack of culturally competent providers (Vázquez & Villodas, 2019), and internal and community stigma (Kranke et al., 2012; Vázquez & Villodas, 2019). These barriers add to remaining obstacles youth experience accessing appropriate mental health services, including barriers related to location, cost, and wait times (Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020; Salami et al., 2021, 2022).

Despite the prevalence of mental health concerns for Black youth, the limited avenues through which young people can access mental health services suggest that their needs are not being adequately met. Programs such as SAPACCY are required more than ever to deliver appropriate, accessible, anti-racist, and holistic mental health care and substance use support to Black youth.



One strategy to improve access and satisfaction with youth mental health care and substance use support is to engage young people directly in the effort. Youth engagement in mental health has been described as youth participation that occurs at the individual, organizational, and/or systemic levels that involves youth strengths and interests to improve programs, services, policies, and governance (Ontario Centre for Excellence in Child and Youth Mental Health, 2021).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

In March 2021, the BHA was engaged by Ontario's Ministry of Education to develop a mental health promotion project that would advance the following objectives:


- Amplify Black youth voice as it relates to the intersection of anti-Black racism and mental health.
- Promote mental health in ways that reduce mental health stigma for Black youth, including through positive affirmations and by providing tips and strategies to students.
- Build individual student skills in mental health promotion utilizing a peer-to-peer model.
- Promote connections to mental health supports and resources (school and community-based resources).
- Increase engagement from youth, caring adults, and sector stakeholders in the promotion of mental health for Black students.

Around the same time, the **Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH) – Provincial System Support Program (PSSP), Centre for Addiction & Mental Health – Health Equity**, and the **BHA** agreed to partner on supporting a backbone structure to sustain the expansion of **SAPACCY**.

SAPACCY was targeted for rebranding because the process would:

1. acknowledge that 'substance abuse' can be stigmatizing and is outdated language in the mental health space
2. provide an opportunity to re-assess how the program name reflects the services being provided to Black youth (i.e. not only substance-related supports)
3. offer a re-assessment of the intersections between race and ethnicity (i.e. African/ Caribbean vs. Black vs. ...) in a way that is more inclusive

In the short and medium term, the collaboration will enable the program to be expanded to seven sites in southwestern and eastern Ontario, and support program build-out in all seven sites, including the development of a revitalized program model, model of care, training and support mechanism, and community engagement, and the development of processes and tools for the network of sites to operate effectively and efficiently. In the longer term, the current backbone will focus on building the capacity of the network so that the backbone and service functions of the expansion can be led and driven by the community.



While this evaluation report focuses on the initial process of rebranding and renaming SAPACCY, the context of the partnership and the additional components of the project are important to frame the significance of the rebranding as the organization grows to meet the needs of Black youth and their families across Ontario.

This rebranding process is the first big project in partnership with the **Black Youth Advisory Panel (BYAP)**. The BYAP is hosted by the **CAMH Youth Engagement Initiative**. A design subcommittee, the BYAP Design Subcommittee, participated in the rebranding process and comprised nine Black youth experts (BYAP members), who provided feedback on the rebranding and renaming of SAPACCY, and on the creation of the mental health promotion campaign and website blog. The BYAP Design Team had representation from Black youth across Ontario with a diversity of lived/living experiences.

The deliverables for the Mental Health Promotion Project and for the SAPACCY rebranding called for integrating the project into one effort with the following components:

- A new name and brand for SAPACCY that speaks to an effort to reconnect the community and diverse Black youth.
- A new website for SAPACCY inclusive of other mental health resources for youth.
- A peer-to-peer mental health promotion campaign that would be featured on the site.
- A subsite blog connected to the SAPACCY website called Amplify, where Black youth will be able to submit entries to reinforce the peer-to-peer element of mental health promotion.

To complete these deliverables, the BHA project coordinator engaged key stakeholders including the BYAP, SAPACCY Implementation Table, and relevant subcommittees, among other stakeholders, to guide and inform the process. (For a complete list of stakeholders, see Figure 1.)

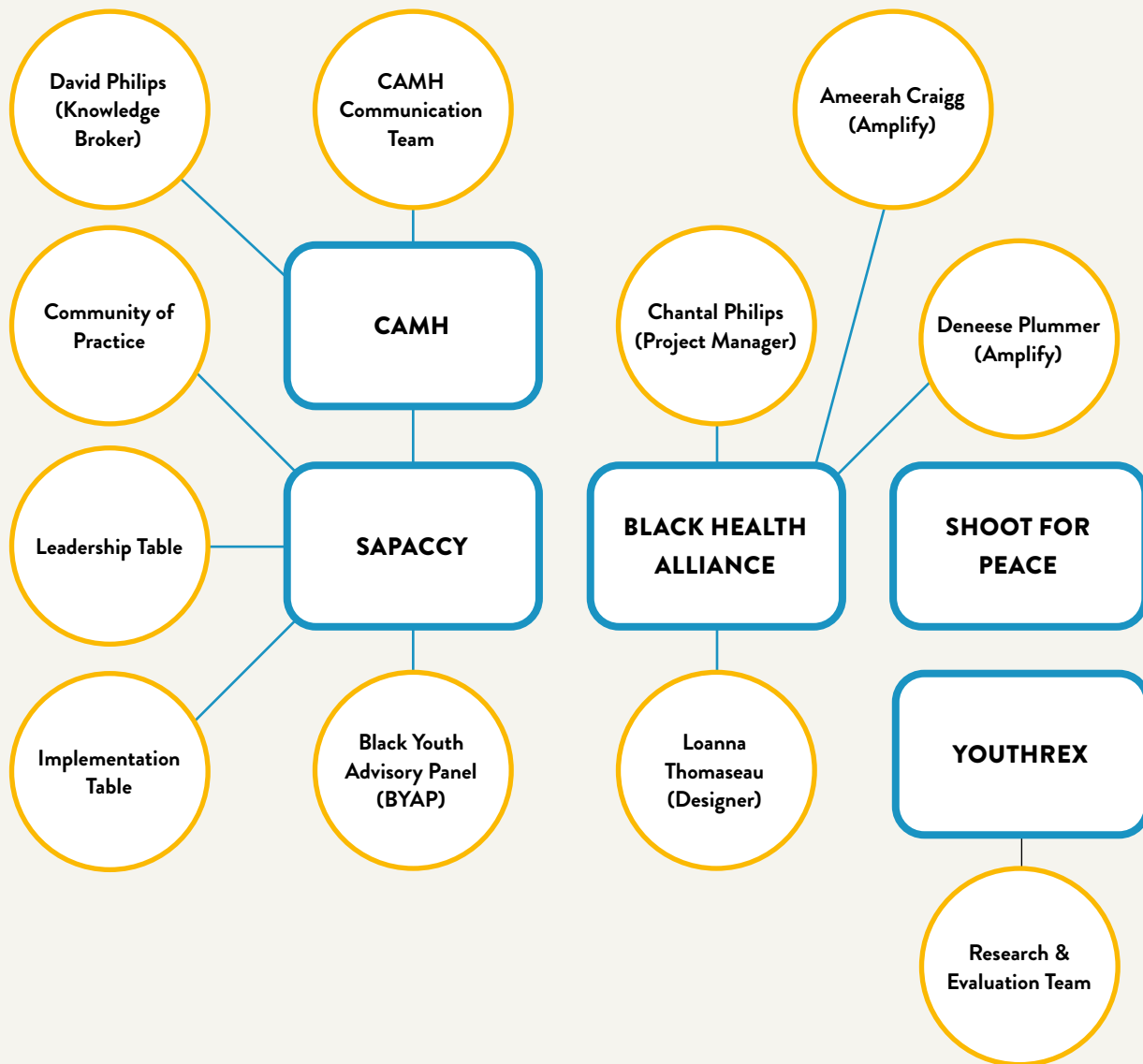


Figure 1. Project Stakeholder Map

ABOUT YOUTHREX

The BHA partnered with YouthREX to lead the exploration of youth and stakeholder engagement on the project. YouthREX utilized its Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing to guide the exploration, with a particular focus on uplifting youth voice. Youth partners from the BYAP and project staff have been engaged throughout the evaluation to inform priorities, data collection tools, analysis, and knowledge translation.

Based at the School of Social Work at York University, YouthREX's mandate is to make research evidence and evaluation practices accessible and relevant to Ontario's youth sector through capacity building, knowledge exchange, and evaluation leadership. YouthREX has extensive experience designing and delivering equity-informed evaluation services and supports that are accessible, relevant, and responsive to community-based youth organizations. YouthREX also supports these programs to use the insights from their evaluations to strengthen their programs and improve the wellbeing of youth.

YouthREX has been very well served by a community-university model that brings the expertise, knowledge, and resources of community partners and university researchers together to support Ontario's youth sector.

APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING ENGAGEMENT

Examining **project processes** allows for rich description of the project design and implementation to provide learnings about the experience of engagement from stakeholder and youth perspectives. The goal of examining the project processes is to ***understand the story of youth and stakeholder engagement*** on the project through interviews, surveys, and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.



STORYTELLING GOALS

- To understand the **project process for engaging** youth and stakeholders.
- To explore the **experience of engagement** from youth and stakeholder perspectives.
- To assess whether the project process is **youth-focused, inspired, and informed**.
- For the process to **engage all stakeholders** in a way in which everyone feels heard and able to participate.



PARTICIPANTS

In line with the goal of understanding youth and stakeholder engagement, YouthREX focused on hearing directly from project stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Key stakeholders from the SAPACCY Implementation Table and Black Youth Advisory Panel (BYAP) were the focus, as they had the most intimate knowledge of project processes and played the largest role in the project. (For a complete list of evaluation participations, see Table 1.)

Table 1. Evaluation Participants

EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS	ROLE IN THE EVALUATION	WHY THEY WERE INCLUDED TO CONTRIBUTE TO EVALUATION GOALS
Black Youth Advisory Panel (BYAP), including BYAP Design Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants 	To understand their experience in the project as a whole.
BYAP co-leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview participants 	To understand their experience in the project as a whole.
Project coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview participant 	To illuminate their role in youth and stakeholder engagement throughout project processes and provide learnings about strengths and opportunities for improvement in community engagement.
SAPACCY Leadership Table, including Implementation Table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview or survey participants 	To understand their experience in the project, and to provide learnings about strengths and opportunities for improvement in community engagement.



DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND METHODS

The majority of data collection occurred in June 2024. All participants consented to being a part of the project evaluation and their participation was completely voluntary.

- 1. BYAP focus groups.** Members of the **BYAP Design Subcommittee** were invited to participate in virtual focus groups to share their perspectives on the project. For youth under the age of 16, parental consent was required to be eligible to participate (even with parental consent, youth participation was still completely voluntary). Scheduling focus groups at a time when each youth could attend was challenging, so a one-to-one interview option was added to facilitate participation from all interested youth. **Three youth participated in the discussions**, which focused on youth perspectives on the renaming and rebranding process, reflections on the group's engagement, and recommendations for future involvement of youth on mental health projects.
- 2. Coordinator and co-lead interviews.** The project coordinator and the BYAP co-leads were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. **Three interviews were conducted**, which focused on their perspectives of the project processes and outcomes, strategies for youth and stakeholder engagement, reflections on project challenges, and recommendations for improving the process moving forward.
- 3. Stakeholder interviews.** Members of the SAPACCY Leadership Table were invited to participate in one-to-one semi structured interviews. **Three interviews were conducted**, which focused on their perspectives of the project roll-out and implementation, reflections on youth engagement on the project, and recommendations for future collaborative projects.
- 4. Stakeholder open-ended surveys.** Members of the SAPACCY Leadership Table were given the secondary option to complete an open-ended survey if their schedules did not allow for an interview. **Five members completed the open-ended survey**, which included questions about their perspectives on program processes, reflections on youth engagement on the project, and recommendations for future collaborative projects.
- 5. Program documentation.** To supplement understanding of project processes, program documentation was provided to the evaluation team. This included project timelines, meeting notes, and slides from design meetings.

A STORY OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The process to rename, rebrand, and eventually expand SAPACCY required input from a variety of stakeholders to ensure this important program continued to best meet the needs of Black youth and their families across Ontario.

PROJECT PROCESSES FOR ENGAGING YOUTH AND STAKEHOLDERS

Planning out the processes for engagement fell largely to the project coordinator. The process began by mapping out who they needed to hear from, how they wanted to construct engagement, and how much time that would take. They solicited input on their plan and got to work:

“I think the first thing I did was really just trying to frame the timeline, the stakeholders who are going to be required, and the amount of engagement or I guess, not just amount, but also the format of engagement, and how to leverage some of those things with people’s schedules, as well as the timelines with things like how do we use online meetings, as well as surveys and emails? Like, what does it look like for us to balance these things to try to optimize engagement, and to actually start the process of meeting with people.”

The team recognized that engaging youth on the project needed to be **intentionally facilitated** to reduce unequal power dynamics and create spaces where youth felt comfortable sharing their ideas. Partnering with the CAMH Youth Engagement Initiative provided the BYAP with an expertise in youth engagement from the start; the BYAP co-leads from CAMH ensured engagement occurred in a youth-friendly way, providing strategies, conducting all communication with youth, and guiding the initiative:

“We would meet with [the project coordinator and/or designer] at least once, sometimes a couple of times to like review the agenda, review the materials, help them, like trim it down and make sure that we’re on the same page that let me know what’s being talked about that was within the scope of BYAP so that they can speak to it as presented in a youth friendly way.”

At the same time, the team recognized the importance of meaningfully engaging the SAPACCY Leadership and Implementation Tables. They were intentional about creating a space where their ideas were equally important, and they noted the importance of building trust that members’ feedback would be honored, especially since SAPACCY was – and is – so important to their communities:

“I think there was a, there might have been a bit of mistrust in terms of feeling like the process wouldn’t engage, like it wouldn’t adequately engage the people that needed to. So there’s a lot of reassurance through making sure we were tracking that and sending that back to folks so that they knew like this is where we’re at right now.”

“But I think as we kind of move the project forward, trying to create that equality between participants across the, you know, their position, so whether it’s youth or our leadership, to build this final product. So I think we tried very intentionally to, to create an even or equitable plane.”

The project coordinator and the BYAP co-leads used a variety of engagement strategies to reach both the youth and adult stakeholders in their work, including:

- Building trust to ensure stakeholders could voice their opinions
- Scheduling discussions in alignment with already existing meetings
- Entering each meeting with a clear goal for what they needed to accomplish
- Cultivating a friendly space for youth to be able to be themselves
- Prepping detailed slides and mock-ups to share prior to meetings
- Facilitating verbal feedback in Zoom meetings through group discussion
- Soliciting written feedback in Zoom meetings over chat
- Utilizing the Zoom whiteboard and annotation features to share group ideas and priorities
- Utilizing Google Jam Boards to brainstorm initial feedback in Zoom meetings
- Using polls to vote on top choices in Zoom meetings
- Completing ‘rose, bud, thorn’ templates to solicit feedback on what was working well and what areas could be improved

- Requesting written feedback following Zoom meetings over email
- Practicing transparency around top choices between stakeholder groups
- Promptly responding to emails to answer questions and address concerns

STAKEHOLDER AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGEMENT

What Did We Hear From the BYAP Members?

The BYAP members described being excited about having an impact on the branding and renaming of an institution that is important for Black youth and partnering with design professionals to gain experience. They also shared their belief that their voices mattered and that they took the opportunity to be heard seriously:

“I have to agree with [BYAP member], I really love designing and anything that go with design in general, so it was the thing that interest me.”

“I’m going to join this group, because, you know, I think that my ideas and attributes would be helpful to other people.”

“And it takes a lot for like, you know, like Black youth and communities to kind of have their say, or kind of have those organizations or communities. So I thought it would be a great opportunity for me and also, like, kind of like, gain more experience and like, widen my like perspective.”

The BYAP co-leads also described how the magnitude of the project supported the BYAP members' engagement:

“In regard to what we set out to do with the BYAP, it was really exciting project to start with, because it’s something that would have, I guess, not immediate impact, certainly a very heavy duty reach, which is stuff like we can only dream of for an advisory. Right? So I think we’re all really excited about that opportunity.”

“One of the things that worked really well is that people were interested, like, I think that was like the first thing like the advisors were really, really interested in the idea, really, specifically, the folks who were in the Design Team. Like they really I think, dug into the content that we brought, like everything that all the content, I think was really rich and exactly what it is that they were looking to engage with when it came to like the rebranding and design process.”

The BYAP co-leads also shared they felt each youth had the opportunity to provide feedback, as they used multiple methods of asking for feedback and had good levels of participation. The BYAP members echoed these ideas:

“While there were a variety of people, I believe also that everyone had the opportunity to speak/ write, and give their ideas.”

“The presentation of both visual and oral was very useful to follow everything. Also the various way to give feedback (the chat, voice, or the board).”

“Knowing that I would be working with, like, professionals, like when the editor was on call sometimes, it was cool to hear their perspective and be able to ask them questions, or any tips they could give us, as we gave them the feedback and stuff.”

The BYAP members on this project **felt heard** and **appreciated the opportunity to learn, provide feedback, and work together** alongside other Black professionals.

What Did We Hear From the Leadership and Implementation Tables?

Leadership and Implementation Table stakeholders reported feeling heard and that their feedback had an impact:

“Yes, the participation and engagement at the committee is great. Any ideas or feedback is always considered fully and discussed further so that all parties involved can agree.”

“I felt that my feedback was meaningful as all voice were heard and acknowledged at feedback meetings.”

“We had discussions at the leadership table about the name, we did have someone come out and meet with us and to talk to us about what some of the options were. And also about, you know, the, the physical branding, and, you know, the presentation of it.”

Members reported having enough time to review materials and provide feedback in meetings, and that the project team did a good job explaining the BYAP's priorities and decisions.

One interviewee discussed the professionalism of the Design Team in running through the options with the group:

“I often leave it up to the experts. So I mean, we did see a couple, I mean, I think we saw three or four [designs]. You know, like, we saw a number of different ways. And then we had options with different colours. And they had, they had communicated to us the significance of the colours, the significance of the lettering. So it seemed pretty researched.”

Some Implementation Table members felt that the BYAP had greater say in the decision-making:

“Generally, it felt like the BYAP had the final say on name and design and that we were being informed as to outcomes.”

Nonetheless, nearly all the youth and adult stakeholders underscored their **satisfaction with the engagement strategies and implementation** on the project.

Youth-Focused, Inspired, and Informed

This project had been described from the beginning as having a significant focus on engaging Black youth to inform and guide the process. Nearly everyone YouthREX spoke with discussed the importance of elevating Black youth voice in matters that impact them, which included the process to rebrand and rename SAPACCY:

“Black youth need to be involved and consulted so as we may construct a service, not adapt a service, that meets their needs with intentionality.”

“We can’t look at, you know, having a specialized program for Black youth without hearing their experience and their voice.”

“Ultimately, like we really respect what they have to say. So we made it clear to the youth as well that their perspective mattered, and that the Leadership Table cared about what they have to say, and that they would try to prioritize centering, what their thoughts were about things. And the youth really appreciated that.”

Successful youth engagement was described by both the BYAP members and the facilitation and coordination team as **hearing from a diverse group of young people**, where **young people are compensated for their time, given a clear understanding of their role, and have opportunities to have meaningful impact**. Ideally, it could also involve opportunities for youth to **gain skills and be in community with other young people**:

“I really liked that we were able to create a space where the 12-year-old feels as confident vocalizing their thoughts as the, you know, 25-year-old does, or 29-year-old does.”

“As young as we think we are, these topics of mental health and anti-Black racism, and how they connect up, require us to create more and more space for young people to express what they think, what they feel on an ongoing basis.”




The BYAP Members as Consultants

All stakeholders described **opportunities for youth consultation and feedback**, and distinct examples where youth votes and input impacted decision-making. However, in some instances the BYAP members felt like there was **more room for youth leadership** – for example, the group could have potentially engaged in a design brainstorm to create the branding themselves rather than voting on options. Sometimes it felt like things were already decided and they were just being confirmed with the group:

“I would say ‘consulted’ because as I mentioned before, I felt like it was more them giving us ideas, and guiding us but in a way that they were looking for our opinions and not so much for our ideas. In other word, they were giving guided questions that limited the open-minded answers.”

“I expected it to be more hands on to be honest. While giving our opinions is being part of the group through our opinions... I was looking to have more chances. Like making some design ourself or something similar to it... Maybe when we all agree with the name, to actually each maybe come with a design. Something as simple like that, could bring new idea on the perspective. Because it feel like they already had something in mind and wanted to confirm it with us... if we all were going to give our idea from scratch, they might have been inspired by our designs and maybe used them. Just having that experience might have been something very nice.”

This project was described as being in the yellow range of the Youth Engagement Stoplight – young people are engaged by being **informed** and consulted – as adapted from Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation (1992) by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (see Figure 2).



Manipulation	Young people are directed by adults, without genuine opportunities to provide input.
Decoration	Young people are invited to the table, but given little to no purpose, influence or decision making power.
Tokenism	Young people are included for the sake of saying youth are included—especially those with diverse identities.
Informed	Young people are kept aware of programs, services or policy changes without contributing to the process.
Consulted	Young people have roles, provide input and are told how their input impacts adult decision making.
Co-development & partnership	Young people jointly develop all projects, services and processes that impact or interest them. They have the opportunity to lead activities, share in decision making and work as equal partners with adults. Young people and adults have authentic relationships (genuine, trusting, collaborative) in which youth expertise and experience are respected and valued.

Figure 2. Youth Engagement Stoplight

On the flip side, the BYAP members recognized that there was a timeline and ‘higher-ups’ who were making decisions. Taking this into account, the level of youth engagement felt appropriate in some ways. Implementation Table stakeholders also recognized the limits of youth engagement on this project:

“I’d say throughout the process, youth inspired many of the changes in the direction, but conceptualizing maybe not so much. Informed, I’d say certainly, because I think the provincial Youth Advisory Panel was a key stakeholder throughout all the phases of the project. So I’d certainly would say that you’re very actively informed from the earliest iterations of this process.”

Youth were not set to ‘lead’ specific activities, but more often reviewed design and name choices first to share their feedback. In this way, all the information presented to the Leadership Table included youth perspectives. This worked because the Leadership Table generally agreed with the youth; if they hadn’t, the process may have felt differently for all participants.

“As I said, there was much alignment between both tables, in the end, so it’d be a mix between consulted and co-partnership and development, but I would think more erring on consulted.”

Leadership felt that the BYAP members were engaged throughout the project as consultants to inform and guide the process. Their input was taken seriously and impacted the way that the Leadership Table thought about the new name and brand. At the end of the day, though, the Leadership Table and backbone partners held responsibility for the project and it didn’t make sense for youth to be true project co-leads, as so many stakeholders’ voices ultimately mattered.

Multi-Level Youth Engagement

The project had multiple levels of youth engagement – including the the BYAP co-leads and the project coordinator, who also identified as a young person – an intentional approach to support the infusion of youth voice. The middle management team had greater ability to attend to and liaise with the adult stakeholders and support the project’s organization, and were therefore able to ensure youth’s ideas were included throughout the project:

“We were intentional about trying to make sure that youth were embedded in other places, like [the project coordinator].”

“Very early we were very intentional even as we were even developing this idea of BYAP, like in my mind, I wanted it to be youth co-lead from the onset. And I mean, I think, I think we’re proud of where we reached with that. And I think the work and the quality of engagement kind of speaks to some of that approach in terms of having that. And we certainly wouldn’t have been where we’re at now without their contributions and their leadership in those spaces.”

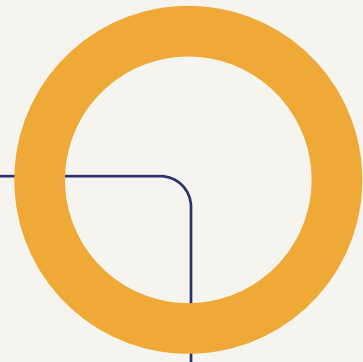


The project coordinator integrated youth voice and led the development of the **You Good?** mental health promotion campaign and the Amplify blog. The project coordinator and the BYAP co-leads acknowledged that they could have played a larger role in decision-making, but felt that their contributions helped to increase the impact of the BYAP:

“So I think, like active leaders within this process, are youth and are part of making sure that this process is youth-informed.”

“But I think when you set things up intentionally, with the philosophy and the values that you want to hold as a program, it lends itself to the work that transpires after it. So when we have these opportunities like rebranding, we’ve already purposely embedded youth leadership in our project management team so that there are those layers.”

Opportunities for multiple levels of youth engagement beyond the BYAP and project coordinator were also acknowledged, including broad youth participation in the Amplify blog posts, the designer consulting with a network of Black francophone youth to inform design processes, and strategies for the Implementation Table to consult with youth in their organization before providing feedback.



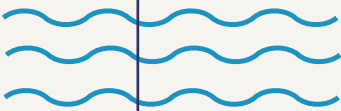
AMPLIFY

An important deliverable for this project was the Amplify blog, housed on the new website, informed by the design feedback from youth and adult stakeholders, and open to submissions from Black youth across Ontario:

“We put out a call for submissions, reviewed a lot of submissions, I think it was like at least 20 or 30 submissions from Black youth and select the top eight. And we started trying to structure a final issue, issue number one, which is focused on stigma.”

The blog creates space on the website for Black youth to share their perspectives on mental health and for other Black youth to read and engage with these perspectives. The blog has been built in to the website’s design to continue to embed youth voices going forward:

“The goal of the of the Amplify bit is to have young people engaging young people, one of the things that the team has found in the research that it’s done is there isn’t enough opportunity for peer support. And for a lot of young folks are getting support in the system, peer support really comes out as really key in Amplify blog. So even though this is not like truly peer-to-peer in the way that people need it, like in the service provision sense, it’s like a light touch of that peer-to-peer where young people can speak to other young people around this topic and engage them in their experiences.”



OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

While the majority of stakeholders were satisfied with the engagement processes, they did share reflections on opportunities for improvement, including:

- **challenges with the extensions of the timeline**
- opportunities for **increased communication**
- opportunities to **hear from additional stakeholders** to guide the process
- desire for more **direct intergenerational collaboration**

Timeline

Members from each of the groups reflected on the impact of the project timeline being extended. After two years of engagement and discussions, team members were looking for more information about what would happen with all their input:

“I think this is taking way too much time, time than we anticipated. ...I think more time draws, it draws things out in a way that people can't stay connected in the same way.”

Although the timeline had been extended multiple times, team members discussed the context of this project and why those timeline extensions were necessary. Members of the leadership team shared the nuances of bringing together multiple project deliverables alongside the rebranding and renaming of an Ontario institution that is so important to many Black community members. They also discussed that **meaningful engagement is a lengthy process that requires flexibility** for additional time to make sure everyone can feel heard:

“I think the project timelines were even extended to ensure that some of that feedback was accounted for. I mean, there's always more feedback that can be had, so I think at a certain point, you know, processes do need to move forward. And I don't necessarily know that a consensus, that the objective so to speak. So if we're thinking of a process like this, there might be, you know, 60 folks from SAPACCY sites that we connected with, whether that's leadership, frontline staff. And I'm making up that number, I don't know. But we're not necessarily saying that every one of those 60 will love this. I think that's not necessarily a realistic goal posts, but it's more so that there's no major objections to some of the pieces.”

“It's hard to change a name, or rebrand something that people hold a lot of, like, holds some sentiment too. So taking the time was part of the, was a strength, but was also a problem. I think, just like project planning could have been better.”

Increased Communication

Members from each of the groups also reported that increased communication among stakeholders might have helped with clarity in the planning process. This team had a large number of stakeholders that did not all have regular times to catch up with each other:

“You're playing a bit of a broken telephone game sometimes.”

Clearly outlined processes and **memorandums of understanding** could better help define the scope of the work to be more intentional about planning, engagement, timelines, and individual organizational processes:

“I think just being very clear on the timelines is important, because there’s planning around this, this process, there’s planning around the planning. So it should be clear as to when things are going to wrap up, and then when they’re going to be implemented. I think that’s the biggest.”

“It’s like a broken telephone going through. But, you know, they write down our opinions and our suggestions. And then that goes through, and then the other people who are viewing it, they put changes to our suggestions, right. So I do think that having just the open mind where we can actually talk to the people, because we did have one of those things where we had a thing where we could like talk to people who were working in different fields and whatnot.”

Team members reflected on whether increased communication could have improved their ability to engage, and suggested this might have helped facilitate more meaningful engagement, clear up issues about timeline extensions, present opportunities for more influence over the process, and potentially even lead to an in-person session to ground everyone in the process and build more trust:

“It wasn’t really explain to us. When we start the sub-group, I had the ideas that we will really giving ideas that may bring direct changes. But as we are going through the sessions, I notice that it wasn’t as serious as I believed it. As

[BYAP Member] mentioned, realizing that we are not making the final ideas shifted my way I saw it. I would have been nice to have a clearer explanation of expectation when presenting the group/opportunity.”

“I do think there was opportunity to engage some of the leaders in terms of the co-creation process, as well of processes. So maybe there could have been like a call for working group members who might want to scope out what the process of some of these pieces might look like, before we engage with design before we, you know, versus coming with a project plan set and then kind of informing and consulting.”

Team members did, however, acknowledge that increased communication and increased feedback would have further extended the project and that this needed to be balanced:

“I feel like, having ‘an open door’ would have been nice for them to get more ideas from us. However, it might take longer for them to get the feedbacks they were looking for. Too many ideas, may slow down the process on their end. Therefore, I feel like it could have been a middle ground.”

Include More Stakeholders

While there was robust engagement from the Implementation Table and the BYAP, members from all groups reflected on extending opportunities for input to additional stakeholders. For example, perhaps even more youth could have been engaged or voted on the new name/branding, and a larger pool of Black youth could have been polled or contributed to the process:



“I think I would have liked to see more engagement with online network, just like a massive group of folks that are itching to get involved in any ways. So if there were like, focus groups and stuff that were directed towards that group, I think that would have been something really beneficial.”

A member of the Implementation Table reflected on whether the BYAP was only capturing a subset of youth voices and wondered if there was room for more youth input. One suggestion was made to survey youth from each organization to give them an opportunity to vote on the logos and names that spoke to them:

“And you know what, I don’t, I don’t, I don’t remember if they had given us like a link for our website. ...Because that would have been an opportunity for us to like, give all of our clients an opportunity to provide feedback, and maybe they did, I just, I just don’t remember...”

Beyond engaging additional youth, a member of the Implementation Table suggested that tapping into the staff at the SAPACCY satellite sites might have provided an important perspective, as they engage most directly with the youth involved in programming:

“I’m imagining it was very challenging for all the folks organizing, so not to say all these things could have been realized. But I think we could have more purposely engaged frontline staff and some of those processes as well.”

While these additional suggestions were made to include more stakeholders, these ideas are in conflict with the tension around extending timelines and the challenge of communication between and among the many existing stakeholder groups.

Intergenerational Cross-Stakeholder Engagement

Members from all groups suggested there was room for more cross-stakeholder engagement so that the Leadership and Implementation Tables and the BYAP could meet each other and hear out their different perspectives. While there was some attempt to introduce the two groups, team members reported that more cross-engagement might have built more trust and allowed for rich discussions and learning:

“The BYAP had ample input into the process from what we were told. We were not directly involved in BYAP engagement, which would have been useful looking back.”

“There were questions that they were giving us. But I think there should have been like an open, open thing where we would ask them. I mean, we could ask questions, right. But like, we could have a just, a panel meeting kind of where we could just be like, the, you know, the people on the panel and be like, yes, did I want to see what you guys are going to do with this? And this and this, because it’s majority of the time it was just them frequently talking. And then we would give feedback. And then going back to the information.”

“It does take a little bit of skill, but there is utility in finding appropriate ways for intergenerational connection, interaction. And by that, I don’t mean that we always have to be slapped in a room together, but being able to listen closely to what people are saying and ask the right questions. So that everybody has their space to express what they feel in that space, as or save as much space as possible. While being able to see those connections, and then finding ways to build build on those things, you know, I think I’ve discovered some of that connection that I didn’t think existed, but and I also see opportunities to enhance that. You know, as we, as we move forward.”

“And then as it relates to like the BYAP, there was some like joint BYAP meeting where Leadership Table members were invited. I don’t think we’ve got the attendance that we were hoping for from some of those activities. But I think there was intention. And it was open for those who are interested in participating. And I think some opted not to for various reasons for time.”

Team members acknowledged cross-stakeholder engagement would have been a challenge, as the two groups had very different schedules, but hoped that there would be more opportunity in future collaborations.

SUMMARY

Youth engagement on this project was **intentional, multi-level, and celebrated**. All members of the team acknowledged the value and importance of **hearing directly from Black youth** in this process, which was guided by young people with lived and living experience.

The BYAP members – while acknowledging that there is always **room for deeper and more expansive engagement** – were satisfied with their engagement opportunities, especially in light of the timeline and importance of the project to other stakeholders. The BYAP was excited about this opportunity to influence the design of the new branding and website (which features the You Good? Mental Health Promotion Project and Amplify blog), and to share their ideas on a topic about which they felt passionately.

Stakeholders **noticed and appreciated the efforts to engage them in the process** to rename and rebrand SAPACCY, including the development of the new website. The broad engagement strategies, including a variety of virtual tools to create space for people to participate in the ways they felt most comfortable, supported **high-level engagement** from the Leadership and Implementation Tables and the BYAP.

This initiative merged three different projects with many diverse stakeholders for a program that is meaningful and well-respected in the province. This all led to a **significant amount of time** hearing stakeholder reflections,



soliciting feedback, and discussing different name and branding options. On the one hand, it was **necessary to ensure people's input** was respected, but, on the other hand, the **extended timeline and large group meant it was harder to communicate** to everyone and **sustain their engagement and focus**.

Team members noted that there might have been **more opportunity to engage frontline staff and youth** involved in SAPACCY. They also suggested that **more opportunities for the two stakeholder groups to collaborate** might have enriched the experience for both youth and adults. These suggestions were offered in the context of the this project's large scope; team members understood that there needed to be some **balance** between the amount of feedback solicited and the ultimate decision-making:

“I think what I really heard from youth was where we landed really resonated with them. So I think, yes, we want to meet timelines, and all the pieces, but it's important that you leave space. And, you know, the process can't supersede the purpose, right? I think, if we let, if we're driven by the purpose, and the purpose was to create something for youth that they were going to resonate with that they would like, and that would they would access. If the youth need more time for a certain space, I think that has to be built into our process. So that's why it's important to have youth leadership to help flag some of those pieces.”

Finally, while exploring the story of stakeholder engagement resulted in a deeper understanding of project processes and participant perspectives, **more robust evaluation throughout the project** might have yielded deeper insights. As the project continues to evolve, evaluation should continue to monitor project outcomes and stakeholder engagement along the way.

of the need for and utilization of adolescent psychological counseling and support services.



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YouthREX is primarily funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services with contributions from the York Research Chair in Youth and Contexts of Inequity held by Dr. Uzo Anucha at the School of Social Work, York University.

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