

INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY

resource officers

school

Armed & in uniform

BLACK & INDIGENOUS youth are more likely to be expelled or arrested in school

BLACK TRANS LIVES MATTER

IEP'S individual education plans

BLACK YOUTH MATTER

zero tolerance policies

LOVE

DISABLED Youth are even more likely to be targeted

25-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ2S

REIMAGINING:

BLACK & INDIGENOUS CHILDREN are overrepresented

in Toronto Foster care & Group homes



SELF-DETERMINATION

BLACK youth are 4x more likely to be CARDED than white youth

REIGNING IN THE NEW SKOOL

BLACK PEOPLE make up 2.8% of the population... yet 1 in 10 PERSONS IN CANADIAN FEDERAL PRISONS IS BLACK



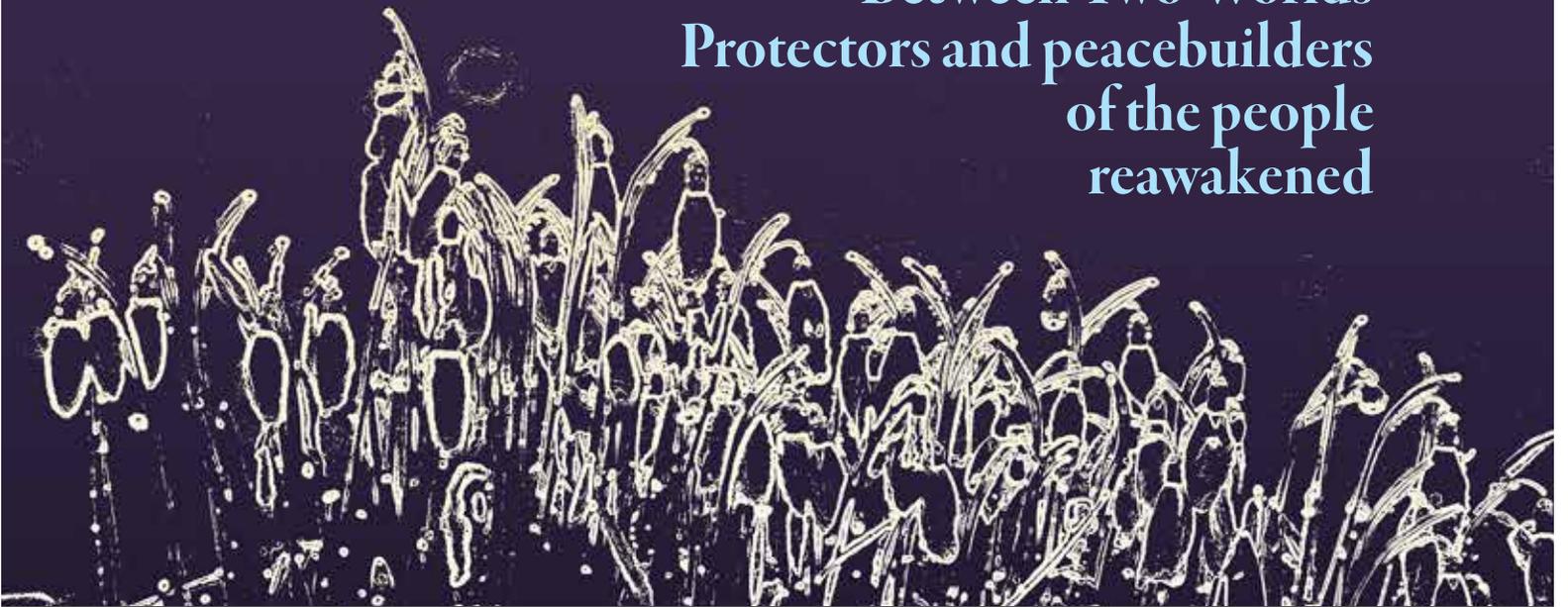
JUSTICE

WARRIOR STAR

Don't you think young people today
Still carry and receive
messages from old ways

As gifts that walk this earth
Between two worlds
Messengers of the past
reborn

Warriors of the future
Between Two Worlds
Protectors and peacebuilders
of the people
reawakened



Reimagining: Reigning in the New Skool

was produced in partnership with BlackLivesMatterTO and the CJ Munford Centre for Students of Colour on Attawandaron Territories (Guelph, ON)

Get in Touch

Email:
reimaginingthenewskool@gmail.com

On the Web:
reimaginingthenewskool.wordpress.com

**Free to prisoners!
Send us your address.**

The Peak Magazine
University Centre Rm 258
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ont.
N1G 2W1

Printed by:



Fonts: Avenir Next and
Garamond Premier Pro

table of contents

INTRODUCTION

Introducing: 2
Re-Imagining: Reigning in the New Skool

RE-IMAGINING: REIGNING IN THE NEW SKOOL

Healing our Circles: 4
Trauma and Resilience With Youth in Our Communities

Captive in Canada: 10
Liberation in the Age of Incarceration

Education & Purpose: 16
A Conversation in Transformative Education

Reflections on Social-Services & the Non-Profit Industrial Complex: 22
An Interview with Riaz Sayani-Mulji

For Black Girls Who Ate Sugar Cane 28

The Face of Youth in Immigrant Detention 30

School-to-Prison Pipeline: #SCHOOLPUSHOUT 36

The Stigma Block: How Stigma Creates Barriers to Education 39

Re-Imagining: Reigning in the New Skool Collective

Ruby Smith Diaz

Guelph Prison Radio with Janaya (j) Khan

The Real Sun

Interview by Mina Ramos

Al.Symone

End Immigration Detention Network - Youth Committee

The Native Youth Sexual Health Centre

Talisha Ramsaroop

Resisting the Static: 42 *Fiona Raye Clarke*
A Participatory Model for Black Youth Engagement

Our Sustenance: Learning & Growing at Six Nations 46 *Adrienne Lickers*

We Learn So We Can Be Free: Toronto Africentric School Redefines Black Education 50 *Guelph Prison Radio with Leroi Newbold*

Raising Children in Community: An Interview with Educators at The Everlasting Tree School 54 *Interview by Mina Ramos*

Restorative Justice & Mental Health as a Young Indigenous Woman 58 *Naomi Sayers*

Vision for Thunder Woman Healing Lodge 62 *Alana Rodrigo and Krysta Williams*

Uncovering Colonial Legacies: Indigenous Youth In Child Welfare (Dis)Placements 64 *Daniela Navia, Tyler Blackface, Angela Gladue, Tia Ledesma, Levi First Charger, Rita Henderson*

Transformative Education, Liberation & the Struggle for the People's Minds 68 *Ajamu Nangwaya*

Contributors

Alecia Golding
Adabu Brownhill
Angela Gladue
Ajamu Nangwaya
Adrienne Lickers
Al.Symone
Alana Rodrigo
Angela Gladue
Amber Williams-King
Bonnie Quaite
Daniela Navia

Emma Warner Chee
End Immigration Detention Network
Fiona Raye Clarke
Guelph Prison Radio
Jalani Morgan
Janaya (j) Khan
Krysta Williams
Laura Rock
Levi First Charger
Leroi Newbold
Lido Pimienta
Mina Ramos

Naomi Sayers
Nadine Forde
Rita Henderson
Riaz Sayani-Mulji
Ruby Smith Diaz
Shabina Lafleur-Gangji
Tia Ledesma
Talisha Ramsaroop
Tyler Blackface
Tings Chak
The Real Sun
The Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Cover
Amber Williams-King
Inside Cover
"Warrior Star" Art and Poetry by B
Inside Back Cover
"A Friendly Reminder" Art and Poetry by B
Back Cover
Amber Williams-King

Introducing... Re-imagining: Reigning in the New Skool

WHAT FACTORS PLAY INTO THE WAYS IN which youth get targeted, marginalized, disempowered and criminalized? How do we dismantle the structures that harm and exploit youth in our communities? What are concrete steps we can take to create empowering experiences for young people? How are alternative education models taking a visionary approach as opposed to replicating the injustices we see in the mainstream public school system?

Re-imagining: Reigning in The New Skool was born out of these questions. It was created out of a need to build resources on our various contexts in colonial “Canada”. We knew there was already a wealth of knowledge surrounding these issues in the stories, experiences and analysis of youth, parents, social workers, educators, artists, academics, etc., and we wanted to tap into that and create an avenue for these voices to be amplified. We wanted to build a resource that included diverse approaches and visions to centering racialized youth instead of a single tokenistic solution. We wanted to highlight concrete examples as to how and why current institutions can and need to be transformed in order to bring about justice and how alternative models are not only possible, but that they exist and thrive in various different communities across “Canada”.

This magazine is a continuation of the brilliance that our various communities have demonstrated for generations and is no way is complete. However we hope that the writings in this magazine will help draw inspiration, motivation and creativity in order to continue and expand on the work that is already being done.

By centralizing youth in our movements and working together we believe that we are able to transform our communities and create something beautiful.

-Re-imagining: Reigning in the New Skool Collective

www.reimaginingthenewskool.wordpress.com
reimaginingthenewskool@gmail.com

This magazine was produced on Attawandaron Territories (Guelph, ON) in partnership with BlackLivesMatter TO and the CJ Munford Centre for Students of Colour.

Thank you to *The Peak* magazine for your support.



ILLUSTRATIONS: Pushkaramula (Elecampane) and Tagara (Valerian)
by Shabina Lafleur-Gangji



Call For Submissions

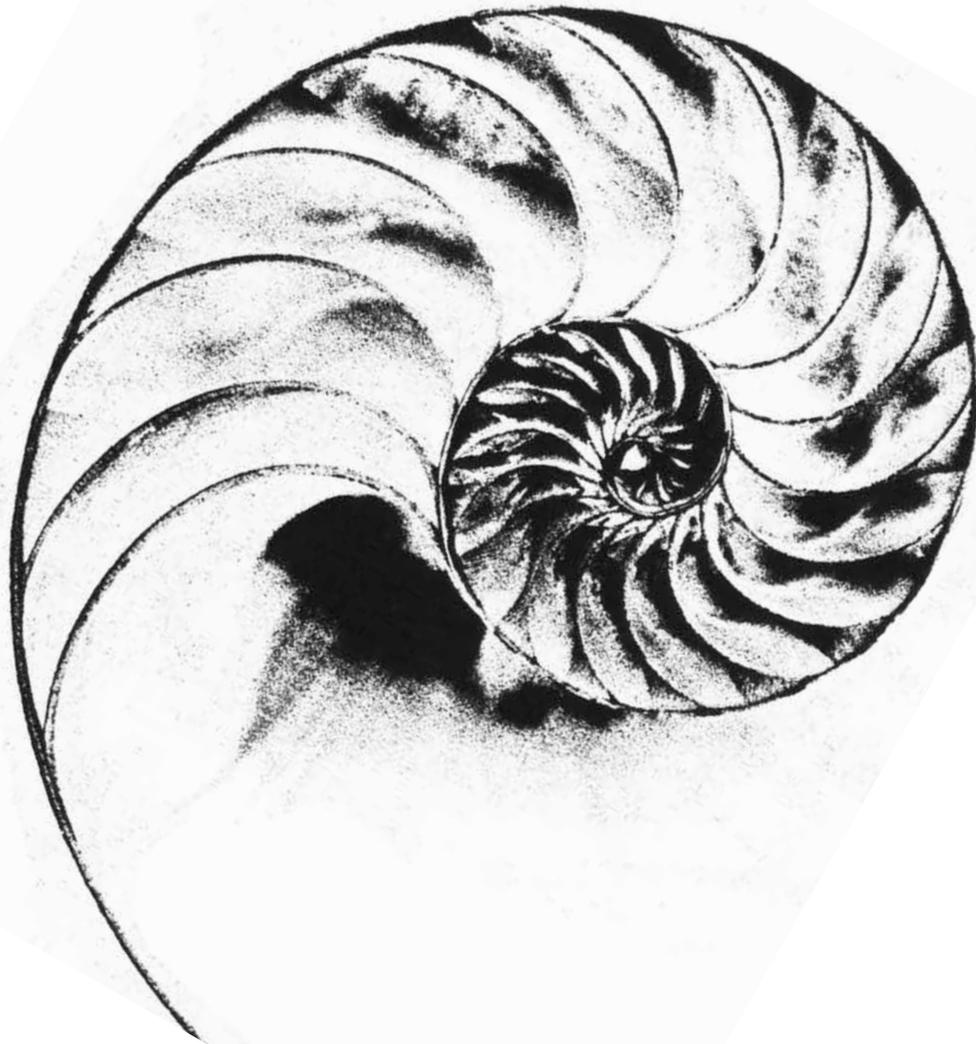
Would you like to share your experiences as a youth, parent, community member or educator? We are still looking for writers to continue this dialogue. If you are a part of criminalized community and want to see justice in schools, youth groups, detention centers, at home, etc... we want to hear from you.

Email us at
reimaginingthenewskool@gmail.com

Healing Our Circle:

Trauma & Resilience With
Youth in Our Communities

by Ruby Smith Diaz



OFTEN WHEN I THINK OF COLONIZATION, THE FIRST word that comes to mind is displacement. Images flood my mind of maps with lines drawn arbitrarily over groups of people, and a wide ocean with boats so large and laden with souls that the very weight of sorrow would bid the waves to sink it. I think of displacement in the way that the old ones pass on, locked away in homes and in the ways that the four legged ones, winged ones, and finned ones are hunted in large quantities without any kind of offering or gift acknowledging their life. They are simply taken; removed; displaced. When all is gone, what is left are the young ones. To endure, to survive, to create a future.

There are few places in the world left where this is not true. Amiskwaciwâskahikan, now known as Edmonton, is no exception. My parents, both displaced from the global south, settled on this area of land to seek refuge and better opportunities like many others who followed suit. I grew up in this place, in limbo between my different identities, not knowing much about the land or the significance of its history and the people that live on it. It was not until later that I found out that Amiskwaciwâskahikan has been known amongst many nations for being a gathering place and a spiritual center. During the warm months, Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Salteau, and Nakoda peoples would gather around its winding river valley, to gather berries, hunt, socialize, trade, and hold ceremony.

Today, my feet take me along the ridges of this same valley, that later became populated by white settlers, displacing an entire way of life and leaving in its wake treaties marked by x's, false promises, duress, and tracts of land for those who were not "Indian". Tracts of land that I still benefit from today. As I squint my eyes in a futile effort to obscure the skyscrapers and refineries in view, I try to imagine what this would have looked like just one hundred years back. I try to find solace in the silence that has blanketed the streets in a soft white powder, knowing that although many- including myself-have been displaced from the place we could once call home, it does not mean that we have simply disappeared.

For the young people I work with, displacement isn't probably the first word they would use to describe their experiences. Couch-surfing, moving to the city, going to jail, getting fucked over for rent; are all synonyms for this experience. The trauma they carry as a result, is real. For some, it is carried from their home country, for others, it has been passed down intergenerationally on these very lands for decades.

Because I work with youth that have been impacted by this trauma, I supposedly work with "the toughest" youth. Youth who have survived the most traumatic situations. Youth who are incredibly

creative, artistically gifted, and face challenges just as incredible around mental health, poverty, abuse, and addiction. One of these "tough" youth came by the youth centre I work at a few months ago on a busy afternoon. She was tall, dark skinned, with shining bright round eyes. Smiling, she eagerly showed me her new baby, only a couple months old. The little one stretched out her arms and latched onto my thumb, smiling at me jubilantly. Her mama held her close, and seemed to absolutely light up at the sight of her little one.

A few weeks later a call comes through one of our outreach workers' cell, and I learn that she has been picked up on a warrant. I run through the possible list of scenarios that an impoverished and desperate young woman might have found herself in, my thoughts soon interrupted by a youth the other end of the room, who had overheard the conversation on the phone.

"YOU'RE ARRESTING HER FOR NOT PAYING HER TRANSIT TICKET?!" she screams. "SHE CAN'T AFFORD 2.85, WHAT THE FUCK MAKES THEM THINK SHE CAN AFFORD 250 BUCKS?!"

I can't disagree with her anger. For this young mother, two bus tickets that she couldn't afford to pay now mean court, perhaps prison, and the threat of her baby being taken away. I think of her face, and I'm immediately washed with fear in my own body, knowing that her experience is symptomatic of a larger system at play. Systems that push away young people from their communities at a young age, because the land they live on has more value than their existence on it. Systems that violently target families for their way of life and identity, whose actions are sanctioned by courts, covered up, and unacknowledged by the vast majority of society. Systems that force 13 year-olds into prisons, because 'home' wasn't a colloquial term, forcing young lips to mouth love letters through prison bars to be able to make it through another day.

Every single one of us at one point or another has endured trauma. And every single one of us has adopted a behaviour in order to survive. Some of us become people pleasers. Some of us push people away by putting up a cold front because we've been hurt too many times. Others become 'saviors', so as to not have to look at their deepest wounds, or turn to alcohol and drugs to numb away the pain.

So what happens when the behaviour that we choose to engage in to be able to survive isn't socially acceptable? Who is it that defines what is socially acceptable behaviour? To a large extent, laws determine this, and they specifically determine them for those who have less socioeconomic and racial privilege. However, every single one of us also

determines what is socially acceptable based on our interactions with other human beings. If we can't be brave enough to look at our own trauma and understand how our own behaviour impacts how we view others, then how do we expect to view others with kindness and compassion?

On a physiological level, it is becoming more commonly known that trauma begins to shape us even when we are in the womb. If the person carrying a baby experiences sadness, anger, or stress, it can be transmitted directly to the womb, shaping the development of that child's brain and every single cell in its body. Based on how our physiology develops, our capability to handle emotional stresses, to make healthy choices, to feel love and joy, are to a great extent, already determined by the time we are born. Despite this, we are still born whole, resilient, and loving, without any judgment of the world around us. What is incredible is that even if we have experienced trauma in the womb, or go on to experience trauma later in our lives, a young person is much less at risk of developing an addiction if there is a loving and supportive person in their lives to help soothe their pain.

Unfortunately, for many youth, having one supportive person in their lives isn't all that common. On a societal level, we are surrounded by institutions that uphold hegemonic values of material wealth, whiteness, and patriarchy. From a young age we are placed in schools that prepare us to become a part of the workforce, and that teach in linear and standardized ways. For youth whose

skin is a darker shade, foundational narratives of the state often come in direct contradiction with the experiences of their families, resulting in "resistance" through silence, contrived apathy, or speaking an uncensored piece of their mind. In many cases, if youth resist and refuse to fully uphold these hegemonic values, they are labeled as dumb or as troublemakers, or are completely ostracized. Combine these labels with racial prejudice and a society that doesn't believe in "gifts", and chooses displacement and incarceration to deal with "problem" young people, and you have yourself a whole generation of traumatized, stigmatized, and targeted youth.

With each young person who goes missing and with every youth that takes their life or falls into addiction, we lose a part of society. We lose a part of a circle.

From a young age, many of us learn about the circle. It is one of the most common shapes found in nature, and is the symbol that is the most found within different traditions and religions. Sitting in one, every person must be able to see the person on either side of them to create the shape. Every single person brings in a different gift and perspective, and if one person leaves, this physical configuration will remain incomplete. But the significance of this shape wasn't anything I really paid attention to. It took sitting in ceremony many times to be able to begin to really understand in my heart and body.

On a spring day about two years ago, I was invited to a ceremony in a sweatlodge located at the Tsleil Waututh nation. As a guest in this ceremony,

“In many cases, if youth resist and refuse to fully uphold these hegemonic values, they are labeled as dumb or as troublemakers, or are completely ostracized.”

I was concerned about doing my best to be respectful and to learn as much as I could. In complete darkness, I breathed heavily at times, and tried to allow my body to take in all the physical and emotional sensations without judgment. Across the circle from me, I kept on hearing a young voice, that every so often, seemed to interrupt the ceremony with his laughter, or offhand comments. Uncomfortable, I tried sitting patiently while I listened to what I judged to be rude and inconsiderate behaviour from this participant, and subconsciously began anticipating this person to be reprimanded.

By the end of the ceremony, the person was never reprimanded, and I left both grateful and baffled by what I had experienced. I still expected to a great extent, silence to represent listening and compliance to be a form of respect, especially in a ceremony. In conversation a few days later, the person pouring water in the ceremony joked with me about his son, the “Heyoka” individual. I was confused. He explained that Heyoka is a person who jokes and does everything in a contrary way. “In ceremony, they sometimes even pray for bad things to happen,” he said. “They play a special role in life. When my uncle died, my family and I were so stricken with grief that we were sitting around the coffin not knowing what to do. Then my son came along and told jokes and cheered us right up.” I thought about how in a school setting, his son could be labeled ‘oppositional’ from a young age, but here, his way of being was honoured. His outbursts weren’t disrespectful. Rather, they were gifts of laughter, medicine and honesty.

All these years that I had studied and worked within myself to become a teacher and youth worker, and I realized I was still subconsciously

manifesting a very colonized way of thinking. Never had I truly honoured the unique ways of being of the youth, or looked for their gifts. Yet it is all needed. For light, there is darkness, for every winter, there is summer. For every land mass, there is ocean. This world would simply cease to exist without all of its gifts.

To be able to reach out to a young person and to empower their own sense of personal resilience and honour, their uniqueness is crucial for our circle in this society to be complete. However, supporting a youth’s resilience is not enough if it is compromised by the very society that they live in. As an educated adult with a support system and my basic needs met, I know that I have much more resources available at my disposal than most of the young people I work with. A lot of us do, and it’s not useful to simply shake our heads or yell “shame” when the systems at play and society around us do not value or support the gifts of our youth.

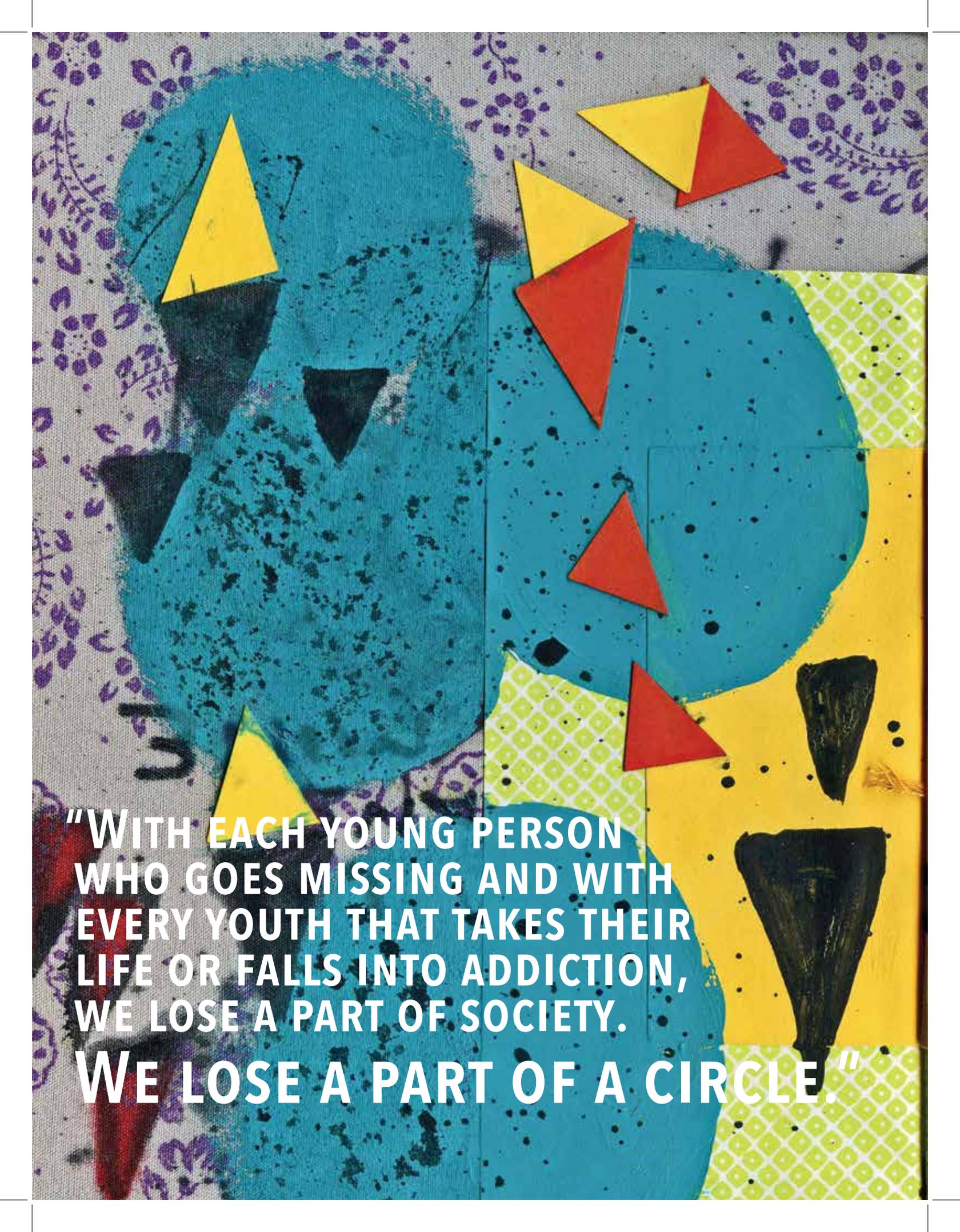
What this means is for all of us to take compassionate action. This means working on our shit, and taking action when police officers target young people being profiled for their age and colour of their skin. This means getting involved in the processes that create more youth spaces. This means taking action in solidarity with communities that have their lands and lives threatened by salmon farms, mining, and pipelines. The work isn’t easy, the transformations are not seen right away, and a lot of the time, things don’t work out the way that we might want them to. This takes time, and this takes patience. But it isn’t futile. Our existence is intertwined, and for as long as there is a part of our circle missing, there will always be a part of us that is missing too. ▲

LEFT: Illustration by Lido Pimienta

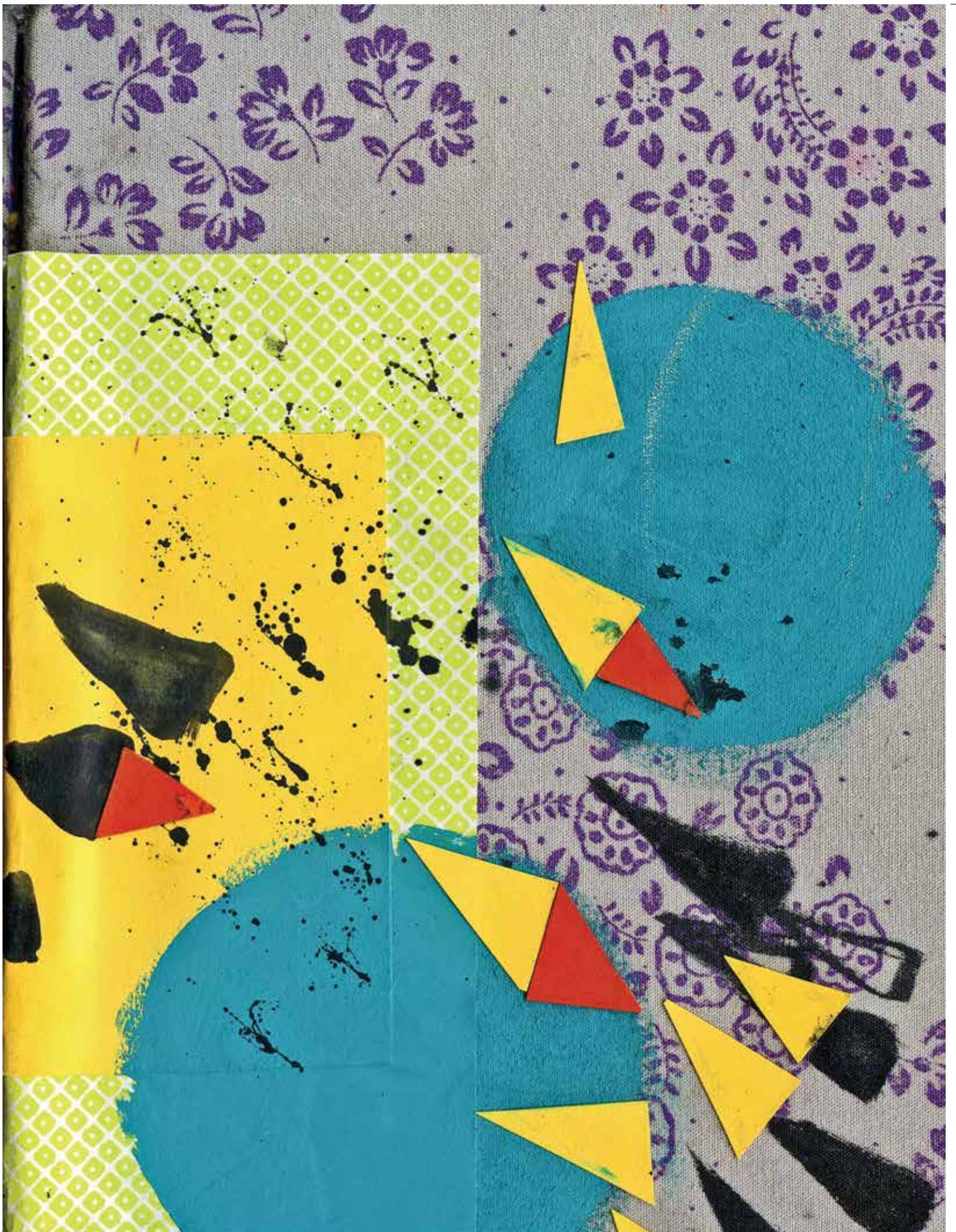


Ruby Smith Díaz was born to Chilean and Jamaican parents on Plains Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Salteaux, and Nakoda homelands, and graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in Education with distinction. Since graduating, she has found her passion working as a youth facilitator by using art and popular education as tools for activism, empowerment, and community building.

Ruby has facilitated with various youth organizations throughout the years. Her work invites individuals to connect their own experiences with the experiences of others on an interpersonal and global scale, and to respond to social and systemic issues with creative action. She is continuously inspired by the young people she has met throughout the years, and dedicates her artistic practice to singing, screen dancing, and poetry.



**"WITH EACH YOUNG PERSON
WHO GOES MISSING AND WITH
EVERY YOUTH THAT TAKES THEIR
LIFE OR FALLS INTO ADDICTION,
WE LOSE A PART OF SOCIETY.
WE LOSE A PART OF A CIRCLE."**



Captive in Canada:

Liberation in the Age of Incarceration

Interview by Guelph Prison Radio

Shabina: Can you talk about the context in which the shootings of Mike Brown and other Black people are happening?

j: What we're talking about is systemic violence, systemic racism and larger more pervasive and insidious forms of anti-Black racism. I think when people turn it into a concentrated event it's a refusal to look at current and historical patterns.

The ways that anti-Black racism manifests itself is based around ideas of not being as worthy as other lives. It's understandings of inferiority, it's determining and deeming that it doesn't really happen. It's the conditions and quality of life you have if you're Black particularly if it's around places of economic disenfranchisement, and not getting access to quality education.

Anti-Black racism is in the media, in day to day interactions with people, in the form of internalized racism. There's this single understanding of Blackness, as if we don't all have our different relationships to it. There are these notions of violent behavior, laziness, aggressors, villains... All of these things contribute, manifest, and come to a head when not only are our lives being taken but you know; these deaths are justified.

This is where you'll see the demonizing and

dehumanizing that happens in the media where it's like yeah, but look what kind of person he is. He could sit there with a grill in his mouth, maybe have a blunt and as young Black man, that justifies his death. That will qualify someone's death but some everyone else it's just a habit or nothing out of the norm.

Shabina: Do you want to talk about how that violence gets played out in terms of relationships to the Prison Industrial Complex and the police as well?

j: If we look at what's happening here and the trends in terms of the last ten years; there's been an eighty percent increase of African-“Canadians” or Black people in “Canadian” federal prisons. Black “Canadians” as of 2013 make up two point nine percent of the population in “Canada: and yet represent nine percent of inmates in “Canadian” federal prisons. That means one in ten inmates is a Black person. If we're looking at Aboriginal folks, they make up twenty-two percent of the prison population in “Canada” yet only make up two point eight percent of the “Canadian” population. This is not something that just happened; it refers to those larger systems of oppression we were just talking about where we have Black people being streamlined



ILLUSTRATION: We Want Peace by Meredith Stern

into prisons. It's Black and First Nations bodies that are filling up the "Canadian" federal prison system. This can happen on so many levels.

Black people are being targeted by police randomly on the streets through carding and are forced to show their identification to prove their innocence. Anyone with experience within that system knows that once you're in the system you never really get out of it. The police put that information into their systems and they become a person of interest. We now have "safety response officers" (SORs) who are in high schools. So you have Black and Indigenous youth who are also being targeted in their schools.

Another form is around IQ or developing Independent Education Plans, IEP's. You have two types of IEPs. You have IEPs for youth who are gifted and you have IEP's for youth who aren't considered able or capable of hacking it in the regular school system. A lot of Black youth are diagnosed and pathologized with things like ADD, ADHD, ODD and other kinds of 'deviant' behaviour because you have teachers who are afraid to teach Black and First Nations youth or who are assuming different levels of stereotypes and criminal

behaviour and you have teachers who are afraid of their students. So, students are being pathologized and are also getting subpar education even within schools that are considered higher end.

The dropout rates are very indicative of the fact that our educational systems for Black and Indigenous youth don't speak to their needs, they don't speak to the actual realities and histories and how those impact our day to day lives.

Shabina: Can you touch on the historical context for what's happening right now in terms of the discrimination and the very intentional barriers that have been set up?

j: I mentioned reference to economic disenfranchisement and different levels of marginalization. Historically, when we are talking about a First Nations experience we are talking about genocide and erasure. They have been denied basic access because of the government's continued agenda on erasing and killing off First Nations people. "Canada" voted against having water as a fundamental human right in a United Nations court, in part because they

1 "Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2012-2013", conducted by Howard Sapers, Correctional Investigator. View the report at www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20122013-eng.aspx



would have to acknowledge their treatment of the First Nations people who often don't have access to clean water coming out of their taps.

When you take people away from what they know and teach them Christianity and a unified language, force them to be as white and Eurocentric as possible. However, realistically this realm of whiteness is never to be achieved and never can be achieved. And that was ALWAYS the point. Always around being second class citizens (if you're citizens at all).

Shabina: Can you talk about community initiatives and steps forward people have been taking?

j: Howard Sapers, the federal correctional investigator, issued a report that spoke to what is happening in our "Canadian" federal prisons.

In response, the African-"Canadian" Prison Advocacy Coalition issued a statement because they didn't feel like the Sapers report from 2013¹ accurately captured mental health status and how that can disproportionately affect African-"Canadians" who are inmates or who have been pushed through the "Canadian" federal prison system. That statement suggests that there are larger issues that are not being considered. They commended that Sapers had located trends, and suggested that there had to be more work and awareness around addressing structural racism. Having strong anti-racist and culturally appropriate mental health clinical and administrative protocols (ie. more than just one-day or two-day trainings), more research specific

to the mental health needs of African-"Canadian" inmates and a conference of community reintegration resources and programming supporting agenda. That is a more holistic approach.

The Black Action Defense Committee (BADC) issued a class-action lawsuit against the Toronto and Peel Police for 65,000,000 dollars in response to their practices of racial profiling. For the BADC, this is not their first action, they have been in the judicial system for years trying to get acknowledged. In the past they had taken so many different re-courses and avenues to seek justice from our "Canadian" federal system and from the "Canadian" government and had been denied. This lawsuit is a last ditch effort. There are actually no other avenues to take from the "Canadian" federal perspective in pursuing justice for African-"Canadians" and Black people who are being targeted because of carding and brutalized by the police.

If you look at different First Nations movements or movements that centre around Indigenous folks, you'll have things like Idle No More. The level of resistance on a day to day basis that First Nations or Indigenous folks bring into the world is overwhelming. You can see it in arts, land struggles, and in demonstrations against things like Line 9 and putting other pipelines through "Canada". There are forms of resistance happening it's just a question of where to plug into it.

So the question is; what are the circumstances systemically that are causing or rather seeking out bodies? If you look at statistics; you see that crime rates have dropped in "Canada", but we know that prison expansion is happening. So when you create

SMATTER

prisons but you don't have bodies to fill them with, it creates a demand - and labour is a major thing. What better source of labour than the labour of those who don't have rights; the prisoners?

This is a topic that is largely avoided in society because the idea of prisoner's rights is like well you know, they gave up those rights when they committed this "crime", when realistically we're not looking at larger issues that are happening. We're not looking at who is in prison, we're not looking at the fact that it's disabled folks, it's Black and First Nations folks. We're not looking at the fact that it's a lot of Trans* folks and two-spirit folks and why that is happening.

There are four major ways disAbled folks are being streamlined into prisons: poverty; lack of support; ableism in the judicial and prison systems; and not having access to proper health care. In 2014 the president of the union that represents "Canadian" prison guards stated that prison guards are not being properly trained to deal with inmates who have mental health issues. So if prison guards don't know what to do with them guess what happens? They get put in solitary confinement for up to twenty-three hours a day. For somebody who is already going through different levels of stress and psychological abuse or torment, being isolated and put into solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day is not going to help. There's limited care around personal support workers, there's no ASL, TTY or TTD [Telecommunication Device for the Deaf] services, stairs and physical access is an issue, not having access to personal aid devices; the medical treatment is sub-par. Those are some major factors

that contribute to oppression in prison. Disabled folks do harder time and if we're looking at Black or Indigenous disAbled folks; they are facing longer sentences, less opportunities for parole and more time spent in maximum security.

If you're looking at Trans* folks in Ontario, there disproportionate levels of unemployment, workplace discrimination and poverty. These are three things that make people very vulnerable to incarceration. There has been very limited research conducted on the prison experience of trans people in "Canada", but there's just enough to suggest that trans people who live in poverty are frequently reporting police harassment. One quarter of Trans* people in Ontario report being harassed by police because they are trans.

We need to look at the circumstances that are causing folks in specific populations to be streamlined in prisons. If we target those specific forms of oppression and how they manifest themselves into people's lives, not only are we gonna seriously minimize and reduce "crime rates" or "criminal behaviour," we can start looking at what transformative justice can really look like. What types of centers, and spaces that center on safety and rehabilitation can really look like because nobody is getting access to the kind of care they would need in order to not get locked up again.

We need to ask ourselves; are we looking at things from a preventative level first? From a proactive stance and moving from a place that's reactionary to a place that is visionary?



Shabina: You had mentioned how there was a rise in people being incarcerated and also that crime rates are dropping. Can you explain how that happens?

j: There is a lot of money to be made in having inmates. You have an almost inexhaustible workforce that is not going to be unionized and can't clamour for rights, and you are not going to have a society that backs them up. You have different levels of surveillance companies being paid, companies that are making the food that inmates eat or even making the clothes. It is an industry, its called the prison industrial complex for that very reason. So there is a lot of money in prisons, especially in private prisons.

Shabina: Do you want to address anything else?

j: Right now we have about 15 000 inmates in

"Canadian" federal prisons, but if you're looking at Black and First Nations people; you're looking at second-class status. There is no level, not even minutely, of rehabilitation that's happening, and you can't 'rehabilitate' people who don't need it, it's the actual larger system that we need to address.

If you have a feeling of discomfort around prison abolition, then you need to really think about that and challenge yourself to see where that stigma comes from to begin with. So many statistics illustrate that prisons actually create the circumstances for "crimes" to recur. They actually do no good.

We need to address the factors that currently impacting Black folks, sex workers, Trans* folks, people with disabilities and Indigenous folks

This stuff is really difficult to talk about because I'm talking about specifics and percentiles, but really I'm talking about people's lives. Δ



Janaya (j) Khan is a Black, queer, gender diverse cyborg who is a social justice educator & staunch Afrofuturist. j's presented in academia, conferences & orgs locally & internationally. they believe in the power of re-imagining movement & movements as a source of transformative justice. j hopes to continue vibing to collective brilliance & igniting dialogue that is a visionary approach to change.



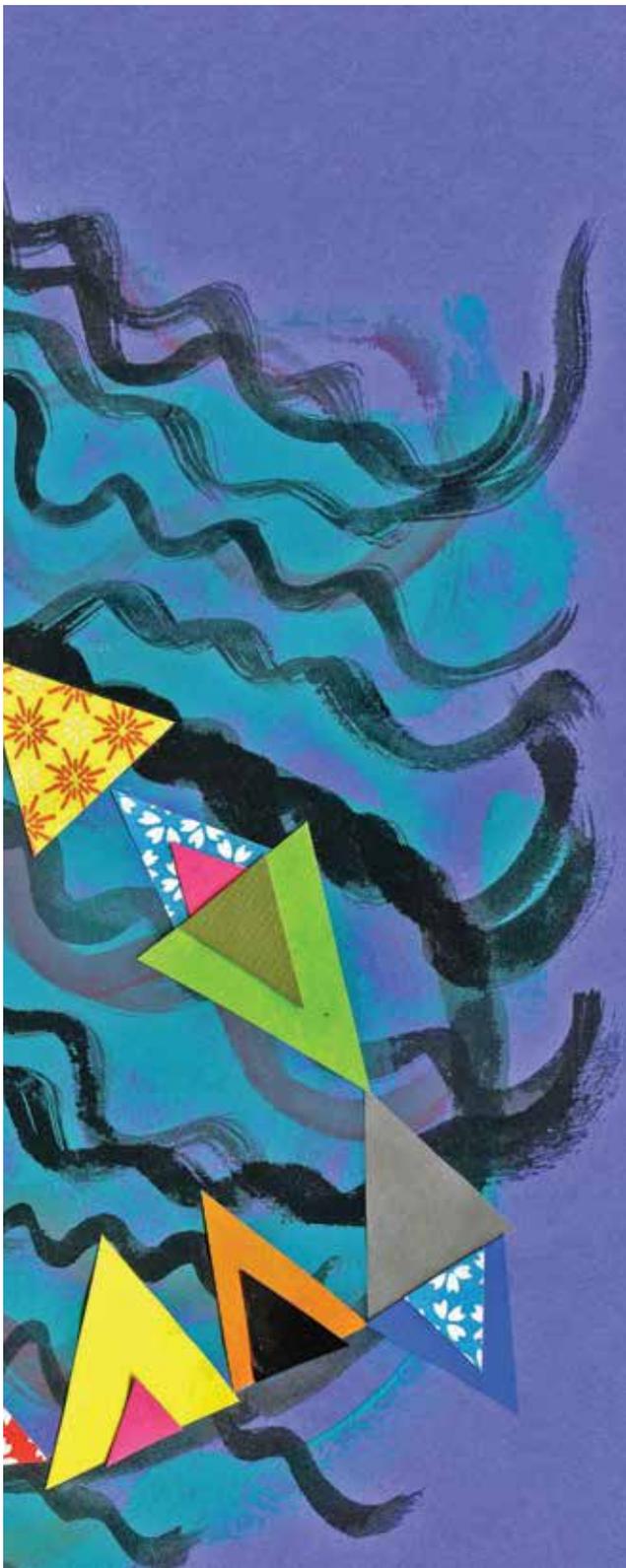
"BLACK 'CANADIANS' AS OF 2013 MAKE UP TWO POINT NINE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IN 'CANADA': AND YET REPRESENT NINE PERCENT OF INMATES IN 'CANADIAN' FEDERAL PRISONS. THAT MEANS ONE IN TEN INMATES IS A BLACK PERSON. IF WE'RE LOOKING AT ABORIGINAL FOLKS, THEY MAKE UP TWENTY-TWO PERCENT OF WTHE PRISON POPULATION IN 'CANADA' YET ONLY MAKE UP TWO POINT EIGHT PERCENT OF THE 'CANADIAN' POPULATION. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT JUST HAPPENED."



Education & Purpose:

A Conversation in Transformative Education

by The Real Sun



LEFT: Illustration by Lido Pimienta

on their performance on an endless number of standardized tests. High performing students are placed in ‘academic’ classes, and if they can afford it, typically find their way to university. Here they often choose fields of study that they expect will get them a ‘good job’, as understood by parents and society - typically defined by the level of salary and social status it’s associated with; also termed the ‘professional’ field e.g. doctor, lawyer, accountant. The students who are identified as being low performing on these tests are often placed in ‘applied’ streams, gearing them towards the workforce rather than Post-Secondary education. But again, the ideal is to find a ‘good job’ that will gain them a steady income and job security, or at the very least something to cover their monthly expenses once they are out of school.

Both options have a clear outcome: prepare young people to become participants of the economic system. Some racialized students, especially young black men, instead of experiencing either of the above, are being funnelled into the school-to-prison pipeline. The depth of this experience is outside of the scope of this article; however it’s important to mention that racialized students have the additional challenge of navigating through an education system that is still largely Eurocentric and lacking in cultural relevancy. This causes disengagement in students, as a great portion of the curriculum is irrelevant to their lived experiences and cultures.

For many racialized families, the purpose of education is to learn how to conform and succeed within a world of white normalcy. The education system is an entry point into becoming an active participant in the economic system ruled also by white normalcy and privilege. (Get the “right” job, and try to blend in.)

Our youth are inheriting an earth that has been severely damaged by generations upon generations of violence, destruction, war, genocide, and abuse on physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, political, social, and environmental levels.

This destruction of the planet, and our violence upon each other is a reflection of the destruction and violence that exists inside each of us. It’s a legacy, which we have inherited from generations of hate carried on by blind following, and fueled by ignorance.

The outer world is a macrocosm of our inner worlds, and vice versa. Like mirrors, facing one another, the closer you get to the centre, the deeper it goes. Like fractal patterns, in each individual part is the essence of the whole.² The amount of unconsciousness that is, and has been, running rampant in the world, is a reflection of our own inner unconsciousness.

¹ Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press)

² *Inner Worlds, Outer Worlds, Documentary.* <www.innerworldsmovie.com>.

TWO QUESTIONS COME TO MIND WHEN APPROACHING the topic of transformative education: What is the purpose of education? And what is the role of purpose in education?

Addressing the first question, we face the reality that the primary role of the current system of education in Canada is to train young people to become participants within the economic system. As Grace Lee Boggs says, like cogs in a machine.¹

Students are categorized into rankings based

Many of us spend much of our youth and adult years feeling that we are not being heard or seen. That what we have to say doesn't matter. This teaches us to not trust ourselves; that we are wrong in some way. This internalized self-doubt turns into self-hate, to the point where we grow to doubt our own true worth. This feeling of un-worthiness becomes subconscious and all-pervasive, and eventually, destructive.

Internalized self-hate is an epidemic. Deep feelings of un-worthiness develop into self-destructive behaviors when we are unconscious of our inner workings. The uncomfortable truth is that we have forgotten how to love ourselves. Shamed into discounting our inner truths, we have become disconnected from ourselves, forgetting who we are.

Our capitalist society and school systems create further disconnection by promoting competition between individuals as opposed to collective cooperation. This adds to feelings of isolation, and sets the stage for the violence felt on the inner level to become projected manifestations of violence on the outer level. Although an in-depth exploration of this is outside of the scope of this article, it points to a narrative around mental health, which is missing in our current education system.

We need to wake up out of unconsciousness and move into awareness. Our education systems can be the conduit for this work. Through education people can learn, evolve – but our education system also needs to evolve to accommodate for the much needed change.

This brings us to the second question: what is the role of Purpose in education? In other words, what is the role of the education system in helping young people find purpose in their lives? What is the role of the education system in terms of teaching young people about knowledge of self, your own personal purpose, your passion, and true fulfillment in life?

Wouldn't it be poignant, given the kind of world that our youth are inheriting at this particular point in time, if the purpose of education was to instill our youth with a sense of Purpose, to help them create change for a future generation?

How do we make that happen? What needs to shift in terms of the purpose of education?

Education needs to be less of a vehicle for streamlining young people into the economic system, and more of a vehicle for inspiring young minds and hearts, expanding their awareness into themselves and out to the world around them, helping them to deepen into their sense of purpose.



Unfortunately our current education system is slow to change. It is built on a model of rigid bureaucracy with roots in the 18th century. It is archaic, and steeped in ways of knowing that lack the flexibility required to adequately meet the needs of evolving generations.

What we need instead is an education system that is inclusive of narratives relevant to the context of youth here and now. We need a curriculum that provides engaging ways for students to interact in meaningful ways with their own knowledge of self; and avenues to understand the many ways that the self interacts with broader society in its complexities, intersectionalities, and layers. Connecting the Micro to the Macro.

This can be achieved through creative inner self-reflection and expression, combined with innovative, engaging narratives of history from culturally relevant contexts.

Our school system needs a pedagogy that provides a holistic view on the human experience. Understanding that a whole human is a combination of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. And spiritual meant not as religion, but a personal sense of being interconnected with all.

Holistic human education should also

include teachings that shed light on the importance of individual healing, as a necessary step in the journey of the collective healing of human society; as well as the significance of being grounded in the present moment. This reinforces the importance of the deep inter-connectedness of the relationship between the micro and the macro, and the here and now. How can we start making these transformations in the education system on a practical level?

ART. THROUGH ART.

Ken Robinson describes art as a vehicle for feeling fully alive, meanwhile our education system tends to shut our youth down and put them to sleep.³ Through art, there is an incredible opportunity to engage young people in meaningful explorations of self, of notions like purpose, and voice.

Arts-based education has proven to be an effective and accessible tool, which provides an important entry point for transforming education. In Toronto over the past decade there has been an upsurge of arts-based education initiatives that is transforming the experience of education for young people.

Grassroots organizations like Lost Lyrics use arts-based education to build a bridge between the

3 Changing Education Paradigms, Lecture by Ken Robinson, <<http://youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U>>

streets and the classroom.⁴ Institutions like the Royal Conservatory of Music pair artist educators with classroom teachers to teach curricular materials in school through the arts with their Learning Through the Arts program. Educators all over Canada have begun to use artistic mediums such as poetry, photography, media arts, dance, movement, music, theatre, visual arts, etc. to engage learners in critical dialogue about social issues, history, philosophy, even sciences and math. Culturally relevant pedagogies within arts-based education include using Hip-Hop Culture as a tool to engage young people in critical dialogue, a movement popularly termed HipHop Education or HipHopEd.⁵

Over the past nine years, in my own arts education practice I have focused on using Spoken Word Poetry as a tool for engaging young people in explorations of Identity and Social Constructs and Social Justice. My practice centers around guiding young people to create spoken word poetry based on a system called the ICT – Identify, Connect, and Take a Stand. I will briefly explain this process below.

IDENTIFY

First, students are given the freedom to identify a topic that is based on either an element of their own personal identity (race, gender, family, being a student, etc) or a social issue that they care about.

CONNECT

There are two levels of connection; Micro: Connecting their chosen topic to their own personal lives and narratives (day-to-day personal experiences). Macro: Connecting their topic to wider social contexts (history, politics, social issues, social justice, social norms and patterns, etc).

TAKE A STAND

The final step is to make a declaration about your topic, and voice your truth.

With this simple formula, paired with guidance around the technical elements and historical context of the art form of Spoken Word poetry, students are assigned to each create their own Spoken Word poem.

The results over the years have been astounding. I have witnessed hundreds of youth, when given the opportunity to express their deeper truths, take the dive and come out transformed.

Such an experience provides a platform for youth to be heard and witnessed in their truths in a way that is rare within educational spaces. It creates a feeling of community and closeness within the classroom, building camaraderie between classmates, feelings of validation, moments of healing, deep self-reflection, and authentic emotional release

Some students have said that the assignment

We need more meaningful collaborations between artists and teachers, which is one step towards a much deeper journey of transforming the core values of our education system.

of exploring the question of identity in connection to wider social issues through spoken word poetry has helped them to connect much more deeply to their own sense of personal purpose, even more so than an entire year in Careers class.⁶

These moments highlight the potential of using the arts to bring much needed transformation to our education system. Arts-based education is an opportunity to transform our education system to incorporate meaningful exploration of self, purpose, and change.

We need more meaningful collaborations between artists and teachers, which is one step towards a much deeper journey of transforming the core values of our education system.

At the core, what we really need is a holistic revamping of the purpose of education, and an integration of the whole human into the educational experience. Art is, and can be, a powerful conduit for this change.

We need to move past a system of education that is preoccupied with intellectualizing, memorizing and regurgitating facts presented by a narrow

At the core, what we really need is a holistic revamping of the purpose of education, and an integration of the whole human into the educational experience.

⁴ www.LostLyrics.ca

⁵ Example of Hip-Hop Education initiatives in Toronto: Remix to Re-Education: A Hip-Hop Curriculum Resource Guide for Educators with Social Justice Activities, Don't Believe the Hype, UNITY Charity, #HipHopEd #HipHopEdTO

⁶ Evaluative feedback from Grade 10 Students at University of Toronto Schools in December 2014 after an 8-session unit on Spoken Word Poetry in connection to Identity and Social Constructs, using the ICT format.

view of the past. Instead of pressuring our young people to find a place to become a complacent participant in an economic system that is failing, we need to move education more firmly into a place of grounding in the present moment to help prepare our young people for the future; and inspire them to become agents of much needed change.

The youth are the future. We need an education system that will give them the skills to create a world that is healthier than the one we inherited. This means a shift in paradigm, of priority, a shift in the purpose of education to include the exploration of our inner true purpose in the experience of education.

Some may say that this is too tall of an order for our schools, or that it's a job for the parents. But why shouldn't our schools be the

place to help young people understand who they are? Teaching them not only how to think but how to know. How to feel alive. How to find and pursue true happiness, fulfillment, balance in life, inner peace.

Our world is at a very critical point in time. It is time to wake up. It is time to evolve. Change is necessary for our collective survival as a species. It is within the self that we must first learn to face these truths, and it is also within the self that we must address them. Our schools have the potential to become spaces of critical self-reflection, innovation, and incubators of collective transformation. The time to transform the purpose of education is now. The future of our youth and the fate of countless generations that will follow depend on it. △



The Real Sun is an artist and educator with a deep dedication to social justice and healing. She has been teaching for nine years combining arts based education, in particular spoken word poetry, with explorations of identity, social constructs, and critical analysis. The Real Sun is trained in the field of integrated healing practices including psychotherapy, bio-energetic therapy, and energy healing. As a poet, singer/songwriter, and musician she expresses her creativity through spoken word and acoustic soul music.

Art, Education, Healing, Social Justice are the pillars and foundation of everything The Real Sun does, is, and creates. She views each one of these elements as necessary components for creating positive and sustainable social change. The Real Sun is a resident of the Jane-Finch community in Toronto, and was originally born in Anyang, Korea.

Reflections on Social Services & the Non-Profit Industrial Complex: An Interview with Riaz Sayani-Mulji

A youth worker describes the barriers faced by marginalized young people accessing services in Hamilton and alternatives to the social service model

Interviewed by Mina Ramos

Mina: You've been a youth worker for several years now. Can you describe some of the different environments that you've worked in?

Riaz: I've worked in youth shelters, youth centers, community centers, group homes, and transitional housing complexes. I've always been a frontline worker; working directly with other young people. I currently work relief at a youth center in Hamilton, while I complete my law degree at U of T.

How did you get involved in this type of work?

Riaz: I began by volunteering with newcomer youth. This led to a job with the now defunct Settlement Integration Services Organization (SISO), in which I ran programming and did outreach work in the community. Working for SISO was an incredible and enlightening experience. It was run almost entirely by newcomers – so the model of service delivery and community engagement was actually geared to the communities we were working with. Further, my manager was an Anishnaabe man, which allowed for knowledge transfer and bridge building between newcomers and First Nations, within that context. As my parents themselves came to Canada as refugees from Uganda, it felt natural to work with other young people who themselves were new to Canada. Something I reflect upon as I look back is that so many of the youth who come here fleeing “war torn countries” and so on can all be tied back to Canadian foreign policy. Especially Canadian foreign policy in Africa – so much of our foreign affairs is driven by Canadian mining companies,

and in many cases it is this resultant violence which causes these youth and their families to flee.

I believe the federal government's decision to defund SISO was a politically motivated decision. While there was evidence of embezzlement within SISO's management, it's the degree of auditing and targeting that is the issue. While there are so many different non-profits operating in Hamilton to deliver services to communities experiencing marginalization, SISO received a disproportionate amount of scrutiny. I think it irked the non-profit establishment to see newcomers running their own organization and doing things their own way, with little regard to the rest of the non-profit world. Traditionally, social work has been the domain of the white community and based in notions of charity. Charity is about those who hold the power in society “giving back” to those that lack power, and not about transforming the hierarchies that exist (social work gave us, for example, the 60s scoop¹). So in some respects SISO was going against the mold.

Can you describe the demographic of the youth that you work with? What are some of the issues that they face on a daily basis?

Survival is a good way to describe their daily reality. Many are experiencing homelessness and street-involvement. Many live off of OW (Ontario Works) and ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). Most government employment-seeking programs end up placing youth in precarious

¹The “60s scoop” refers to the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities by children's aid services and their subsequent adoption, into mainly white, Anglo-Canadian homes, from the 1960s to the mid-1980s.

Traditionally, social work has been the domain of the white community and based in notions of charity. Charity is about those who hold the power in society "giving back" to those that lack power, and not about transforming the hierarchies that exist.

work situations like call centres. With the price of housing increasing and social benefits steadily being rolled back, many struggle to make rent and have enough to eat off of their OW or ODSP cheque.

When working on the front lines in shelters, group homes, transitional housing complexes, etc. – a disproportionate amount of youth have been youth of colour. In addition, a disproportionate amount of the youth under the care of the Children's Aid Society and Catholic Children's Aid Society were First Nations. There were also large numbers of Queer and trans youth, although the numbers we saw were likely low. This is the result of barriers due to shelters that are not queer and trans positive. I remember a Trans youth telling me of the death threats they received from other youth and the staff's refusal to let them sleep on the "Girls' floor" when accessing a youth shelter.

In addition, almost every young person who came through our doors was being diagnosed with serious mental health disorders and prescribed extremely strong medications. While not denying that serious mental health disorders can and do coincide with youth who are experiencing homelessness, many youth objected to their medicalization and fought against taking some of the medications prescribed to them. The policy of the organizations I worked for had consequences for youth who wouldn't take their medications; so it wasn't really a choice. Meaning, if you're living in a group home, and you're refusing to take your medication, you're vulnerable to being kicked out.

Youth who are experiencing homelessness and street involvement often grapple with mental health issues. Many may have pre-existing conditions that

are exacerbated by the circumstances they are in. I found it problematic that the agency of the young person was being taken away in exchange for a bed for the night.

Have you identified gaps in the resources that are available to youth in Hamilton? If so, what are they?

Riaz: From a macro perspective, the non-profit model is failing. Organizations are competing for funding to deliver fairly similar services, instead of collaborating and identifying areas that aren't receiving adequate attention. Communities are "being served", as opposed to directly receiving funding and choosing themselves how it should be spent and what services should be delivered.

What accompanies this is the "professionalization" of non-profits. The community members and activists who fought for their initial creation and funding are being pushed out by individuals with Bachelors in Social Work or Masters in Social Work. While not arguing that post-secondary education is illegitimate, it's problematic when lived, community experience is not held to the same regard as a degree. There's so much to living that can't be learned from a textbook or from the perspective of a clinician.

Alternative models of community work could see all of us as community members, working in partnership with each other. Allowing youth to have a real voice, say in organizational governance, policy and procedure drafting. So for example, sometimes youth object to being searched and having to take off their shoes when accessing community meals. Instead of dismissing their concerns that "this feels like jail" and strips them of their dignity – we should be recognizing that there's a problem and working with youth to come up with alternative ways to maintain their dignity while also addressing safety in that setting.

Alternative models of community work could see all of us as community members. Allowing youth to have a real voice, say in organizational governance, policy and procedure drafting.

When you sit down and talk with youth struggling to get by or embedded in the world of the street economy, many, when reflecting on where it all went wrong, point to being pushed out of school.

Are you familiar with the school to prison pipeline? How does this play out in respects of the youth that you engage with? What kinds of things do you believe are necessary to disrupt the pipeline?

Riaz: The school to prison pipeline predominantly pushes youth with different learning abilities, youth of colour, Queer and trans youth – out of school and into prison. Youth get pushed out into society without a high school diploma and work precariously, sometimes in the street economy and can eventually end up incarcerated. We know that there's a disproportionate amount of people of colour in Canadian prisons, especially First Nations, as well as Black and Brown people. But there's no discussion, no analysis, of how they're getting there. In the United States, the school to prison pipeline is a major policy issue – it gets considerable attention. In Canada, it's hard to find mention of it. Yet when you sit down and talk with youth struggling to get by or embedded in the world of the street economy, many, when reflecting on where it all went wrong, point to being pushed out of school.

There are so many different factors that combine to push a student out – let's start with the Eurocentric curriculum that attaches little-to-no value to the experiences of communities who have been historically marginalized in Canada. Youth don't see themselves reflected in what is being taught to them, while much of it is arguably racist and historically inaccurate. Further, pedagogy in our schools is regressive. The teacher and student aren't in a learning partnership together, in which students feel valued and have a say in how the classroom operates, how they're evaluated, what they want to learn.

Instead, you have a hierarchy with a teacher who holds all the power, encouraging individuality

and not collaboration. If students learn differently than conventional, didactic methods, and find their grades suffer as a result (attaining the label as the "slow" or "dumb" student in the class). For example, a First Nations youth told me about academic troubles he was having in his high school English class. Instead of being supportive, and valuing this student, the English teacher asked him "Why do you even bother coming back?"

Further, punishment reigns supreme. For example, something like sagging one's pants can result in a suspension. This is a sad example of a predominantly white teaching force targeting what they see to be problematic. And remember, youth who are suspended are on average less likely to even come back to school. Fights and threats are also responded to with suspensions and expulsions. Alternatives to this include community healing and calling in students who are engaging in oppressive behaviours, not removal from the community.

Something that's not on the records but also occurring are (illegal) suspensions and expulsions, done in contravention of the Education Act. Youth have shared experiences of being on the line of failing school, and then the principal of their school calling them into their office and simply telling them not to come back. Those who know their rights under the Education Act can be successful in advocating for due process, or those who have supportive families to assist them in responding, but for those who aren't aware of their rights or who don't have that family support are stuck with their undeserved punishment. – none of the required proper channels and paperwork. This can be especially detrimental for many newcomer youth and their families, who are still in the process of

I think the only way to stop the pushing out of students is a radical shifting in education policy and practice... giving young people power and a real voice in the spaces that are meant to be for their benefit.

understanding our legal structures and ways to navigate things like school discipline. I have also seen youth expelled from school for engaging in criminal activity outside of school property, also in contravention of the Education Act.

While I have many opinions on the prison aspect of the pipeline and how society needs to move away from incarceration, on the school side of things we firstly need more information. Through freedom of information requests I've made, I know that provincially, the Ontario government isn't tracking any indicators of youth who are being suspended and expelled aside from traditional notions of gender i.e. men and women. Only school boards, of their own volition (which are few and far between) are tracking indicators like race, religion, primary language spoke in the home, and other factors that give us a better idea of who exactly is bearing the brunt of school discipline.

Further, I think the only way to stop the pushing out of students is a radical shifting in education policy and practice. Addressing some of the issues I've outlined above and giving young people power and a real voice in the spaces that are meant to be for their benefit. But in the meanwhile, ensuring students are aware of their rights and pursuing alternatives to expulsions and suspensions is imperative.

You mentioned that you currently work at a Youth Center in Hamilton and have helped to run the Youth for Justice initiatives in the summer. What do these initiatives entail? Why are they important?

Riaz: Justice for Youth was a space for young people to come together and discuss the issues affecting them, including the school to prison pipeline, police violence, and more. Justice for Youth was premised on the idea that there needs to be a space for youth to come together and discuss these issues. A space for youth to share their stories, recognize both the similarities in the hierarchies they've encountered as well as the important differences in their struggles, and then to find ways to transform.

I remember when trying to establish something similar at a youth shelter I worked at; specifically dealing with police violence and youth experiencing homelessness and street involvement. I advocated to the program director at the shelter that with much discord and division amongst young people accessing this service, that one commonality youth have is a dislike for the police, given how police target, profile, and brutalize young people of their class, especially given the climate of gentrification in the area where the shelter is located. I wanted to know how we could take that (justifiable) feeling – fuck the police – and work with that constructively, using our position to make

Alternatives include community healing and calling in students who are engaging in oppressive behaviours, not removal from the community.

gains where we could and effect minor changes. It wasn't too radical, by any means – small reforms in policing to make young people's lives a bit easier. However, I was told that the program wouldn't be happening because "it could jeopardize our relationship with the police."

When I look back on Justice for Youth, there were some incredible discussions that took place. Young people are cognizant of the power structures around them and the unjust nature of how society is built – it reinforced the idea that in transforming society, it can, and it only will be done with their direction and input. Δ



Riaz Sayani-Mulji is a youth worker from Hamilton and a law student at the University of Toronto. He currently sits on the steering committees of the Law Union of Ontario and the Canadian Peace Alliance.



ABOVE: Cousin by B



ABOVE: Future Grad by B

I'm B. I'm Coast Salish - Lkwungen, Quw'utsun' and Lummi - on my mom's side and French, Irish mix on my dad's side. I am two spirit, I make art. My imagery and words are often a reflection of who we are, family, the everyday and environment. I work with "youth at promise" and community and believe youth are the hearts of our communities. I support youth movements and decolonizing education. Having access to our knowledge, histories, languages and truths will allow youth to rise up and relive our beauty. Knowing where they come from, the past and histories give youth the tools to navigate the present and change the future.

For Black Girls Who Ate Sugar Cane

by Al. Symone

From young we are told that Barbies
are:
White
with Blonde Hair
and Blue Eyes.

We are told that:
Creamy crack makes the hair
more manageable.

We are seen as:
Scary
Ugly
Unworthy

We are made to believe:
In order to be heard
we must be silent.

Nature replies with:
Wind that blows through Palm trees
Rocks that fall and make ripples in
seas.
Sand and Water make limestone
and from that roses still grow.



ILLUSTRATION: by Lido Pimienta

When the world says:
Straighten your tongue
Lose your prints
Shine your skin
Hunch your back

Remember this:
The Melanin that makes your skin
is used to protect rocket ships.
Your hair coils
in the same pattern as the sun gives light.
The calcium in your teeth
came from the stars that surround you.

Your lips are
Honey.
Your love is
sacred.

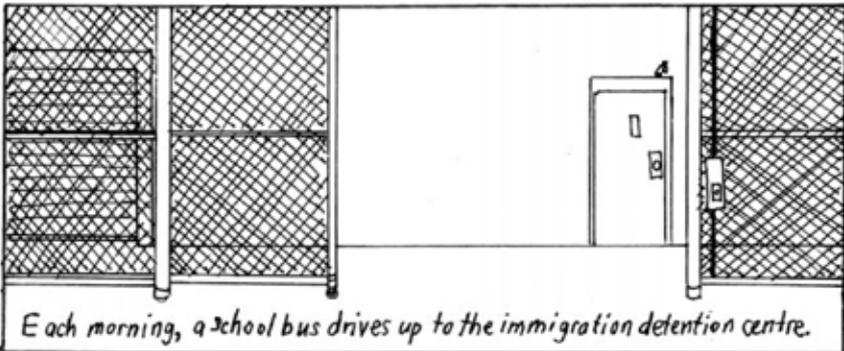
The Truth is:
You are a Creation of the Universe.
You are the heart of the Gods.
No one
Can change the future
Don't try an' change Your Bones.



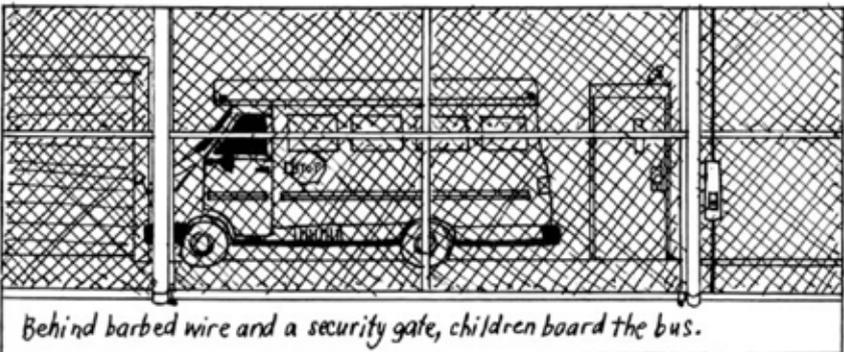
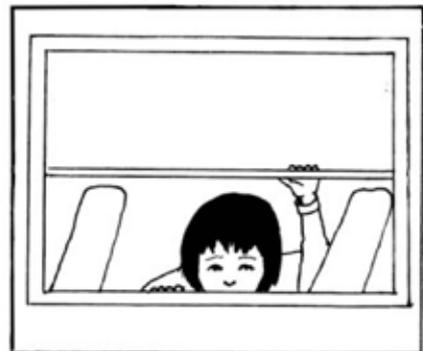
Currently earning her Bachelor degree at York University in the field of Theatre, Alexandria Williams (Al. Symone) has been involved in various art forms in the city of Toronto, acting in productions of The Vagina Monologues at York University and hosting the 2014 production of Insatiable Sisters. During her time as President of the York United Black's Student Alliance she led protests addressing racial profiling on campus and aiding in the creation of the collective Cops of Campus. As the York Federation of Students Fine Arts director, Alexandria redirected her love for performance to a zeal of black community advancement through art and positive recreation. Fiercely femme and boldly black, Alexandria is dedicated to the addressing patriarchy, the prison industry complex, and youth education within the Black Community in Toronto and her home island of Bermuda.



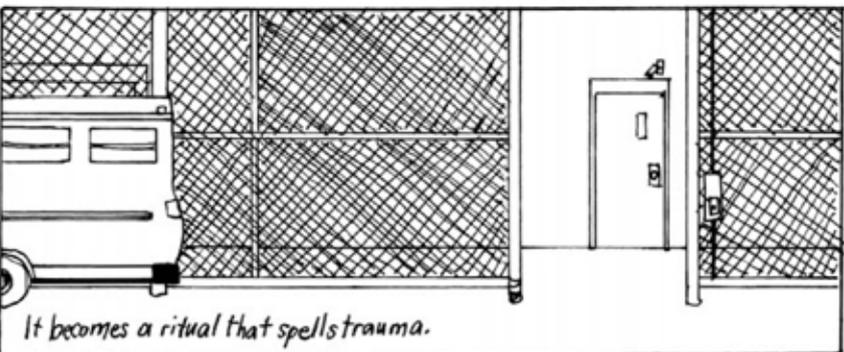
*You are not a minor, a senior, or a dependent,
but you are an elder, a lover, and a child.*



Each morning, a school bus drives up to the immigration detention centre.



Behind barbed wire and a security gate, children board the bus.



It becomes a ritual that spells trauma.



LEFT: From the book,
*Undocumented: The
Architecture of Migrant
Detention*
by Tings Chak

The Face of Youth in Immigration Detention

Young immigration detainees and their supporters speak to the experiences of youth in detention, and the unjust systems that put them

there. by Emma Warner Chee, Alecia Golding & Laura Rock with End Immigration Detention Network - Youth Committee

THIS PLACE IS CALLED NOGOJIWAANONG; calling it Peterborough is a lie. This land is called Turtle Island; calling it Canada is a lie. A lie created by colonial borders, borders fought over, borders bought, unfairly. Canada is built on stolen land, land violently claimed. On land claimed by silencing, killing, alienating and assimilating. In this land, being a person of colour is a problem, a problem for the white minority to control. Genocide, slavery, head tax, internment camps and residential schools are the stains on the pages of our history books. And they're also the only stories we hear about ourselves. Oppressed. Our families, our ancestors, their legacies reduced to a single apology. A hollow apology, because progress is only made to benefit white skin.

Why do people immigrate?

People have always migrated, whether in search of better lives, to reunite with families, or because they are forced out of their homes. Millions of people are displaced each year by war and conflict, resource extraction, climate change, poverty, neo-colonial economic policies, oppressive laws and for other reasons, which countries in the global north like

Canada, and their corporations, are largely responsible for.

How do people not have status?

Most people do not enter Canada without papers - they come in as migrant workers, students, asylum seekers, visitors, and others on temporary visas, etc. Being unable to renew or regularize their status means that people *lose* status and become undocumented. There has been a massive decline in refugee acceptance rates, and for poor racialized migrants to gain permanent residency. We are living in a system of permanent temporariness and many people have no choice but to live here without full immigration documents.

What is it like to live without status?

For the half a million people who live without status in Canada, confronting borders is an everyday reality. Trying to access a school, library, food bank, hospital, or shelter can mean facing the risk of detention and deportation if one's immigration status is discovered and reported to immigration enforcement. Our communities live in perpetual fear; employers and others know this, and exploit our fears.

What is detention?

Immigration detention is the nice name for prison for undocumented or precarious status migrants (including children). They are "held" there on administrative grounds while the Canadian government tries to deport them - immigration violations are not criminal offenses. Over a 100,000 people have been jailed by this government. Remember they have no charges, and no trial. In Canada, migrants can be detained indefinitely without charge or trial in the three designated detention centres and in maximum security provincial prisons across the country.

What is double punishment?

Double punishment is a term used to describe the unjust policy used against non-citizens who face deportation after being punished for a criminal conviction. In other words, non-citizens who commit criminal offenses are punished twice: once when they are sentenced for their crime, and again by being permanently removed from Canada, often after living here since childhood. But what is worse is that some are punished three times, that is they are jailed for long periods before their deportation, and after they have finished their jail sentence.

What are the international norms around detention?

According to the United Nations, immigration detention should have a maximum length and should be used as a last resort. Many “western” regions have a maximum length of detention, for example, six months in the United States and in the European Union. This means that if migrants cannot be deported within that time frame, they must be released - Canada has no such limit and is therefore defying all international norms.

IMMIGRATION AND RACISM

Undocumented. Illegal. Non-status. Denied refugee. “Why am I being detained?” This is a question that almost 100,000 migrants detained by immigration enforcement under Stephen Harper have had to ask in the past eight years. Thousands of people come to Canada on temporary visas, to fill labour shortages, to attend school, to be with their families. When these visas expire, our government considers some people’s existence illegal. People become undocumented and if targeted can end up in immigration detention, with a deportation order hanging over them.

These folks may never be given status, and may be sent back before they have a chance to ask for it. And they have to ask, to prove, that they are worthy. Worthy of our stolen land. The list of requirements to be considered for permanent residency, or even for refugee status is growing every day. You must be a professional. You must make

over 50,000 dollars a year. Have desirable politics, speak proper English, be educated.

CHILDREN IN DETENTION

Others, like Glory Anawa, are detained upon arrival in Canada. Glory has been in immigration detention since the day she arrived in Canada. With her inside is her son Alpha, who she gave birth to in detention. Alpha is now 16 months-old, and lives with Glory at Toronto Immigration Holding Centre. He has never seen the outside world. For people detained upon arrival in Canada, some imprisoned with their children, they are given the impossible choice of keeping their children with them in detention or giving them up to social services. In 2013, two hundred and five children were listed as detained by Canadian immigration enforcement.

RATES OF RELEASE

A third of all immigration detainees in Canada are held in maximum-security prisons, without access to their families, or legal support. They do not know when they will be released, and they have no charges against them. Each month they are asked to attend a hearing, a hearing where the judges have often already made up their minds. In 2013, over 7000 migrants were detained in the country, and only 711 (nine percent) were released. The authorities will try their hardest to deport these people because they don’t have status. They are seen as “cheaters” of the system - but what kind of system is this?



Farai Chigagora is a 21 year-old Hamiltonian man who was deported from Canada where he had lived since 2008 on January 13th, 2015. He was denied permanent residency in Canada because of his criminal conviction in 2012 in which he pled guilty to 'home invasion' charges because of incorrect legal advice. He was not aware that pleading guilty would result in deportation, and was sentenced to fifteen months in prison. Here are Farai's words, excerpted from a video statement on January 9th, 2015:



FARAI'S STORY

I was a permanent resident in Canada until my PR was revoked due to a criminal conviction against me. I'm not a thug. I'm not a criminal but I was convicted of a criminal charge, which has led me to the situation. One guilty plea changed my life forever. I didn't know I was going to get deported. I had no choice though.

Bill C-24 says if anybody who is not a Canadian citizen is convicted in Canada of a crime with a maximum sentence that serves up to ten years, they get deported. And the minimum eligibility for that is six months. Which is the reason why I was declared inadmissible in Canada. Bill C-24 is a law that has declared me inadmissible in Canada and has also force the government to enforce a deportation order on me to go back to Zimbabwe.¹ Zimbabwe is a place that I haven't lived in a really long time. It's been seven years. I don't know too much about living a grown man's life in Zimbabwe. Serving a sentence and deportation at the same time is not right. Especially in the country that raised me. I'm trying to get a stay motion so that I don't get removed on 13th of January. Until that situation is finalized I'm not allowed to work. Which means my mom is working every single day just to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. So I don't see how somebody could look at my application and see that that is what's going on and still remove me from that woman's life. From my brothers life. From my family's life. I don't see how somebody could just

look at that and do it. I am going through a situation whereby I am looking at an empty world and I'm leaving everything. What I have here is everything to me. My family is everything to me. And if I don't have my family then I don't have anything

It's not just happening to me. It's happening to a lot of people. There are a lot of other Black males facing the same situation as I'm facing right now. Or through worse right now. But it just needs to be said right. Somebody needs to say something. Somebody needs to be heard saying something out there. Because if nobody says something its going to keep happening. It's not going to stop. All I can do now is fight to change the situation. Right for what's right. That's all I am trying to do. I'm just trying to get the fair share of my rights. I feel like my rights have been abused. I feel like I've been reduced to the lowest terms. I live in Canada with no status waiting a removal.

So many times I felt like just giving up. Just letting go. Hey they say I should go I should just go. No. Something in my head keeps telling me no that's not right. What am I going to do? There's nothing for me in Zimbabwe. What am I going to do here? I thought about that. I thought about not giving up. Because I was almost giving up. But there was just the little piece of hope that told me that things could change. Things might change. I hope they change.

¹ Bill C-24 was passed after Farai had completed his sentence, when he had been convicted the minimum length for denial of permanent residency was two years, and Farai had been convicted for fifteen months.

Glory Anawa is a 29 year-old woman refugee claimant from Cameroon who was jailed upon her arrival in Canada. Shortly after, she gave birth to a son, Alpha. Now 16 months-old, Alpha has spent his entire life in immigration detention. Here, Glory describes her conditions of detention in her own words:



GLORY'S STORY

I see other inmates with their babies. There are other ladies here with their children. We have a few telephones, a few couches, like sitting chairs and a TV and few toys for the children to play around with. My room has two beds and a baby's cot, a TV and a bathroom.

It's very hard because I just feel like I am trapped in here. I just feel like I am in a very difficult situation because every time when I go to court, for one they no new reasons but they just keep me here. I have been here for two years with my son. When I take him to the hospital he gets very scared because he is not used to seeing cars. He just used to the security guards with their uniforms, and he knows some words like 'radio check'. Radio check is when the security guards change shift, they make the calls on their phones saying radio check and it's very loud and that's what he knows.

It's very hard. I try to make it feel better for him. At the age he is right now specially. The doors here cannot be locked, they have to be open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and he always wants to go in the bathroom and play with the toilet water. It makes me feel bad because I can't close the doors and that's the biggest problem I have with him.

We don't get no child support. We don't get nothing for the babies. We only get baby food and baby formula. Those are the things that sometimes makes me frustrated. Because when I ask for baby formula I need to make a formal request, and I have to wait for sometime and the baby is hungry and crying. These are the kind of things that make me feel really bad. The baby just gets cereal and baby formula.

There is security guards took me to the clinic

for his two, month, four and six month needles. But when he was one year old, the manager of the facility told me that they have change the rules that he is a Canadian citizen and nobody is supposed to escort him to the hospital. I told them I was arrested at the airport and I don't know anyone in Canada and because of that they refused to let me son have his one year needle. Until last week; that's when he got his one year needle. The doctor was not happy about it, he is 17 months-old now and those type of things make me very frustrated.

I am a very devoted Christian. I miss taking my son to the church. I miss taking my son to the park. I miss teaching him how to behave with other kids in the park. From inside here, every place has the bars, like the prison bars. I just feel that this is not the right place for him as a child.

I can't go back to Cameroon I'm hoping that Canadian authorities will open the doors for me, let me have a chance to live a life with my son.

I don't know what's really keeping them, I know they are trying to remove me back to my country, and my country too have received issuing of travel documents. So I do not know how long they want to have me in here.

I'll just stay here and continue the life that I'm facing here, because at this point I have no authority over this, so I don't know what happens next.

I just look at my son and I feel happy day after day. I feel that if I was alone it would be more stressful. So if he smiles, it keeps me going. But on the inside I cry every time, but I just can't cry in front of him to let him feel down. I try to do my best that I can, but to be honest it's really not easy.

Tracy is a 23 year-old woman living in Toronto. Tracy first came to Canada in 2004. In 2013, she was finally granted permanent status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. In the years in between, she lived without status, spent time in immigration detention with her family, was deported and had to deal with the passing of her sister, who was deported to her death in Mexico. This is an excerpt from an interview on February 2nd, 2015:

TRACY'S STORY

People come to Canada not to be judged or classified or fit into an immigration category but to leave hardship, escape from danger and find a better life for their families.

My mother was forced to make a choice to try to bring herself and me to Canada and initially to leave my sister behind. Nobody says, 'Hey let's move to Canada.' It doesn't work like that. The final time my sister was deported she ended up in the arms of the drug cartel that had murdered my father and they took her life too."

The detention centre [Rexdale Immigration Holding Centre] they call a hotel is anything but. I was in a cell with my mother. The door to the cell was never allowed to be closed, even at nighttime, so that the guards could always see what you're up to. The guards were very judgmental. The food was terrible. My dairy and egg allergies were ignored. There was nothing to do. They say it's a hotel but it's not even a detention centre. It's a jail. I felt like I had committed a crime. For children living and growing up in detention, the conditions must have long term negative effects that they have to live with.

When I was living without status, the paranoia was the biggest thing. I felt like I was walking around

with a big sign on my head saying I was non status and would be picked up at any moment. I spent my life either at school or at home. I am a very outgoing character but had to become a different, quieter person and removed myself from a lot of social situations and regular teenage life.

The Canadian government and the Canadian immigration system has put me through a lot of tough times and I hope that the word gets out and people understand what is going on here. However, I have been lucky to meet many angels here and be surrounded by people who have helped me. Teachers who turned a blind eye to my immigration status, refugee centres who took me in. I am now working as an advocate and supporter of precarious status youth in Toronto and my experiences and struggles allow me to help them and explain they are not alone. I plan on becoming a lawyer and helping my community. And when I say community I don't just mean my Latino community, I mean my refugee, migrant, precarious status community. Though I am now a permanent resident I will always be a refugee. I identify as a refugee. No one should be called illegal, whatever their status is. Δ



LEFT: Rally at a Detention Centre

School-to-Prison Pipeline: #SchoolPushout

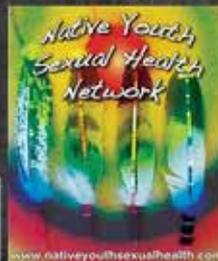
By NYSHN

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is a grassroots network of Indigenous youth that organize across issues of sexual & reproductive health, rights & justice throughout the United States & Canada.

As part of Project NIA's Week of Action against **#SchoolPushout** campaign (Sept 28th thru Oct 5th, 2013), we made a number of memes to bring attention to the School-to-Prison Pipeline & the experiences of Indigenous youth to reclaim our education & spaces we are in.

BACK TO SCHOOL RESISTANCE

- REPRESENTING OUR HISTORIES
- USING OUR LANGUAGES AND CULTURES
- DEFENDING SELF DETERMINATION
OVER OUR BODIES AND LAND
- YOUTH LEADERSHIP



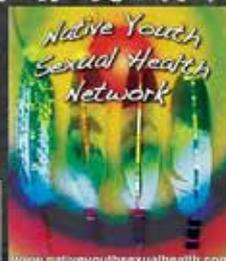
#SCHOOLPUSHOUT

#SCHOOLPUSHOUT

BACK TO SCHOOL RESISTANCE

- RESIDENTIAL/BOARDING SCHOOLS
- CHILD WELFARE
- PRISONS

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES CONTINUE TO BE
CRIMINALIZED AND REMOVED FROM THEIR
COMMUNITIES



#SCHOOLPUSHOUT

#SCHOOLPUSHOUT

MALE FEMALE
CLASS ASSIGNMENT
-SCHOOLING GENDER -POLICING GENDER

TWO-SPIRITED NOT ALLOWED IN SCHOOL
RESISTING COLONIAL BINARIES OF
GENDERS/SEXUALITIES BY BUILDING OUR
LANGUAGES AND TERMS FOR TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE



#SCHOOLPUSHOUT #SCHOOLPUSHOUT

SCHOOL PRISON
NO CONDOMS ALLOWED NO SYRINGES ALLOWED

HARM REDUCTION (VERB)

- 1.) TO REDUCE THE HARM OF COLONIAL EDUCATION
- 2.) SELF-DETERMINATION OVER OUR HEALTH
- 3.) TO REDUCE THE HARM OF TEACHERS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, SECURITY GUARDS
- 4.) RESISTING ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES



#SCHOOLPUSHOUT #SCHOOLPUSHOUT

The Stigma Block:

How Stigma Creates Barriers to Education

by Talisha Ramsaroop

IN ONTARIO, JANE AND FINCH IS A HOUSEHOLD NAME WHICH sparks fear and scorn. The community's image as an "inner-city ghetto" is an identity that has been consolidated through representations in the media and various forms of public discourse. A recent article in *Toronto Life*¹; "Fortress York," links a series of sexual assaults committed at York University to the campus' proximity to Jane Finch. In bolded letters, it declares: "The school is bordered by...seedy strip malls populated by dive bars and rub 'n' tugs and by Jane and Finch one of the most notoriously crime-ridden neighbourhoods in Toronto". Similarly, a CBC documentary "Lost in the Struggle," portrays Jane and Finch as "notorious slums, teeming with restless hip-hop styled youth"². Both print and non-print media increasingly portray Jane and Finch in a manner which associates it to criminality, deviance, gangs, drugs and a high police presence while ignoring its positives like youth activism and strong family ties which is something I have experienced in the community.

So what does this stereotype do to young people from the community? Well to begin this representation of Jane and Finch creates negative associations for all community members as young men become portrayed as criminals or gang members while the young women are labelled promiscuous; likely to become young mothers or "welfare queens". Youth become restricted to these labels which deem them deviants without any consideration for their individuality. However, this stigma is more than just a bad tag, it has real consequences, one of which is the restriction of pathways to education. Getting an education becomes something abstract and unattainable in the minds of many youth and those around them because unlike youth in other parts of the city, there are no prospects of post-secondary education, no expectation that these youth could become prime ministers or CEOs. Instead this single story continues a cycle of youth who do not see their true potential and have low self esteem.

It needs to be noted that these labels cannot be isolated from traditional colonial stereotypes

which mirror the ones imputed in these youth. It is no coincidence that Jane and Finch— one of Canada's most racially diverse communities, with large flows of new immigrants and racialized youth—is also the one which is labeled violent, unruly and troublesome. These labels, create a cycle of low expectations which contribute to reinforced racism and poverty.

This phenomenon where one becomes the labels which are enforced onto them is termed the "self-fulfilling prophecy" by symbolic interactionist Charles Cooley³. According to this self-fulfilling prophecy, which has been employed in the study of many racialized urban youth, internalization of the negative stereotypes occurs, making it hard to see any pathways other than the single one which matches the preconceived notions.

How could students feel like they matter when this not reflected in the conditions of their school?

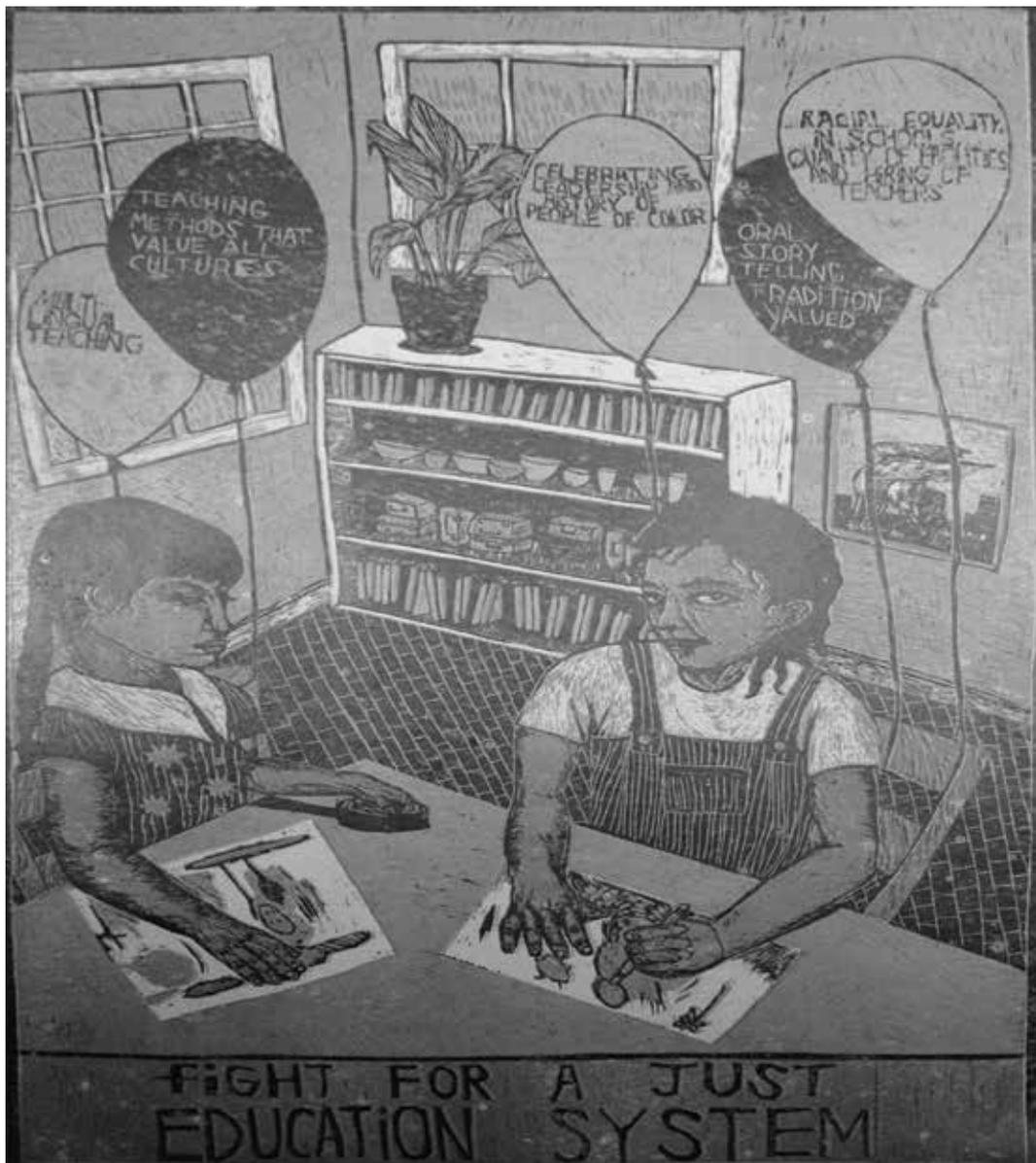
This stigma of deviance and the violence of low expectations are further reinforced by the physical conditions of the schools in the neighbourhood as many of the schools resemble factories with low lighting, failing infrastructure and a depressing tone of grey and post modern decay. Schools were not made to be appealing to students or spark excitement, rather they were created to simply house students. This is demonstrated as the school I attended had crumbling ceilings, desks that could barely stand, the lack of heat or air conditioning even in scorching/freezing weather, and a total of four working computers in the library. How could students feel like they matter when this not reflected in the conditions of their school? Students feel just as degraded as the infrastructure is. Are we not worth the extra computer in the library? Are we not worth lockers that close? Are we not worth textbooks that don't fall apart and desks that can stand? Who wants to wake up at seven in the morning to come to a place which resembles a

It is no coincidence that Jane and Finch— one of Canada’s most racially diverse communities, with large flows of new immigrants and racialized youth— is also the one which is labeled violent, unruly and troublesome. These labels create a cycle of low expectations which contribute to reinforced racism and poverty.

1 Laidlaw, K. (2013, October). *Fortress York*. *Toronto Life*, 66-74.

2 Giroux, H. (2013). *Youth in revolt: reclaiming a democratic future*. USA: Paradigm

3 Cooley, C. (1983). *Human nature and the social order*. New Brunswick: NJ : transaction



LEFT Education by Meredith Stern

factory more than a healthy learning environment?

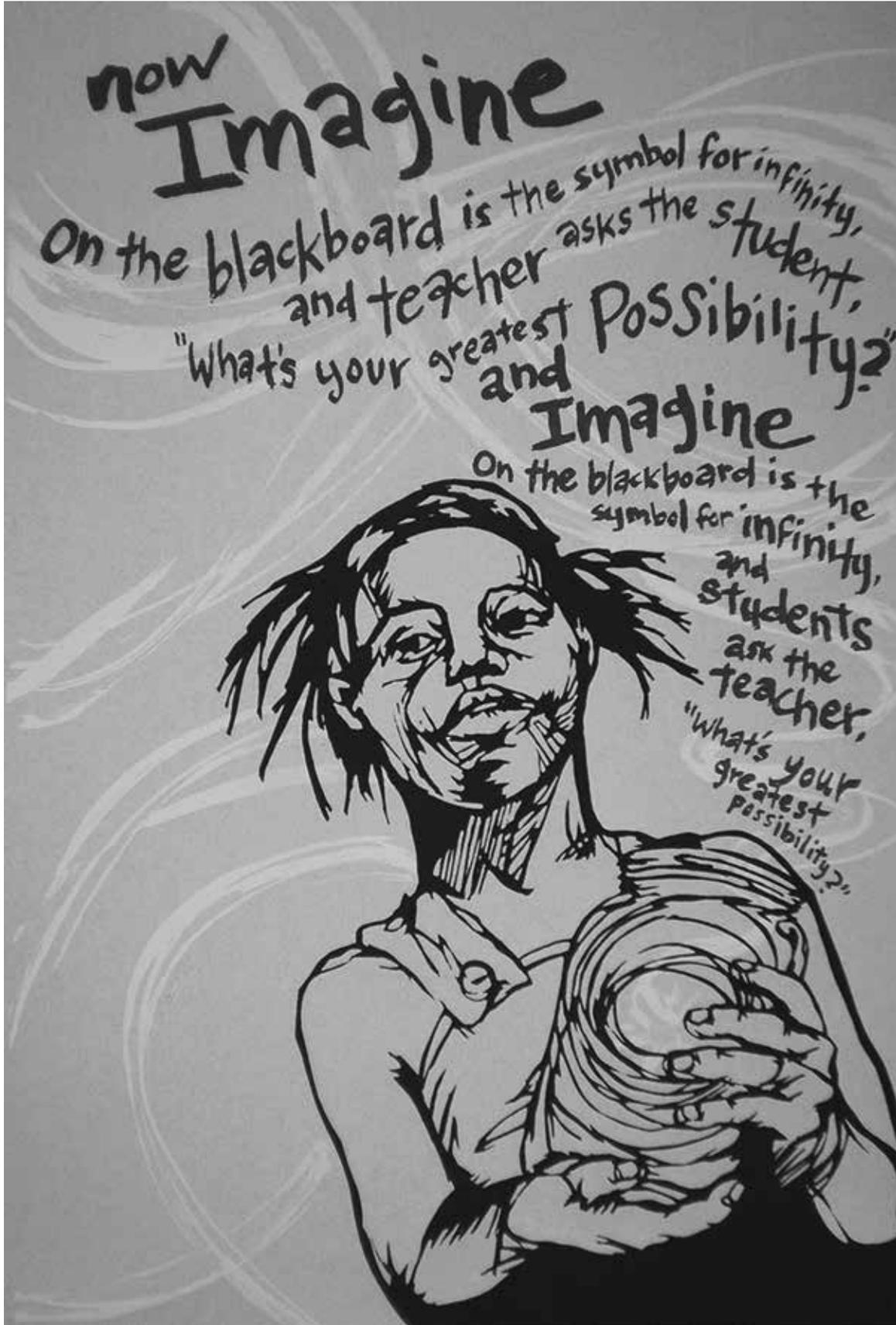
Furthermore Jane and Finch is located within three kilometers of York University, one of Canada's major educational institutions. The University is so close that students from the community could walk to school, saving the cost of transportation. Most would assume that this proximity simultaneously means easy access to education. Yet even though York University is just steps away geographically, it seems much further mentally. Low expectations can make post-secondary education seem impossible, even if it's right in your backyard. As such, many of the youth from the community have yet to step foot on the York campus because they do not think going there is a possibility. In addition, the stigma of Jane and Finch is national with people as far as British Columbia, who stereotype it as the infamous community "where everyone gets shot." Many York University students have preconceived notions of the community. Being labeled by your classmates can be an isolating experience. I remember in my first week of university I heard another student tell someone "there is a grocery store on Jane and Finch, but you don't want to go there, that's where everyone gets shot". I felt so marginalized and ashamed to tell people that was where I lived. I felt like university was not where I was supposed to be because everyone there would see me like this. What would that young man say if I told him where I was from? Would he gasp like the many others, ask me if I've seen someone get shot? My sense of belonging was quickly washed away and post-secondary seemed more isolating than ever. This stigma has the ability to create physical barriers to education by ensuring youth do not see it as a potential and for those who do, they must continue to face the stigma throughout their post-secondary education.

With all this said I would also like to note the various programs which created pathways to accessible education; in particular programs which made university a potential. I applied to ACE (advanced credit experience) in grade ten after my English teacher forced me even though I barely showed up

to class and when I did, my work was never complete. He saw potential in me, I was not a label to him. The ACE program which runs out of three major schools in the Jane and Finch community takes students from their schools to York, where they take a university course for a semester. Books and tuition were covered, and students receive a scholarship upon completion. Through ACE I stepped foot on York for the first time. I learned what it meant to go to university, and realized that it was in my potential. It gave me experience being in university and my teacher ensured I had the support I needed to complete assignments and feel empowered and capable. Through ACE I became comfortable with the university environment and realized that I was capable. When I returned to my high school in grade twelve my grade quickly went from C minus to A plus. There was no question I was going to university come application time. I knew I could do it because I believed in myself and my teacher believed in me. I can say without a doubt that ACE is the reason I'm currently in the second semester of my master program. What I'm trying to say here is that this stigma is much more than a silly label you can just shake off or get over. It has serious effects, many of which are detrimental, including restricted access to education. Though there are various programs including the ACE program which helps debunk the issue, not all students are able to take part in these programs. More needs to be done to actively eliminate this label. I've experienced the consequences of the "infamous Jane and Finch" label first hand. I was a C minus student. I was the kid who would never step foot on campus, I was the kid who never thought about university. We need to realize how serious this stigma is, and realize that low expectations create a vicious cycle. We need to realize that it is a form of violence in itself; it can rip the potential out of our hands and make us feel vulnerable. Δ



My name is Talisha and I am a young racialized woman from a stigmatized community infamously known as Jane and Finch. I've lived in the community for nearly all my life, and have been working in the community, in the field of community development for about four years now. I'm currently in my first year of my Masters at York University.



Resisting the Statistic:

A Participatory Model for Black Youth Engagement

by Fiona Raye Clarke

BLACK YOUTH FACE A REAL CRISIS WITH RESPECT TO marginalization within the education system in Toronto. While Blacks have the highest percentage of youth 14 years-old and younger in Canada,¹ the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has recorded an over forty percent drop out rate among Black students.² Combine these statistics with the fact that Black students are more likely to come from the lowest income homes³, and that Black youth face a thirty percent unemployment rate in Toronto,⁴ and it becomes clear how so many Black youth become prey to over-criminalization and become ensnared in the Prison Industrial Complex. Within the prison system, fifty percent of the overrepresented Black inmate population is 30 years-old or younger.⁵ Thus, a significant portion of the Black youth population is disengaged from the traditional school system, and find themselves as either drop outs or in the prison pipeline.

While there are a myriad of complex reasons for this marginalization, much of the current research revolves around the systems of power within the education system. In a critical theory of education developed by Lisa Delpit, called the *culture of power*, Delpit sees the power for determining the subjects and achievement within the traditional school system centring around the experience of white upper and middle class students, and resting in the hands of white instructors and educational publishers.⁶ This reinforces the so-called 'cultural superiority' or hegemony of Eurocentrism - the belief that the European worldview is superior - and colonialism - the erasure of Indigenous people's

voices and history. Because Black students statistically come from lower income households, they are therefore traditionally excluded from participating in the culture of power and so are marginalized. This leads to disengagement from the system, resulting in the high drop out rate and rate of criminalization.

As a response to this culture of power, Black education advocates such as scholar, George Dei, suggest Afrocentrism as a methodology to disrupt Eurocentric hegemony. According to Dei, Afrocentrism is "the study of phenomena grounded in the perspectives and epistemological constructs of peoples of African descent."⁷ Its strength is that it "empower[s] students and educators to question the dominance of the Eurocentric paradigm,"⁸ thus helping to disrupt the culture of power. This approach is supported by statistics collected by the TDSB stating that seventy-eight percent of Black students feel that learning about their race and culture would make school more interesting; while sixty-six percent feel it would increase their enjoyment of school and fifty-six percent feel it would improve their performance.⁹

After years of agitation, and a close vote in favour of the project, the TDSB established the Africentric Alternative School in September 2009 accomodating approximately 120 students.¹⁰ In a document outlining its strategic vision for the Africentric School, the TDSB acknowledges the power of using "real life experiences of the students and their social context as a basis for learning."¹¹ So far, the Africentric model is a successful one, with the TDSB consistently reporting that Primary and

Junior Division students of the Africentric School are outperforming students from other schools in the province and in the TDSB in reading, writing and mathematics skills.¹² While the project has been expanded to include two Africentric Secondary Programs being offered to Grade 9 and 10 students,¹³ the impact of the project only reaches a handful of students compared to the tens of thousands of Black students currently in the TDSB alone. Thus, the current system with incremental changes such as the Africentric School, is very slow to bridge the gap into which many Black youth are currently falling.

As Tina Sharma points out in her thesis, “[o]nce minority cultures are marginalized, minority students become marginalized as well,”¹⁴ thus, I argue that to further disrupt the culture of power on a larger scale, community leaders must create grassroots solutions to these critical issues affecting the lives of Black youth.

One such solution is a participatory learning model I created which has been used in classrooms within the GTA and in detention centres in Ontario. The model invites contributions from Black youth to curate and create learning materials for use in the education system by inviting expressions of their personal and racial identities and experience with systems of oppression. This material is collected, anthologized and published, then given to teachers for incorporation into their lesson plans. This creates a radical shift from the culture of power: placing educational publication in the hands of Black youth.

The participatory model works in direct opposition to the tide of academic work currently being produced in Canada, which places race in quotations. The idea behind this practice is to reinforce the privileged notion that race does not exist. Thus, instead of ideologically denouncing race as a fallacy, my alternative learning model views race as central to a discussion of the systems of oppression at work in the Canadian context, giving Black youth the opportunity to write about and be a part of the system’s dissolution.

I created this model by a happy accident. When I failed to find any outlets for creative expression in celebration of Black History Month targeted to Black youth out of school, I applied for funding from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. My goal was to create an anthology of work by Black youth, for Black youth on the topic of being young, Black and Canadian, while acknowledging that there is no homogenous Black community existent in Canada. Therefore, the anthology includes Black voices from both Continental Africa and the Caribbean. The anthology was published by General Store Publishing House in 2012, and was entitled, *Basodee: An*

Anthology Dedicated to Black Youth. It includes work from over a dozen youth from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds as well as those with experience as refugees, of incarceration, foster care, immigration and abuse. Thus, the model incorporates perspectives traditionally overlooked in the creation of educational materials.

Basodee was included on the Toronto Public Library Recommended Book List for Black History Month in 2013 and was placed in post-secondary library institutions throughout Toronto. More importantly it was adopted by at least one teacher for use in their Greater Toronto Area classroom and at Beaver Creek Institution, a penitentiary. While *Basodee* started from a desire to fulfill a creative impetus, it ended up creating an alternative learning model with the potential to engage Black students wherever they find themselves in Ontario.

After *Basodee*, I received funding from ArtReach for another anthology called *Black Like We: Troubleshooting the Black Youth Experience*, which is to be published this year. *Black Like We* will seek to explore and problematize systemic issues facing Black youth. In completing the project, I hope to incorporate feedback I received about *Basodee* from the teachers who have been using it in their classrooms, one suggestion was that more guidance is needed on how to teach the issues posed by the book to students. And so, a teacher’s guide will also be included with *Black Like We*.

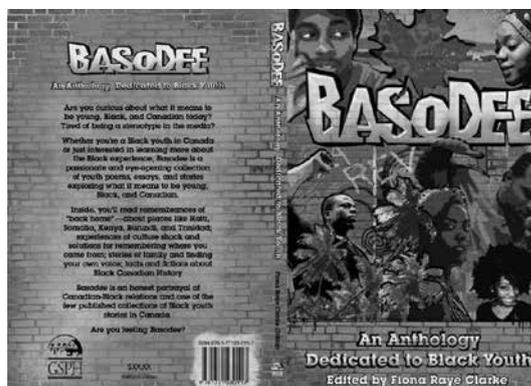
The model created by *Basodee*, and soon to be followed by *Black Like We*, not only positively engages Black students by providing them with materials that reflect their lived experience, it also disrupts the culture of power. Since the materials are created by Black youth, it disrupts Eurocentric hegemony, imparting the idea that materials designed for the classroom do not have to be created by professors to be considered educational. Furthermore, the model facilitates shared power between the students and teacher, because rather than being able to “[claim] authority of text, knowledge, or experience”¹⁵ the teacher must acknowledge that the students in a sense were the authors of the experiences communicated in the materials, and therefore must relinquish their role as “authority.”¹⁶

While this model is perhaps a more radical approach to alternative educational models incorporating Afrocentric and community-sourced wisdom, it allows communities – in this case Black youth – to dictate what is important learning for them. Moreover, with community support, it is a model that can be repeated throughout different communities by grassroots organizers hoping to reach students neglected by the mainstream educational system. ▲

- 7 Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada, Statistics Canada
- 2 Canada's Forgotten Children: Written Submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Third and Fourth Reports of Canada, African Canadian Legal Clinic
- 3 Census Portraits, Understanding Portraits Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds : Black Students, Toronto District School Board
- 4 Creating New Paths to Employment for Youth, Civic Action
- 5 A Case Study of Diversity in Corrections: The Black Inmate Experience in Federal Penitentiaries Final Report, Office of the Correctional Investigator
- 6 Jane-Finch Black Youth Perspectives of Africentric Schooling in Toronto, Tina Sharma
- 7 The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools, George J. Sefa Dei
- 8 The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools, George J. Sefa Dei
- 9 Census Portraits, Understanding Portraits Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds : Black Students, Toronto District School Board
- 10 Jane-Finch Black Youth Perspectives of Africentric Schooling in Toronto, Tina Sharma
- 11 TDSB (2008). Strategic vision: Africentric Alternative School
- 12 "Toronto District School Board EQAO Assessments of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Levels 3&4" TDSB Primary Division (Grades 1-3) and Junior Division (Grades 4-6), 2012-2013
- 13 Africentric Secondary Programs, TDSB
- 14 Jane-Finch Black Youth Perspectives of Africentric Schooling in Toronto, Tina Sharma
- 15 The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools, George J. Sefa Dei
- 16 The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools, George J. Sefa Dei



*Fiona Raye Clarke is a Trinidadian-Canadian writer, playwright and visual artist creating from a critical race perspective and carrying the legacy of slavery and sexual violence within her. In her travels to Nicaragua, Trinidad, England, and Poland, she has met many individuals living on the margins and through her art she seeks to share their stories with the world. Her work aims to highlight the realities of racialized existence, both positive and negative, and claim literary space for this perspective. In 2012, she edited *Basodee: An Anthology Dedicated to Black Youth* published by General Store Publishing House, and is currently a member of the *InspiraTO Playwriting Academy 2014-2015*. In 2014, Fiona won the *ArtReach Youth Arts Pitch Contest* for her new anthology project *Black Like We: Troubleshooting the Black Youth Experience*. She is a co-facilitator for *Toronto WordSmiths* and is currently an intern at *Jumbies Theatre*.*







Our Sustenance:

Learning & Growing at Six Nations

Community building meets food security in gardens & greenhouses at Six Nations by Adrienne Lickers

OUR SUSTENANCE IS A COMMUNITY BASED organization in Ohsweken, in the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory outside of Brantford. The project began in 2011 through community request and involvement with the Community Planning office. One of the concerns brought forward was access to fresh food and the suggestion was for a farmer's market and a community garden. It started with those two things. A single vendor farmer's market selling fresh hand picked local produce and a community

garden where anyone was welcome. From there, the program has grown and is now a community-based program focusing on access and education. We house the Farmer's Market, Community Garden, Greenhouse and Good Food Box. We focus on access to fresh food but also access to information and culture about raising your own food. Issues such as food security, culture and language as well as basic gardening skills are all concepts which can be addressed at Our Sustenance.

In focusing on education as well

as access, we have participated in the community to bring our goals and voice directly to youth. The greenhouse hosted every elementary grade of one of the local schools for classes in the 2013-14 school year. Every week these students learned the building blocks of garden planning, plant care, soil care and followed through to harvesting. The classes combined effort was immortalized in a display of photographs and harvest vegetables at our local Fall Fair. We have hosted pre-school programs and science camps. As

well, we have participated in March Break camps all with the goal to promote, not just our program but healthy eating, living and food growing to the community members who need it most; youth. We have also taken on Youth employment trainees as well as summer students and work placements. They learn about planting, growing, harvesting, canning and preserving and so much more. For the staff at Our Sustenance and all of its supporters, the benefit of learning and growing with us is measurable in so many ways. Young people, children, youth, teens, anyone really can benefit from learning to grow their own food. When you teach a young child to pay attention to what they eat, and where it comes from, they begin to ask that about all the food they eat. Our culture is integral to that.

The Traditional culture of our community is rooted in our beliefs and in the land. We have ceremony for planting times and harvesting, but we also have celebration for the change of the seasons and the passage of time. If we can teach children and young adults to follow those things in their life, and not just in their belief system, we create a healthier community. We become more self sufficient and issues such as poverty and hunger become something more manageable. The cost of growing your own food may involve land access and water, seeds and plants, but those small costs will pay out in the harvest. As well, along the way we learn that the feeling of pushing

When you teach a young child to pay attention to what they eat, and where it comes from, they begin to ask that about all the food they eat. Our culture is integral to that.

your hands into the soil and placing a seed in the small well you've created is good for your mind and body as much as eating healthy food is good for you. Our Sustenance offers a community garden where the food is available to anyone who is willing to visit and harvest it. We also offer Individual garden spots for families who may not have the land or the ability to have it tilled or worked. We invite everyone young and old to participate in all of our programs. One of the joys of being in our garden, and our greenhouse is that you will very often see just that. Young and old, married, single, men and women side by side, asking questions, gaining confidence and being part of something larger than themselves. We have a large number of volunteers, often youth from not just our own community but others as well. What this

tells us is that we are doing something well. We are creating community; where it is hoped you can come to Our Sustenance, make a new friend, learn something new, and often leave with either some fresh salad greens, a book you borrowed from our mini-library or a pack of seeds and the happiness that comes from having worked hard, made a difference and be excited for more. Those things can all be learned and taught in a program like ours.

Our Sustenance counts on a lot of community generosity and we are always grateful for volunteers, donations and the time so many people freely offer us. If you would like to know more, or want to offer your time, expertise or even some donations, feel free to contact us on facebook, email or our website. Δ



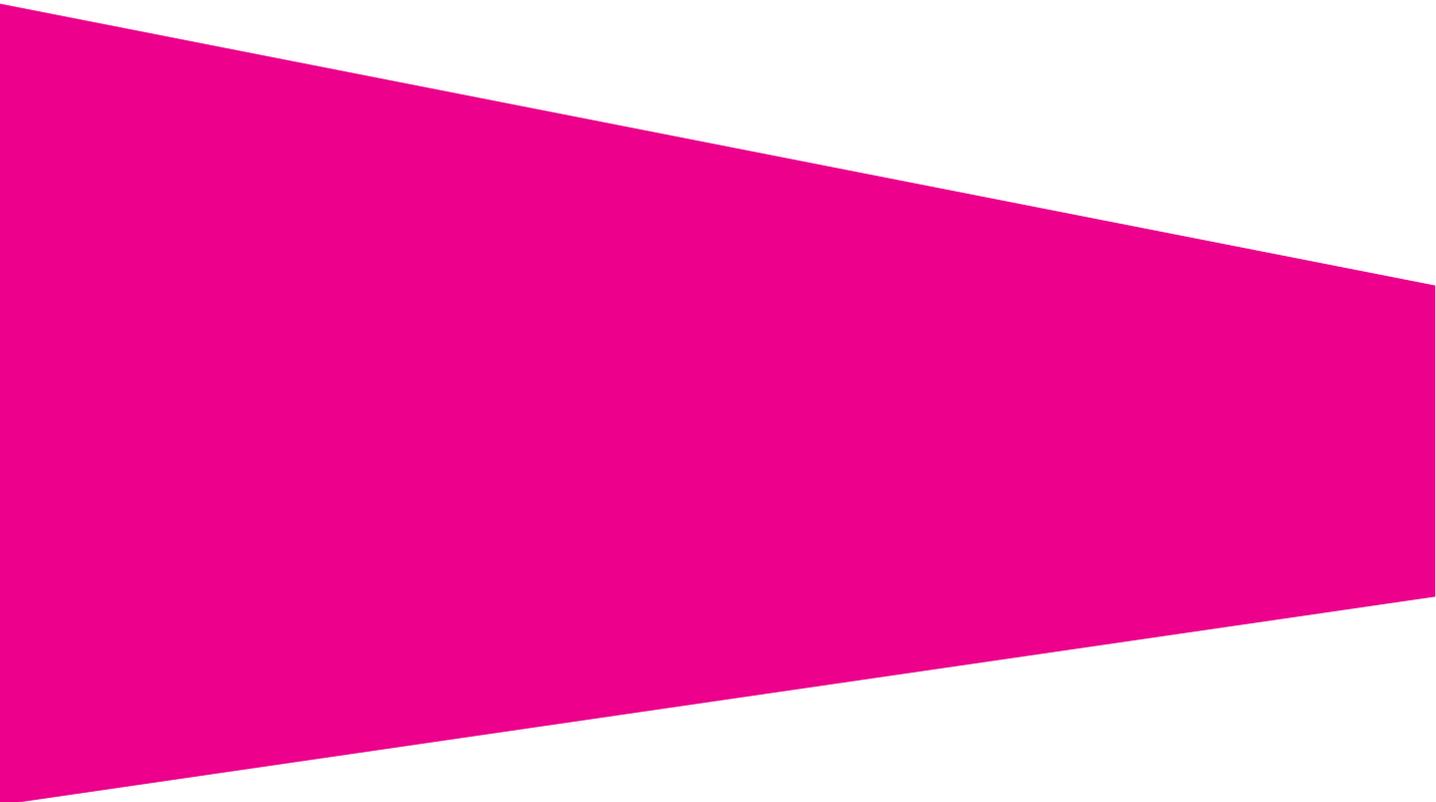
Facebook.com/sixnations.farmersmarket
www.sixnationsfarmersmarket.com
 Email: alickers@sixnations.ca

Adrienne Lickers is the Coordinator of the Our Sustenance Program. She recently received her Masters in Intercultural International Communication and her thesis focused on Food Security and community-based programs at Six Nations. She continues to work to help bring gardening and sustainability to the forefront of her community. She also has just begun her Doctoral studies in Social Science at Royal Roads University. She enjoys her position at Our Sustenance and is proud to work with her mother to share the knowledge they both hold with the community. Everyone is a seed and if you nurture those seeds, the most beautiful friendships will grow.

ILLUSTRATION Putani
(Mint) by Shabina
Lafleur-Gangji



1430
SHEPPARD PUBLIC SCHOOL
AND
AFRICENTRIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL



We Learn So We Can Be Free: Toronto Africentric School Redefines Black Education

Interviewed by Guelph Prison Radio

HHEY, MY NAME IS LEAH NEWBOLD. MY FRIENDS CALL me Leroi. I'm a teacher at Toronto Africentric School and I teach grade 1. Africentric School is an elementary alternative school in the Toronto District School Board. It's a community initiative that was lobbied for by parents and educators. We just finished our fifth year with our new principal, Joan Lattie. Africentric school is Toronto's first public Africentric school, but it's not Toronto's first Africentric school. There's been a rich history of community-based, Black-focused and Africentric schooling, including Umoja in Rexdale.

Can you talk a bit about why you think schools like these are important?

Leroi: Schools like Africentric are important, because, first and foremost I believe that Black education should be initiated and designed by Black communities. I believe our institutions need to be transformed to contribute to the liberation of our people. For descendants of enslaved people in Canada, the US and the Caribbean, education is rooted in the fight for liberation. In my first year of teaching my grade two students, we read this book called *Nightjohn*¹. *Nightjohn* was an enslaved man

1 Nightjohn by Gary Paulsen

Africentric disrupts the pipeline because it operates from the philosophy that our students deserve safety, love, respect and power; it's a philosophy of personal responsibility for teachers.

who worked in the fields on a plantation, and he survived horrific things at the hand of his master. When he arrived from his plantation, his back was raw from whipping and he was hauling the chariot attached to his neck. What the children learned is that Nightjohn had once escaped from slavery, and that he came back to enslavement as his own choice, to teach people on the plantation how to read. Nightjohn knew that the punishment for teaching slaves to read was very severe, if people were caught teaching slaves to read in Canada and the US they would often have a finger or toe cut off. Nightjohn came back to teach because he knew that reading would help to make his people free. Enslaved people who knew how to read could write passes to cross checkpoints in the night; they could read their masters' record books. What we're teaching our kids is that we learn so we can be free, and we're teaching them to participate in the fight for our freedom, our liberation.

Can you describe what the school-to-prison pipeline is, and how it works?

Leroi: The "school-to-prison pipeline" is a term that was coined in the US, but I think it's also applicable to Canada. It looks at how students are pushed out of schools and into prison, because of institutional neglect, because of disengagement, and because of the employment of the Cultural Deficit Model, where our students are basically given the message that they can't learn. For example, in Toronto we have a forty percent push-out rate for Afro-Caribbean students, and in the Canadian context, the school-to-prison pipeline [refers to] the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education, the over-policing of Black youth in schools and neighbourhoods like Jane and Finch and Malvern, and how these experiences contribute to the disproportionately high number of Black men and women in Ontario prisons.

How do you think Africentric School is disrupting the pipeline?

Leroi: Africentric disrupts the pipeline because it operates from the philosophy that our students deserve safety, love, respect and power; it's a philosophy of personal responsibility for teachers. As opposed to a cultural deficit model, personal responsibility means that if my students fail, then I have failed as an educator. So I will [work

to make] my students successful by any means necessary because I have love for my community. So Africentric School disrupts the pipeline by making students successful. In our first year, our school had eighty-one percent of our students reaching provincial standards in writing and math. In reading it was seventy percent, which was higher than the percentage of student standards at the Toronto District School Board and in the province of Ontario. In the States for example, they have a one hundred percent graduation rate which means students will be moving on with skills and also with self confidence and self love.

Do you have any idea of what the success rates of Black students are in non-Africentric public schools?

Leroi: Well typically students in our communities tend to underscore on both standardized tests. Especially in the area that our school is, the Keele and Sheppard area. Most of the students at our school are from the Jane and Finch area, so a lot of the schools there tend to underperform; not because the kids can't achieve but because they aren't being engaged in that test. I mean that test is also biased, but that doesn't mean that our students can't succeed in it; we succeed in life and all sorts of institutions that are biased.

Can you talk a little bit about how your approach is different than the methods used in other public schools?

Leroi: The approach differs in terms of curriculum but also in terms of instruction. We use the Ontario curriculum but through the lens of African and Caribbean experiences and also through the lens of anti-oppression. For example, if I'm teaching about the migration of mammals in science, I may choose to teach about the migration of Africans in the diaspora. You can interpret [the curriculum] in a lot of different ways. We also place a lot of emphasis on the arts because it's something that's engaging for our students; especially performance, music, dance and looking at teaching literacy and numeracy through the arts. Last year at the holidays my grade ones learned how to sing Esperanza Spalding's *Black Gold* but they also learned how to read the lyrics and how to act out the skit and record it on film. They were on stage singing, "*Hold your head as high as you can, high enough to see who you are little man.*"

Life sometimes is cold and cruel but no one may tell you so remember that you are Black gold.” So they will learn a lot of things through the arts.

If you could send a message to public school teachers about how to work with Black students, what would you say?

Leroi: I would say that if you’re a non-Black teacher in a public school then you have a responsibility to learn about what anti-Black racism is and you have a responsibility to take leadership from Black community— from your students, from your students’ parents, from surrounding community, and do not use a cultural deficit model to explain Black student failure. Take responsibility. You have a responsibility to seek out examples where Black students are successful and to replicate those examples within your classroom. Also you need to understand that our students are Black gold and that our children mean everything to us so you have our everything in your hands. Don’t take that responsibility and privilege lightly.

Can you explain what the Cultural Deficit Model is for people who may have never heard that term before?

Leroi: The Cultural Deficit Model basically says that our students are unsuccessful in the educational institution because of our culture, because parents don’t care about their kids, or their kids doing well, because of poverty or because of something within our culture that prevents us from being successful. Obviously that’s not true because there are so many other educational institutions in which we are successful, historically and now. So that’s why I’m saying people need to look at those examples and to change the system to learn how to be successful for our students.

Is there anything you want to add?

Leroi: I guess a lot of people were asking about the high school and at the time there wasn’t a high school yet but Africentric Elementary now feeds into two high schools, one at Downsview and one in Scarborough. So if people are looking to do their GED or high school those are also alternative possibilities now.

So for people who are maybe interested in sending their kids to your school could you give out contact info on the school?

Leroi: Yeah, you can find it on the Toronto District School Board website and it’s called Africentric Alternative School, it’s located at 1430 Sheppard Avenue West. △



Leroi Newbold is an artist, community organizer and an educator at Canada’s first public Africentric School.

Raising Children in Community: An Interview with Educators at The Everlasting Tree School

How a unique school at Six Nations is transforming education through language, culture and healing

Interviewed by Mina Ramos

Mina: How did the school get started?

Amy: Well it started on a whim after many years of talking about wanting to see change in the education available to our children. We were all doing our own thing but came together through our passion for learning Kanyen'keha and wanting to teach our children. We were seeing that mainstream educational practices were not serving our kids, they weren't meeting our language or cultural needs.

Tammy: There was I think, six of us and we were just sharing our experiences. We were all pretty much in alignment with what we didn't want children to experience; which turned into the question of what we did want our kids to experience. This particular group of people had come together to revitalize language for ourselves, within our own home and within our own family. There were four of us who had taken the adult Mohawk immersion program offered at Six Nations together. Some of us kind of went our separate ways and then Amy and I had come together a short period of time after that and worked at Kawenni:io elementary. She worked there for a few years and I worked there for nine years. I was the primary teacher at that time.

So then, in my ninth year, Amy, Cathy, a lady by the name of Chandra Maracle, a man named Teho Green and Stacy Hill came together again and started sharing more experiences on education. Most of it was based around how it was going for their children, but predominantly the conversation was around Mohawk language revitalization and how this was going to happen. We know that ideally intergenerational transmission is optimal but not always do-able so talking about how can we get to a point where intergenerational transmission is happening because we just don't have that many fluent speakers right now.

Amy, Stacey, Teho, Chandra, Kathy and I are all trained Ontario teachers and we've all worked in the mainstream educational system. Amy and Chandra had experiences with Waldorf; their children attended Waldorf schools and absolutely fell in love with it. So when I came into the circle they had already been planning what this was going to be and what this was going to look like. They needed two teachers so the two teachers at that time were Teho Green and myself. With us working together we started to plan what the year would look like and how things would go. We started training in July; I had been working at "Kawenni:io," which is pretty much a mainstream school that incorporates Mohawk immersion, and so that summer I started to dive into what Waldorf education was.

What are the principles of the school? How is the Everlasting Tree School different from other school models?

Tammy: It is based on Waldorf education which is really a child-centered education that focuses in on their child development standards. Some of the views that are different are that we keep them until they hit what is called their seven year change. Every child hits this at a different time; it doesn't have to do with your birthday or the year that you were born. Unlike other schools where you go from kindergarten to grade 1, we would keep them until they hit this and really come into their bodies. For example if they still have a lot of their baby fat or haven't lost a lot of their teeth. We look at when they start having a thirst for knowledge vs. their birth year so looking at where the child is at versus grouping them all together by age.

Amy: In our culture we're taught that in the early years, children are still very much connected to the spirit world. I was told that we are not fully here

on earth until the “soft spot” on our head hardens over. This is similar to the seven year change as is recognized in Waldorf education. We believe in our culture that this time is supposed to be very protected; that’s why the kid is raised by their mothers, grandmothers and aunts – it takes a whole community to raise a child, so we really found a connection and similarity to our own beliefs when we found Waldorf education. Prior to learning about Waldorf Education I struggled as an immersion teacher trying to figure out to connect the importance of the land and nature to the words they were hearing in our thanksgiving address, through pictures. Our thanksgiving address is fundamental to who we are, we give thanks before and after everything that we do.

I knew there had to be a better way to give our children hands-on experiences that would also help them to internalize and truly comprehend the language. I wanted to bring it alive but I didn’t know how. That connection to the land is so empowering and defines who we are; everything we’ve done has been connected to the earth; where our food comes from, our shelters, clothing, medicines, etc. When I was introduced to Waldorf education it was as if the light came on for me and the possibilities are exciting when I think about the future of education for our children.

Much like our culture, Waldorf Education really looks at the kid as a whole individual; socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. We all go through certain stages in our life, we all get our first tooth between four and eight months; there are certain rites of passage that every human kid goes through at around the same age and so Waldorf education is based on that human development. It embraces the human being regardless of who you are and from my own experience as a child and a teacher, I’ve found that is missing within mainstream education. I believe it has a lot to do with the residential school era. I mean if you think about it the Mohawk Institute, which is in Brantford, only closed in the 1970s. We’re only two generations removed from that experience and a lot of our families within this community have been affected. It’s really tainted education for many people.

Currently all of the educational courses available to our people are mainstream and they don’t take into account the body, mind and spirit. It’s a skills based education that doesn’t look at the whole child. I really believe in looking at the whole child and meeting children where they are at; it’s empowering. Behaviorally, if a kid is having a challenge then the teacher is able to sit with them and really look at what is happening with the child, within their environment. Looking at the whole child means taking into account changes in their

In our culture we’re taught that in the early years, children are still very much connected to the spirit world... We believe in our culture that this time is supposed to be very protected; that’s why the kid is raised by their mothers, grandmothers and aunts – it takes a whole community to raise a child.

routines at home, traumas, their diet, sleeping patterns, and anything else that would affect them. It means working in partnership with the family to determine the root of the challenges the child is facing. For example, we’re all energy and so we absorb and we attract and pick up other people’s energy. Sometimes kids are holding that energy and it gets pent up; so that temper tantrum they just had might be because their system is overloaded with energy they’ve absorbed. Energy has to move and for children they are still learning to deal with their emotions so it may come out negatively. It’s important for our teachers to recognize it.

Tammy: Also we always try to talk in the positive. Instead of saying, “stop running” we would say, “Hey maybe you will walk today, we are walking inside, you may run outside.” We try to create that energy. Teachers have a toolbox full of strategies to try and keep themselves in that mentality. We’re also teaching through role-modelling; a lot of the principles we’d want them to have we try to play out the best we can because we want to be living examples. Additionally we really want them to learn through storytelling; especially in the kindergarten program.

What are the benefits of having this type of school on the rez?

Amy: It’s well known that our (Native) students often struggle in the mainstream system, as we are

"Our school seeks to develop a love of learning within our students. The language is transmitted orally and through activities so the students become active participants in their learning. The focus is not on the curriculum but who they are as individual people."

RE-IMAGINING: REIGNING IN THE NEW SKOOL



Although we are doing something new here in our community, we are positive that a holistic education will greatly benefit our students and create a positive ripple for future generations. It will help heal the negative impact of residential schools.

kinesthetic learners. Our school seeks to develop a love of learning within our students. The language is transmitted orally and through activities so the students become active participants in their learning. The focus is not on the curriculum but who they are as individual people. We believe in the importance of learning the right thing at the right time, which is a key element of Waldorf education. When children are empowered they develop a love of learning. Although we are doing something new here in our community, we are positive that a holistic education will greatly benefit our students and create a positive ripple for future generations. It will help heal the negative impact of residential schools.

I think at this time it's so beneficial because

Skaronhese'ko:wa Tsyohterakentko:wa Tsi Yontaweya'tahkwa (The Everlasting Tree School) is a new school initiative founded in June 2010 by a group of parents and teachers seeking a holistic education experience grounded in Kanyen'keha, Rotinonhsonni culture, and the Waldorf Education principles of inspiring life-long learning.

Amy is a founding member and three of her children attend the school. Amy is currently acting as the Administrative Director working alongside the Leadership Circle to guide the vision of the school and oversee its development.

we are evolving as a community. Globally there is so much movement happening and people are finally becoming more aware of things like taking care of the environment, global warming and the foods that they eat, etc. All of these things have always been embedded in our culture. I think it's time to empower our kids so that they can really step into who they are as Onkwehonwe people and be the leaders to help make change. We have so much traditional knowledge and culture and we still have elders and knowledge carriers that are here that can teach us and support us. So, to have this school at this time is so important so we can empower our kids to embrace that and be part of the change.

Are you familiar with the school to prison pipeline? Do you feel like this school disrupts the pipeline? If so, how?

Amy: I'm not familiar with the school to prison pipeline, but I certainly believe that empowering our children will disrupt the pipeline. Any individual who is proud and confident in who they are will seek to leave a positive impact on the world.

How successful has the school been since its creation in 2010?

Amy: Our school has grown immensely in the last five years. In 2010 we had no idea where we would be in five years but we were determined to start and do what we had to do to make it happen. We have seen amazing growth in the language development of our first students. Community support is growing every day and we have successfully received some grants to help us further our development. This year already we are seeing a growth in inquiries about our program and expect our enrollment to grow. △

LEFT: The Tree

Restorative Justice & Mental Health as a Young Indigenous Woman

An Indigenous woman's reflections on the criminal (in)justice system & restorative justice in so-called Canada. by Naomi Sayers

THE MOST DIFFICULT PIECES ARE ALWAYS THE HARDEST to write. I have to go back to a place that I can never forget. It's not that I try to forget. It's rather that I can't forget. The pain and the realities from these memories will last forever.

It took me a while to realize that a lot of the things that I battled with, like racism in the education system, were not my fault. I am at a point in my life where I realize I have control over some of the things in my life. One of those things includes getting up everyday and being grateful. I realize that this is sometimes hard for people to do. It was hard for me to do at many times in my life. I sometimes still struggle with these feelings but I have learned that I have some control over them. This is my truth and for others, I understand it is different. But this is my story and this is how I survived.

The first time I was arrested, it was for my own protection. I didn't receive any charges. I was just put into a holding cell. It wasn't the best position to be in for obvious reasons. I was about 15 years-old and I

had just sustained an acquired brain injury. I changed. I was more irritable and easily angered. These are also some of the "side effects" of brain injuries. When people acquire a brain injury, they change because their entire being changes. For me, being more easily angered was one of them. So I fought a lot with my family. A lot of my friends changed because they didn't know how to be around me anymore. I was literally a different person. But when I was arrested after getting into a fight with a family member, I realized that I wasn't the same person I used to be.

I moved out of my family home about the time I was 16-17 years-old. I was still in high school. I remember meeting this guy around my birthday. I can't recall if I was 17 or 18 years-old. I know that people kept telling me to stay away from him. He was much older than I was. He was also white. We eventually started "dating." I wouldn't call what we were doing dating now though. He started introducing me to alcohol and drugs. I didn't drink or do drugs before I met him. He also became abusive. By the end



of our “relationship,” it was really bad. I don’t remember a lot of what happened, but I know that the police were called a couple of times. The final time the police were called. I was arrested. I was charged with drinking underage and when they let me out, I was still drunk. Not long after, I was arrested again, but this time for some more serious things.

I didn’t want to go back home because I didn’t feel safe and I knew that I would try to kill myself (for the umpteenth time). So the police brought me back to the holding cells. Before they brought me inside, I tried to run away from the police. The police grabbed me forcefully and called me a “fuckin’ bitch.” Before I ran, all I remember was looking at the vehicles coming down the road. One was a transport. I wanted to kill myself. The police put me in the cell and I don’t remember much until I was placed into the local remand center. Remand is where the courts place individuals until their next court date. For me, I was placed there for my own safety. It didn’t feel like a safe place.

I remember being there for several days. I can’t recall if it was a week or a couple of weeks. But I remember being there for a long time. I was there for so long that I made “friends” with the people who were watching me for twenty-four hours a day. I also wasn’t allowed to leave my cell. I only left it to shower (but if I recall correctly, they didn’t let me shower every day). The one lady who was watching me, I remember her clearly, because she shared her brownie with me. I was and still am thankful for her kindness. I also remember the Crown calling me and telling me that I would be facing some pretty heavy charges and that I could be going to jail for life. I can’t recall what I said to him—all I know is I didn’t speak much to him. I just remember being really angry with him. Like you want to call me while I am in a cell for twenty-four hours, where I am being where I’m continuously being watched for twenty-four hours and not allowed to leave my cell because I want to kill myself? Then trying to tell me I am going to go to jail for life? You think that is going to change my reaction to what is going on right now? No. I was so angry.

By the time I was let out, I had strict conditions on me. One of the conditions was to stay at a women’s shelter. This was also one of my requests because I knew I wasn’t going to be safe at home (from my ex or from myself).

After this experience, I eventually overcame the charges.

I received a conditional discharge and within a couple of years, the charges would be withdrawn from my record. I ended up moving to London, Ontario. When I moved to London, the same patterns described above emerged except this time I was heavy into drinking and doing drugs myself. Nobody was supplying the substances to me but myself. I ended up getting arrested and was placed in the Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre for my “own safety.” This time I almost wasn’t released and needed to get out! I could have lost my apartment and I could have lost my place at school since I just recently applied and was accepted. The arrest happened before school started. By the time I was released, I had some conditions. These conditions were a little different.

One of my conditions was to see a counsellor. This counsellor was amazing. I only ended up seeing her for a little bit, I think she changed positions or started working elsewhere. By the time that happened though, my conditions were fulfilled. I spent almost a year going to traditional circles and counselling with some traditional aspects. None of the traditions were related to my Indigenous culture. But I am grateful for being invited into those spaces—well, I wasn’t invited, I had to go and this just happened to be an organization that offered these services. This is what is sometimes referred to as restorative justice, which many liken to Aboriginal or traditional ways.

Briefly speaking, the restorative justice system is an approach that’s adopted by these colonial and violent institutions to deal with the increasing Aboriginal prison population in Canada. However, it does not address the fact that Aboriginals are criminalized in a myriad of ways, like homelessness, street involvement or sex work (to name a few). It also does not address the fact that Aboriginal peoples experience increased police violence, police harassment and discrimination on top of police indifference—the police do not care about Aboriginal people’s safety which is evident with the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The restorative justice approach addresses the lack of cultural support inside the prison but it does not address the absence of culture outside the prison. Cultural supports should be available to Aboriginal people’s without the condition of having to plead guilty to receive them.

We must also remember that the prison industrial complex is not traditional or Aboriginal. These are just labels to erase their

Briefly speaking, the restorative justice system is an approach that's adopted by these colonial and violent institutions to deal with the increasing Aboriginal prison population in Canada.

colonial violence. The only thing I learned from the restorative justice experience was to feel ashamed of my culture. I already didn't feel proud that I was no longer practicing it (because I moved away, I stopped practicing it with my family) and then I didn't feel proud to have this violent institution try to force it on me.

In 2012, I was sitting in a presentation while I was at university studying criminology (funny that), and an Indigenous woman was presenting. I couldn't recall where I remembered her from but at the end, it all clicked in. She was the lady who counselled me upon my release after I was arrested in London, Ontario. I wanted to cry when I heard her speak again but not for reasons you would imagine. She said something so powerful during that presentation. She said to the crowd of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, "It was an institution that took away our culture and it is an institution that is trying to give us it back." She

was referring to the restorative justice approach that more correctly describes prison as the new residential school. In the end though, after all that happened to me, I was lucky because I didn't die. I eventually found home again. If that is the standard, being lucky to not die then we have a lot more work to do in restoring "justice". Because a lot of young people aren't lucky... they never make it home again.

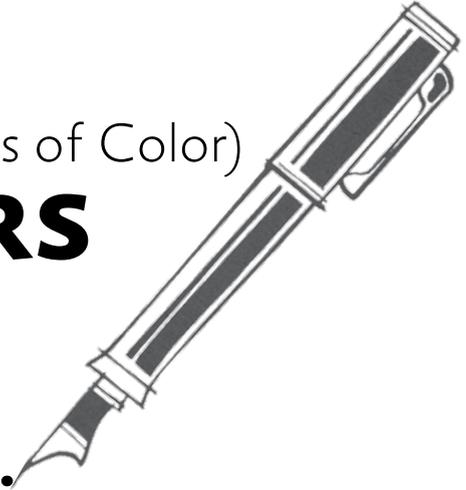
In light of this, we must remember Indigenous communities that experience increased criminalization have unique needs. For instance, northern communities must deal with forced displacement of their young people once they enter the justice system. This forced displacement is a result of the lack of support within the community. These communities need to be supported from the inside--an Indigenous centred model of justice is community based and culturally specific and relevant to the community. This is true restorative justice. Δ

Naomi Sayers is the creator of kwetoday.com and she identifies as an indigenous feminist, and sex work activist. She is currently in the common law program at the University of Ottawa and she has a passion for various social justice issues including access to justice.

The Arrow Archive Zine Library presents:



micro grant for
BIPOC
(Black & Indigenous, Persons of Color)
ZINESTERS



.....
It is our goal is to provide a small monetary supplement (\$100) to a successful applicant to use to make a zine on any topic they wish. The purpose of this micro grant is to provide resources to marginalized voices to express themselves in the self publishing (zine making) format.

This micro-grant is for zines not published yet. Submissions will be reviewed by a small collective of folks from the BIPOC and Zine making community.

In your application please state the title, theme, size, distribution size of your planned zine and anything else important to the creation of your zine.

Please send any questions and applications to: thearrowarchive@gmail.com

Deadline: April 3rd 2015
thearrowarchive@gmail.com



Vision for Thunder Woman Healing Lodge

by Thunder Woman Healing Lodge partners: Alana Rodrigo & Krysta Williams

"There can be no peace or harmony unless there is justice."
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION, ROOTED IN A HISTORY OF colonial practices, inaction on legislated policies and currently a politically driven "tough on crime" approach to justice explains the continued criminalization of Indigenous peoples and their extremely high rates in the criminal justice system. Despite the reduction in crime rates in Canada, the incarceration of our communities has increased by over forty percent and recent reports reveal that this growing trend of over incarceration is likely to continue.¹ Today, the Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) population is younger and exceeds the growth rate of any other population group in Canada.² According to the federal government, Aboriginal people in Canada make up just four point three percent of the total population, but constitute twenty-two percent of the federal inmate population. This number is even higher for female Aboriginal inmates who make up thirty-three point six percent of those federally sentenced in Canada.³

One way to tackle these devastating numbers and address the problem of the "revolving door" is to address re-incarceration rates with supportive programming. The Corrections and Conditional

Release Act (CCRA) includes "specific provisions (Sections 81 and 84), which are intended to address over-representation of Aboriginal people in federal penitentiaries and address long-standing differential outcomes for Aboriginal offenders."⁴ Section 81 of the Act allows for Correctional Services Canada (CSC) to establish agreements with our communities to share responsibilities for people who have offended and to enable the delivery of Aboriginal healing in the process of rehabilitation.

Despite these partnerships being mandated, "as of March 2012, there were only sixty-eight Section 81 bed spaces in Canada and no Section 81 agreements in British Columbia, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada or the North."⁵ Meaning that despite policy mandating community control and facilities, this has not been effectively implemented. In fact, it was not until 2011 that a lodge was created for Aboriginal women.⁶ The Healing Lodges serve an integral part in bridging the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal justice systems, but also, serve to address the cultural needs and healing processes⁷ that are extremely important to Aboriginal peoples.⁸ In spite of the potential benefits of S. 81 healing lodges and

available funding, “documentary record indicates that CSC chose to abandon its commitment to create new Section 81 agreements and facilities at the very same time as it was receiving additional government funding to do precisely that.”⁹ This is not surprising given the history and current reality of the treatment of Indigenous peoples by the federal government. Under funding and unreasonable delays are just some of many bureaucratic factors that try to undercut responsibilities.

This does not stop our communities from organizing! There is current a vision to build the Thunder Woman Healing Lodge project. This vision is to give Aboriginal women a place in Toronto to heal themselves from suffering systemic and personal harm; a place where they can grow, learn and embrace cultural values; a place where they can reclaim voice, spirit and wellness.

Thunder Woman Healing Lodge will be a Lodge for Aboriginal Women currently incarcerated

in federal penitentiaries. The purpose of the Lodge will be to support Aboriginal women who have offended to reshape their lives. Encompassing the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual components of the individual and be based on holistic concepts of the Medicine Wheel. While we understand that the criminalization of Indigenous women happens as a result of systemic violence and colonialism (and not just individual behaviours) the goal of this project is to provide an Aboriginal specific space for women who are sentenced.

This is a partnership project between, Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and with support from Toronto Doctor’s Lions Club. We are currently at the preliminary stage of developing our vision. Proceeds for our cause will go toward supporting our Project Manager and the feasibility research for our final proposal. 

For more information on this amazing project, please visit:
www.thunderwomanhealinglodge.ca

1 Howard Sapers, “Aboriginal Issues,” Annual Report of the Officer of the Correctional Investigator (2012-2013) <<http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/pdf/annrpt/annrpt20122013-eng.pdf>> (Accessed April 2014) at 30-31.

2 Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Metis and Inuit,” <<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>> (Accessed April 2014).

3 Sapers 30-31.

4 Office of the Correctional Investigator, “Spirit Matters: Aboriginal People and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act” (2012) <<http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/oth-aut/oth-aut20121022-eng.aspx#TOC2>> (Accessed April 2014) [Spirit Matters] para i.

5 Spirit Matters, para iv.

6 Ibid.

7 Through empathy-based programming the most vulnerable in society can begin to address some of the trust barriers that impede progress. See: Gabor Mate, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (New York: Random House, 2009) at 1-24.

8 The Federal Government has halted progress on the development of Healing Lodges despite reports by the Correctional Investigator that suggest that it is an important element to addressing Aboriginal over-incarceration and legislation requiring increasing shared custody. For more on how political will impacts policy issues, see: JSG Montaner et al., “The Canadian government’s treatment of scientific process and evidence Inside the evaluation of North America’s first supervised injecting facility,” *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(3): 220-225.

9 Spirit Matters, [emphasis added] para 39.

Uncovering Colonial Legacies: Indigenous Youth in Child Welfare (Dis)Placements

by Daniela Navia, Tyler Blackface, Angela Gladue, Tia Ledesma, Levi First Charger & Rita Henderson

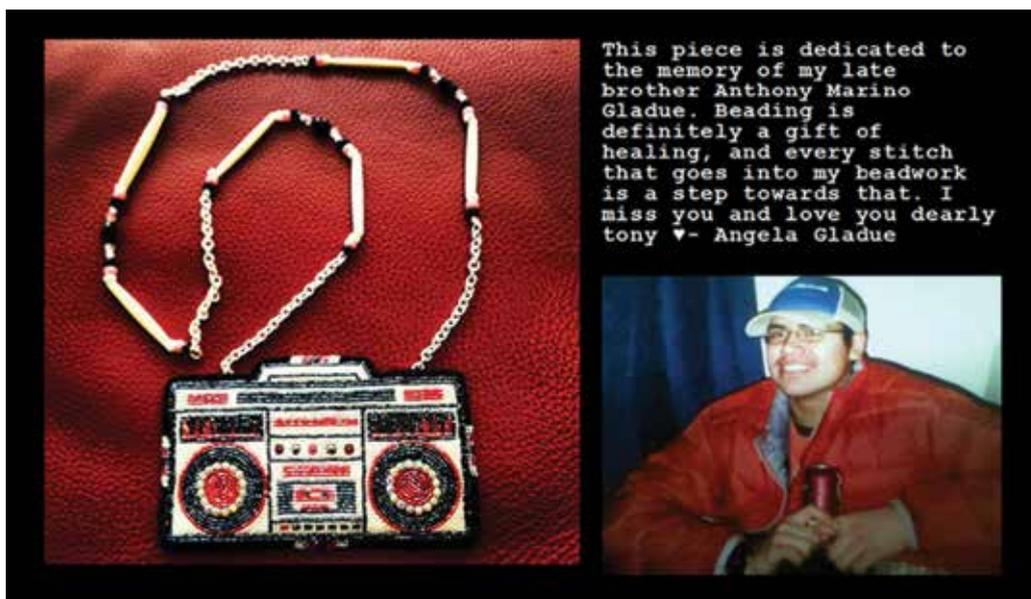
RE-IMAGINING: REIGNING IN THE NEW SKOOL



Angela Gladue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & THANKS

We would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking the Nations whose footsteps have marked the territory that we live on for thousands of years: the Tsuu T'ina, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani and Stoney. We would also like to acknowledge and thank all of our ancestors as well as the generations to come as they fuel our efforts to reaffirm the existence and power of Indigenous and racialized bodies across this continent and beyond.



This piece is dedicated to the memory of my late brother Anthony Marino Gladue. Beading is definitely a gift of healing, and every stitch that goes into my beadwork is a step towards that. I miss you and love you dearly tony ▼- Angela Gladue

THIS PAGE Beadwork by Angela Gladue

OPPOSITE Paintings by Tyler Blackface



ABOVE: I did this canvas to represent how important sobriety is to me. The graffiti style is used to represent my take on modern Native art. The dots represent the lives of those affected by alcoholism. -Tyler Blackface



ABOVE: This one represents my feelings while growing up in care. The red, black and yellow are colours from the medicine wheel. The white is supposed to represent a cage and how I felt that I couldn't be who I truly am while growing up "white." The gold is to represent the illusion of life being "golden" when I was facing numerous problems that I couldn't deal with at that time. -Tyler Blackface

You cried when I was born.
 gave me a name, forgot who I was there, your eyes daze
 over and focus on the scars on the wall
 Spirits lead you away

There, I was taken by the wrist.
 They took my name, took my clothes,
 took my life and washed it anew.
 I cried for the girl
 You forgot was inside
 I keep her away.

There, Her reflection will sometimes
 stare back at me
 Wake up and take your name back, she says
 My eyes daze over and I focus on living ghosts.

Mother, Do you remember me?
 Wake up and take your life back.
 Your eyes close and I focus on the blood on the wall.

Try to remember,
 I was a daughter once
 we want to forget but focus on the pictures on the walls
 That we hope
 will bring us back home.

You seem to remember-
 When you notice the flowers that bloom through the
 concrete ground.
 When you have true forgiveness for another
 Or see a fire that burns and gives new life.
 You remember that things can be renewed.
 Recalling your true form
 Like the souls and souls before your time,
You are resilient.

—Tia Ledesma

YOUTH VOICES ON THE MILLENNIUM SCOOP

There are currently three times the number of Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare system than were placed at the height of residential schools. Indigenous youth are removed from their families at alarming rates and communities and placed in foster homes, group homes, treatment centres and detention facilities, making up the majority of children in care throughout Canadian provinces. We seek to bring forward the voices of these youth in order to have a discussion on how ongoing colonialism shapes their lives and celebrate the importance of different forms of resistance.

The stories shared here have been part of a process of community building and critical conversations around Child Welfare that has taken place in Treaty 7 territory since July, 2014. Facilitated through the Urban Society of Aboriginal Youth and with the support of several service agencies in the city, youth shared their stories and art. The project, which combines research and social action is guided by an anti-colonial framework, seeking to challenge systemic hierarchies and encourage self-determination.

CONNECT WITH US

For more information about this project:
email: dnlnavia@gmail.com.

Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth: www.usay.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/urbansocietyforaboriginalyouth

OUR MESSAGE

The main messages we would like to share through this project is that Child Welfare is part of a larger historical and political process to facilitate:

1. Dispossession of land and resources
2. Assimilation of Indigenous peoples
3. Violence and violent indifference primarily toward Indigenous women, two spirit peoples and children

For Indigenous youth, resistance is extremely important and takes many forms including:

1. The refusal of dominant systems and ideologies
2. The resurgence of indigenous ways of knowing
3. The renewal of indigeneity in urban contexts

We are drawing from artistic and creative work that some of the youth created through the project to highlight each of these themes.

Daniela Navia is a Latin@ feminist from Bogota, Colombia. She is a Master's student at the University of Calgary in the department of anthropology and archeology interested in building better understandings of the relationship between colonialism, displacement and the experiences of Indigenous and racialized youth through advocacy grounded in oral traditions and the arts.

Tyler Blackface is 22 years-old from the Siksika Nation. He is sponsored for skateboarding and spends his time painting. He grew up in foster care since he was 3 years-old. He has faced several struggles in life such as alcoholism and homelessness

Angela Miracle Gladue represents Papaschase and Frog Lake First Nation. She has been blessed to be able to perform, teach and travel to many cities through-out Canada, The US, Asia, Australia, and Europe with various First Nation and Hip-Hop performing groups. Her passion is promoting living healthy lifestyles through dance and culture. To see more of Angela Gladue's work: www.misschiefrocka.wix.com

Tia Ledesma is 25 years-old from Siksika Nation. She is a mother of two children. Tia plans to continue to pursue her education and one day work in youth advocacy.

Levi First Charger is a graduate of the Justice Studies program with a specialization in Youth Justice. He is the outreach worker for the Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth working with Urban Aboriginal youth (ages 12 to 30) to promote cultural involvement, educational success, mentorship and healthy lifestyles.

Rita Henderson is a postdoctoral fellow whose research focuses on collaboratively engaging youth from conflict-affected communities in confronting structural violence. This form of violence involves harm often so commonplace and institutionalized that it is experienced as normal. Of non-Aboriginal origin, she is dedicated to improving teaching and learning about health inequities and conditions of social injustice affecting youth throughout Alberta.

Transformative Education, Liberation & the Struggle for the People's Minds

by Ajamu Nangwaya

"The responsibility of an artist [or organizer] representing an oppressed people is to make revolution irresistible."

- Toni Cade Bambara

» THE CONTEXT OF AFRIKAN EDUCATION

FROM THE START OF THE AFRIKAN PRESENCE IN THE Americas as enslaved workers, the system of education and other means of legitimizing ideas Afrikans have played a role in perpetuating white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism as the natural order of the world. Education has never been a neutral process for the Afrikan labouring classes.

Since coming to the Americas, many Afrikan communities have developed critical ways of knowing in order to affirm their humanity and to resist oppression. Afrikans have resisted through the creative use of new languages, carnival arts, religion and music, the creation of Maroon societies, engaging in rebellions, and retention of folk stories from Afrika and rites of passage. These acts of self-determination are dependent on educational processes to ensure their survival to the present period.

In Canada, very much like in the United States, the islands of the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Americas the education of enslaved Afrikans was not a priority. It was illegal in most slaveholding territories. The education of fugitive enslaved Afrikans from the United States and free Afrikans in Canada was primarily the responsibility of non-state actors such as churches, mission societies and local communities. According to Daniel Hill in the book *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*, the common schools in Upper Canada (today's Ontario) barred Afrikans from attending in spite of being individually-funded to the tune of 24,000 dollars from the government.

The de facto educational apartheid was recognized by the *Common Schools Act of 1850* in Upper

Canada that "authorize[d] the establishment of one or more Separate Schools for Protestants, Roman Catholics or Coloured People" as cited by Dr. Afua Cooper in the paper *Black Women and Work in Nineteenth Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb*. Both public common school and independent private schools were used to educate Afrikan children.

These segregated schools were generally affected by the problem of not having enough material resources. The experience of educational apartheid, culturally inappropriate and Eurocentric curriculum, and educational underachievement were relevant issues in the past and still remain the case in the present period as articulated in the text *Educating Black Canadians* by Keren S, Brathwaite and Carl E. James.

Afrikan students are disproportionately affected by the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon, suspension or expulsion from school, placement in non-university bound educational programmes, low high school graduation rates, high drop-out or push-out rates and teachers' low expectation of their potential for educational success.

The struggle for educational equity for Afrikans and other oppressed groups ought to take a broad approach. Afrikan learners ought to be exposed to an intersectionality framework that fosters an understanding of the way that multiple forms of oppression unite and impact the lives of individuals and groups.

Oftentimes, racist or white supremacist educational barriers are centred in the struggle against the formal educational system as it relates to Afrikan students. However, organizing for institutional change in schooling would be parochial, if it does not include the fight against patriarchy, capitalism and its class relations, heterosexism or homophobia, ableism and other forms of structural oppression that impact access to education.

» EDUCATION AS A SITE OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

It might appear problematic for radicals to call for transformative education in the formal educational system. Irrespective of how we feel about the existing system of education, most working-class students, especially those who are racialized, are going to in public schools as opposed to private ones.

Agents of educational equity and socially relevant education have a moral and political obligation to challenge the powers-that-be to place the worldview and material interests of students at the centre of the curriculum.

It should be clear to critical minds that all systems of formal education have the primary objective of reproducing the dominant economic, social, political and cultural structures in society. It is only logical that the preceding situation would be the case.

No society would intentionally set about creating an educational system that is explicitly dedicated to overthrowing it. Those of us who are committed to engaging the system of education of the white, patriarchal and capitalist ruling-class in Canada ought to get this basic reality right from the outset.

However, in spite of the commitment of the dominant social groups in using the educational system to train its students into accepting the social norms, values, beliefs and ways of seeing reality through the eyes of the former, radical learners still emerge from within the walls of the present classrooms.

The formal educational system does not exist as a uniform entity with the ability to remove all opportunities to prepare potential future gravediggers of the current society. There are margins of resistance within the educational system that provide space for transformative education. The preceding situation enables some learners to emerge as potential midwives to the birth of the future just society.

The Amilcar Cabrals, Angela Davis's, Peter Kropotkins, Claudia Jones, Sherona Halls, Frantz Fanons, Kwame Nkrumah, Ella Bakers, W.E.B. Du

Bois's, Karl Marxs, Rosie Douglass's, Dionne Brands, Maurice Bishops, and Winnie Mandelas embraced the struggle for social emancipation in spite of experiencing the conforming forces within the dominant educational structures.

However, the fact that the formal educational system is not churning out revolutionaries in droves could be taken as an indicator of its success in moulding most of us into compliant and subservient subjects of the ruling-class. This state of affairs might be taken as a measurement of the scope of the work that must be done to meet the educational needs of oppressed groups.

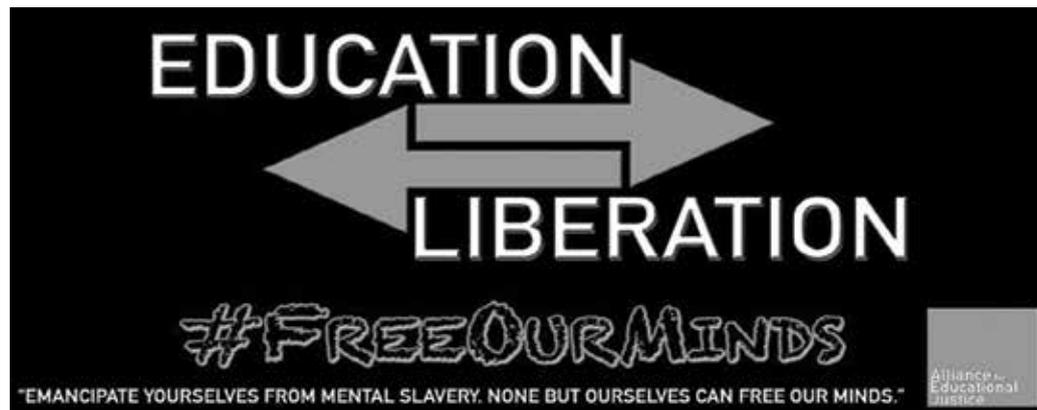
» TOWARD A TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

Karl Marx has quite correctly instructed us, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." It is necessary for organizers or activists to offer practical plans to deal with educational inequities. This form of education would allow the Afrikan community and other oppressed sectors in society to fight the dead weight of educational conformity that haunts their lives like an unwelcomed spectre or ghost.

Transformative education is committed to equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and attitude to use the educational processes and structures to critically understand and assess the world in which they live. It would encourage students to act in their school, community, and the wider society as activists/organizers. They would be educationally prepared to understand and strive to eliminate the systems of oppression that work singly and together to cause suffering, injustice and violence.

This radical approach to education would foster participatory, democratic, non-authoritarian and student-centred techniques of teaching and learning that would draw on the experience and social environment of the learners. The very process of transformative education ought to mirror the humane way that we would treat each other in the just society.

Organizing for institutional change in schooling would be parochial, if it does not include the fight against patriarchy, capitalism and its class relations, heterosexism or homophobia, ableism and other forms of structural oppression that impact access to education.



Our practice of transformative education will chase away the ghost of social conformity that has been implanted into our consciousness and behaviour. The powerful minority that rules society has been able to get us to embrace its ideas on social reality. It is clear that our response to this situation must work at developing a critical awareness and understanding of society among learners.

Our oppositional education for the oppressed ought to be mindful and guided by the claim of the Black Consciousness Movement revolutionary Steve Biko, “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

An education for liberation will help Afrikan students and other oppressed learners to become transformative beings and to abandon fatalistic thinking that tells us that we, the oppressed, are not capable of ending exploitation and injustice through collective action as critiqued by the late Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

What antidotes are we offering to eliminate the virus of dominant education with its oppressive features? The following actions are recommended as steps that can be taken to deal and or cope with the unacceptable or repressive educational experience of Afrikan students and others:

» BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION:

There will not be any significant shift in the philosophy and practice of education without a bottom-up organizing approach. It requires the active participation of parents, students and other members of the community. In the history of the resistance from Afrikans and other exploited groups, the oppressors rarely made concessions in the absence of collective oppositional actions from “the wretched of the earth.”

The struggle for transformative education will have to give priority to organizing parents, students and educational equity advocates into organizations that are committed to the creation of programmes,

projects and other initiatives to wage a consistent, principled, broad-based, and long-term struggle.

Merely mobilizing behind marches, rallies, demonstrations, vigils or occupations will not be sufficient for the type of permanent opposition that is needed to eliminate all forms of social domination. The emphasis on organizations is critical. It is based on the assumption that the people need a structured space wherein they may develop as ideologically-informed, skilled, politicized and active activists/organizers.

The organizations will form coalitions, networks or alliances that will contribute to a sustainable mass movement. It is essential that we draw the correct lessons from the past on how to effectively organize the resistance, create participatory democratic structures and leadership, and maintain the motivation, commitment and participation of the membership.

» ADVOCATE FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES:

We should prioritize the establishment of transformative, innovative and social justice-oriented educational programmes. They will serve as

We are politically obligated to organize around the needs of the people. The educational solutions that we offer should mirror those that we want in the just society of tomorrow.

models of the transformative education that we are seeking to establish throughout the educational system. The Africentric Alternative School in the Toronto District School Board is a model of the possibility to advance education for liberation. The success of alternative programmes would be used to build pressure and a constituency for the system-wide implementation of transformative educational innovations.

However, when we create educational experiments or facts-on-the-ground, we are obligated to take an intersectional or multi-oppression lens to social domination. We cannot compartmentalize our markers of identity such as class, gender, race, sexuality, age and ability. Therefore, any programme that privileges one form of oppression might end up privileging the experience of socially dominant groups within the ranks of the oppressed.

We ought to insist on not measuring the success of students by high-stakes standardized testing, because we would be pandering to the dominant educational approach that is opposed to critical thinking, and creative and innovative teaching and learning. Transformative education is committed to educating students to not become mere cogs in the machinery of oppression.

»DEVELOP COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES:

With the emergence of the Black Power Movement in the United States in the 1960s, its commitment to community control of schools led to the creation of independent schools for the education of Afrikan students. Independent schools are potential sites of innovation, experimentation and creativity in the methods and programmes that are used.

However, the movement would need to be methodical in developing a transformative curriculum that transforms the learners into revolutionaries who are committed to eliminating all systems of oppression. Independent, movement-controlled

Transformative education is committed to educating students to not become mere cogs in the machinery of oppression.

schools are not therapeutic spaces for the emergence of narrow identity politics, and the preparation of students who are merely educationally successful by the standards of the dominant society. The graduates of independent schools ought to be self-conscious, movement-involved agents of change.

Even homeschooling may be creatively used to prepare homeschoolers for a transformative educational experience because of its non-traditional approach to learning. There ought to be a shift away from the largely individualistic focus of homeschooling that is dependent on the unpaid labour of women.

Homeschooling can become collective initiatives that use the labour of men and women and other resources in the community. A group centred approach to homeschooling would contend with the following favourable conditions: draw upon the resources all participants, emphasize collective action, and minimal regulation by the state.

This movement would need to create innovative funding models to sustain these independent educational structures.

We are politically obligated to organize around the needs of the people. The educational solutions that we offer should mirror those that we want in the just society of tomorrow. △



Ajama Nangwaya, Ph.D., is an educator and organizer. He is an organizer with the Network for the Elimination of Police Violence and the Organization for Afrikan Struggles and International Solidarity.



#blacklivesmatterTO

December 14th, 2014: Over 300 people stage a die-in at the intersection of Yonge and Dundas in Toronto. The action was part of a Turtle Island-wide day of action calling out state sanctioned violence against Black people.

PHOTO by Jalani Morgan



Our youth walk these streets
unable to keep minds free
unable to lye down
and put heads to sleep

sunrise
still get to school
and all of your
little brothers and sisters
followed you

you get criticized
for the lower than average mood
lucky to have arrived
nevermind late
been up all these hours
and havent even ate

if they only knew

to say good morning
it's nice to see you

come in,
you're welcome
have a seat
have something to eat

A FRIENDLY REMINDER



re·imagining

REIGNING IN THE NEW SKOOL