

Black Community Hub in Durham Region

Rationale, Environmental Scan and
Community Recommendations

Report by RFWC Consulting

About the Community Collective

African, Caribbean, and Black community members from across Durham Region have shared countless stories about their experiences with anti-Black racism. In October 2020, Durham Region sought to identify strategies to address the prevalence of anti-Black racism within the Region. Through the Anti-Black Racism Pillar, it was identified that there was a need for community collaborations, particularly as a means of centering Black voices.

CAREA, the Durham District School Board, the Durham Children's Aid Society, Durham Family and Cultural Centre, Black Queens of Durham, and the Women's Multicultural Resource Centre, came together in June 2020 to discuss resources for Black families in Durham Region linked to CAREA's leadership in the Black Health Strategy framework. Discussions expanded, and the collective grew to include community-based groups from across Durham Region specializing in services and supports for Black children, youth, families and seniors. To date, the Community Collective has representation from across a plethora of sectors, including children's services, mental health, education, and professional service networks.

The Durham Region Collective ("the Collective") understands that the African, Caribbean and Black community of Durham Region requires improved and culturally responsive services for children, youth, families and seniors. Recognizing that there are initiatives that support the Black community in Durham, the Collective has developed a coordinated, holistic approach to service delivery with a focus on the overall well-being of Black communities.

Collaborating on shared goals, the Collective proposes the development of a community hub ("the Hub") as a central point for community members to access a range of programs and services, and which can be used as a gathering space grounded in Black joy, self-determination and collective action. Part of the strategic planning process for the Hub includes targeted engagement, community conversations and the production of a body of research.

Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge and thank the African, Caribbean and Black community across Durham Region for providing a critical community voice, and for sharing experiences, concerns and sound recommendations. The information in this report could not have been compiled without your invaluable input.

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Report Overview

This report provides extensive evidence and community-centred recommendations for the development of a Black community hub in Durham Region. The report opens with a literature review exploring anti-Black racism in Canada and its deleterious impact on Black communities' sense of identity, belonging, and access to culturally relevant and responsive services. Strategies to eliminate and mitigate the effects of anti-Black racism are also outlined in the literature review, including the strategy of the establishment of Black community hubs which create spaces that provide support, empowerment, and safe havens for Black communities. Examples of successful community hubs across North America are highlighted in this report's Environmental Scan, with special emphasis on Black-led, Black-serving community hubs throughout Canada and the US. Examples of successfully implemented Indigenous community centres are also highlighted to emphasize the strategic value of the deliberate establishment of community-focused spaces.



Community voices are critical to the successful and relevant creation of a community hub. By collating the feedback acquired via conversations and targeted engagements with Durham’s Black, African and Caribbean communities, this report outlines these communities’ accounts of the impact of anti-Black racism on their lived experiences and sense of belonging, as well as the overwhelming value that a Black-led, Black-serving Durham community hub could provide. The report concludes with recommendations from Durham’s Black, African and Caribbean communities on development strategies, including potential goals, the hub’s organizational structure, core values, and the programs and services that could be provided.

Literature Review

Home to over 38 million people of various ethnic origins, Canada has been ranked number one out of seventy-eight countries around the globe for quality of life and overall liveability¹.

Data collected in 2016 points to almost 1.2 million people in Canada identifying as Black, with more than half of this Black population residing in Ontario². This Black population in Ontario is rich and diverse; while close to half of Ontario's Black population was born in Canada, just as many have immigrated to Canada from 150 different countries, including Jamaica, Nigeria, Somalia, Trinidad and Tobago, and other countries within Africa and the Caribbean³. Despite this diversity, Black communities in Ontario and in Canada share many commonalities, one of which is the pervasive discrimination centred around their racial identity.

“The Black population in Ontario is **rich and diverse.**”

Anti-Black Racism

First expressed by Ryerson University social work professor Dr Akua Benjamin, 'anti-Black racism' refers to "policies and practices rooted in Canadian institutions such as education, health care, and justice, that mirror and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of Black-African descent"⁴. Far from being an issue to which Canada is immune, anti-Black racism is systemic and pervasive, manifesting across multiple sectors and reducing the potential of Black Canadians across the country⁵.

A quick glance at news media stories and research reports corroborates this sobering reality; on June 14 2022, for example, an article was published⁶ revealing race based statistics from Toronto Police reaffirming the disproportionate treatment of Black persons by police compared to white persons.

Similar disparities can be observed within the employment sector - research suggests that Black professionals are **more likely to encounter racial prejudice and micro aggressions** than any other racial group⁷. A new report released by the One Vision One Voice program in collaboration with the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work suggests that schools and police in Ontario are **more likely to refer Black children** than white children in child maltreatment-related investigations⁸.

Research also suggests that despite having higher levels of education, Black women are **more likely** than white women to be unemployed⁹.

Effects of Anti-Black Racism

While the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism on Black communities in Canada is staggering, even more sobering is its negative impacts on mental and physiological health, as well as on social, economic and overall wellbeing. Experiences with racial discrimination are associated with depression, anxiety, hopelessness and trauma¹⁰ with such significance that the Toronto Board of Health declared anti-Black racism a public health crisis¹¹.

Canadian research in particular has found significant associations between anti-Black racism and Black poverty, unemployment, incarceration, deportation and disproportionate child removal¹². Subsequent negative impacts on feelings of belonging, self-esteem and identity may be compounded by prejudicial generalizations about Black communities that are disseminated - both overtly and covertly - within the media¹³ and in the general public.

Addressing Anti-Black Racism Through Community Hubs

The depth of trauma and injury caused to Black Canadians as a result of anti-Black racism, as well as the barriers to equitable opportunities, make its continued existence in Canada intolerable. Naming and interrogating anti-Black racism are critical steps in confronting the phenomenon and mitigating its effects¹⁴. Many systems and organizations within Canada are already doing this, and are prioritizing the elimination of anti-Black racism as part of their strategic plans. The Government of Ontario, for example, has created an anti-Black racism strategy with a vision of the “elimination of disparity outcomes for Black Ontarians in the child welfare, education and justice sectors by 2024 to align with the close of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent”¹⁵.



Also important in addressing anti-Black racism is actively finding ways to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for Black Canadians¹⁶. Research suggests that providing tangible opportunities to experience acceptance, positive recognition and security allows people to feel included and respected¹⁷ and can be significant in improving overall wellbeing¹⁸.

Community hubs are person and community centred spaces that have the ability to do just that, providing opportunities for community engagement, collaboration, and informal community interaction, as well as a wide range of services including recreation, education, health services and social supports¹⁹.



Identifying community hubs as a “policy priority”²⁰, the Government of Ontario posits that these hubs make it “easier for local residents to access the health, social, cultural, recreational and other resources they need together in one spot”²¹.

In light of the racial trauma and deleterious effects that anti-Black racism can have on the Black community, community hubs can therefore serve as a central access point for services that can nourish the Black community,²² celebrate Black cultures and build social cohesion.

Benefits of Community Hubs Include²³:

- Enhanced learning opportunities and well-being for children and youth
- The ability to respond to the needs of the Black community
- Access to early-intervention programs and other efficient, sustainable services
- Improved outcomes for the Black community
- A Return on Investment that can provide social, financial and environmental value to founders, funders and key stakeholders

Community hubs also provide community members with an easy way to access a wide variety of culturally-appropriate services in one physical space, minimizing transportation costs and challenges and maximizing community engagement and the enhancement of social capital²⁴.

Acknowledging that having a sense of belonging is crucial to persons' personal and collective success, the Regional Municipality of Durham has pledged commitment to the elimination of anti-Black racism and to long-term, systemic change via the development of an Anti-Black Racism Pillar²⁵. With evidence clearly illustrating the benefits of establishing dedicated community spaces, the formation of a Black community hub in Durham region can therefore be a valuable strategy in disrupting the harmful impacts of anti-Black racism, serving as a source of refuge, restoration, growth, development, networking, and culturally relevant and responsive services for Black communities that are so often bombarded with discrimination and systemic barriers.

Environmental Scan

North America is home to a wide array of community hubs that focus on providing culturally relevant and responsive programs and services for specific communities. This section outlines six examples of successful community hubs within Canada and the US, with emphasis placed on the community hubs' missions, organizational structures, programs and services, and public visibility.

Black-led, Black-serving Community Hubs



Google Images

The African American Community Service Agency

San Jose, California

The African American Community Service Agency (AACSA) was founded in 1978 and is one of the only African American cultural centres in California's Silicon Valley. Available to community members seven days a week, AACSA reports that its facilities "open early and close late" to accommodate a wide range of schedules.

Structure

The AACSA is Black-led and supported by a full team, including an executive director, an associate director, program managers, an operations and finance manager, a youth engagement coordinator, community workers, program coordinators, administrative staff and student interns. This community hub is also managed by a predominantly-Black Board of Directors.

Programs & Services

The AACSA provides services under six distinct pillars: education, health & wellness, economic development, social services, racial & social justice, and the Family Resource Center (FRC).

Some of AACSA's key initiatives and programs are highlighted on the following page.



Mission

Providing quality educational, cultural, social and recreational programs, services and activities in order to perpetuate and strengthen African American identity, culture, values, traditions, knowledge and family life.



- The AACSA Meaningful Life Initiative (AMLI)

The AMLI hosts culturally relevant events, community celebrations, education support systems for persons of all ages, and provides access to other social services.

- The Beyond School Hours program

This program brings together other initiatives designed to address the educational, health, emotional awareness and mental development of youth outside of their regular school activities. Programs under the Beyond School Hours program include the AACSA Leadership Academy, Summer Science Camp, Kids Club, Census 2020 and Science Technology Art Math (S.T.E.A.M.).

- Young Adults Education Workshop

The Young Adults Education Workshop program provides workshops and seminars designed to prepare young adults in the transition to adult life and covers areas such as interview techniques, resume writing, financial management, and dressing for success.

- Information Referral Center

The AACSA offers a virtual web portal via which churches and other organizations, including non-profit organizations, can advertise services and activities aimed at providing value to the community.

- Health & Wellness Program

This program offers events, workshops and seminars that focus on the health and development of the community. It includes Senior Brown Bag Distribution, Senior Holiday/Christmas Luncheons, the provision of Thanksgiving food baskets, and Christmas Toys for Tots.

- Information Career Center

The Information Career Center program provides the community with tools, services and activities to help access jobs and intern opportunities and to facilitate career development. Also included in this program are job fairs and relevant seminars and workshops that allow the community to share their own experiences and leads, to assist others with obtaining a job.

Visibility

The AACSA receives noticeable engagement on its virtual platforms, with its Facebook page ‘liked’ and ‘followed’ by over 2000 people. Serving the African American community for 44 years, the Agency states that its programs and services touch the lives of approximately 200,000 people on an annual basis and markets itself as “the” place for social, recreational, and cultural activities for all ages and stages of the community. The AACSA also maintains a website that provides information about the Agency’s history, structure, and programs. More information about the AACSA can be found [here](#).



Tropicana Community Services

Scarborough, Ontario

Founded in 1980 as a non-profit community organization, Tropicana Community Services is a Toronto-based, multi-service organization that offers culturally-aware and supportive programs, including counselling, settlement services, childcare, education, personal development, and employment services, with a predominant focus on the Caribbean, Black and African Communities of Toronto.

In 1984, Tropicana Community Services became the first Caribbean, Black, and African community organization to become a United Way member agency. The organization currently has partnerships with the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the City of Toronto, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre, and the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough.

Structure

Tropicana Community Services is funded by the government and by corporate donors, including Royal Bank of Canada, Amazon, TD Canada Trust and United Way. The organization is governed by a predominantly-Black Board of Directors.



Mission

To provide all youth, newcomers, people of Black and Caribbean heritage and others in need with opportunities and alternatives that lead to success and positive life choices.

Programs and Services

Tropicana Community Services offers a number of culturally-appropriate programs and services through both internal development and external services. Programs include:

- Culturally Appropriate Counselling

The Culturally Appropriate Counselling Department is staffed by counsellors from the Black and Caribbean community. With the dialects, customs, references and cultural norms of clients being reflected by the counselling staff, this department provides ethno-specific services and therefore receives regular referrals from the mainstream setting to provide services to Black, Caribbean and African families. Over 1800 community members were supported between 2020 and 2021.

- Transitional Housing and Support

This program advocates for women to “receive subsidized priority housing to escape domestic violence”.

- Stop Now and Plan Black, African & Caribbean Kids (SNAP BACK)

SNAP BACK offers guidance to youth between 6 and 11 years old on emotional regulation, self control and problem-solving skills.

- Caribbean Lime

Due to an increased need for senior support in the community, Caribbean Lime amalgamated their Women Empowering Women Support Network and Gentlemen’s Forum - Leadership by Design, to provide opportunities for social connections and recreation for seniors during COVID-19.

- Social Services

Tropicana receives donations from Whole Foods, Red Lobster and other food sources, and redistributes them to individuals and families facing food insecurity. Tropicana Community Services also hosts a food and toy drive to support Black communities in need.



- Tropicana Employment Centre (TEC)

TEC provides employment services to youth and adults to help prepare them to meet the challenges of the job market. This program offers year-round access to resources including training workshops, one-on-one pre-employment counselling, and job placements.

- Youth Development & Education (YDE)

YDE provides children and youth between 5 and 18 years old with programs that focus on academic skills, recreational interests and the development of life skills. The program aims to foster a safe and nurturing environment where participants can develop intellectually, morally, emotionally and socially.

- Tropicana Daycare

The Children of Tomorrow Daycare Centres provide culturally appropriate childcare to children between 3 months and 12 years old, allowing parents the opportunity to work or attend school. These daycare centres operate from two locations and have served the community for over 30 years.

Visibility

Tropicana Community Services maintains an active social media presence and a website which transparently outlines annual reports and financial reports for the public's consumption.

One client provided the following feedback about Tropicana Community Services, emphasizing the significance and benefit of having hubs that are community-focused:

“When I joined the program, it provided me with a sense of community. Since the passing of my husband, I have been alone, but being in the program provides me with an escape, comfort, and community.”

More information about Tropicana Community Services can be found [here](#).

Africa Centre

Edmonton, Alberta

Incorporated in 2006, Africa Centre is the largest pan-African, non-profit organization in western Canada that serves as a community hub. With Alberta having the third-largest Black population in Canada, the Centre provides culturally-aware programs and services to Black families within the community. Africa Centre's core values include accountability, integrity, responsiveness, inclusivity, respect, passion and excellence.

Structure

Africa Centre is Black-led, with a Black Board and Black staff including an executive director, managers, administrative staff, communication and social media staff, and program and project coordinators. Africa Centre also has a large number of partners and funders, including the Alberta Government, the Government of Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Royal Bank of Canada, and Edmonton Family & Community Support Services.

Programs and Services

- Early Learning and Child Care

Catering to children between 12 months and 12 years old, this program facilitates culturally relevant, affordable childcare and programs through a holistic approach to early learning, utilizing qualified teachers, creative lessons, active learning and play facilities.

- Youth Programs

Africa Centre's youth programs focus on promoting education, re-establishing cultural identity, reducing high-risk behaviours, enhancing protective factors and increasing the circles of support for youth of African descent.



Mission

“Create opportunities for access and full participation of the African descent community in Alberta.”

- Seniors' Wellbeing & Engagement

Africa Centre prioritizes initiatives that support seniors in the community, particularly as the aging Black community in Alberta continues to grow. The Seniors Program aims to combat social isolation among seniors through the enhancement of general wellbeing, increasing social connections and promoting skill-development. The Seniors Program provides exercise classes, arts and crafts, cooking opportunities, conversational circles, workshops, and community outreach to seniors in the area who are unable to travel to the facility.

- Mental Health

The ArTeMo project aims to provide tools and strategies that address barriers to the mental health and wellbeing of Black Canadians, and makes a special effort to empower Black Canadians who identify as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

- Ujima Fellowship Program

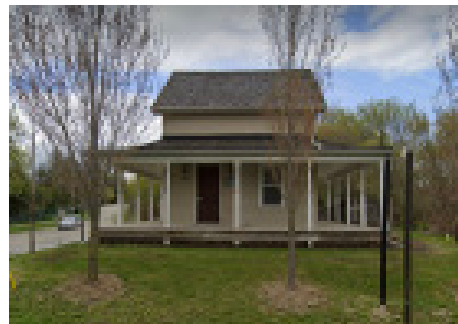
The Ujima Fellowship is a leadership development program funded by the Government of Canada that aims to support young Black leaders between 18 and 30 years old who are looking to develop leadership skills and want to serve on advisory or policy-making platforms. In collaboration with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and various community partners, the program includes 35 hours of in-class leadership training, placement with a volunteer agency, board, commission or committee, and 20 hours of volunteer work.

Visibility

The Africa Centre maintains a strong social media presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter, with over 1700 follows on Facebook. The Centre also has a detailed, transparent website that provides the Centre's financial statements, annual reports and strategic plans. Further information about the Africa Centre can be found [here](#).

The Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association Community Centre Newmarket, Ontario

The Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association (NACCA) was established in 2018 to provide Black communities access to resources and opportunities for advancement, and to foster pride in identity, culture and history for people of African descent. In December 2021, NACCA officially opened a new community centre to provide a physical space in which to further their mandate in York Region.



Operating from a centre of Blackness, Black consciousness and Black experiences, this is the first Black-led community centre in Newmarket, and serves to provide the Black community with a sense of belonging and to preserve Black culture. Newmarket’s Mayor John Taylor has described NACCA as an “emerging leader in dismantling anti-Black racism and providing culturally relevant services to community members”. NACCA’s values include mentorship and education, youth engagement, innovation, cultural diversity and empowerment.

Mission

“A group of like-minded individuals who are committed to sharing and celebrating our stories - the stories that form the foundation of our collective history.”

Structure

The NACCA Community Hub operates under a small Board of Directors and relies on the contributions of volunteers to assist with the running of its programs and initiatives.



Programs and Services

NACCA offers many programs and services, including:

- A Financial literacy program

To assist with economic independence and wealth building, NACCA offers financial literacy services to help families achieve financial wellness via an afrocentric educational model.

- Mental Health support

NACCA offers culturally-relevant mental health education and counselling support programs for Black youth and families addressing a wide variety of issues, including trauma, depression, anxiety, grief and stress. The NACCA network of therapists and counsellors work from an anti-oppressive framework.

- Educational programs

NACCA offers educational programs that teach, share and honour Black history.

- Food Security Program

With support from the York Region Food Network, NACCA offers a food security program for members of the African, Black and Caribbean community in Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury who are experiencing a food need. The program includes the free biweekly delivery of food baskets and grocery gift cards.

- An annual scholarship program

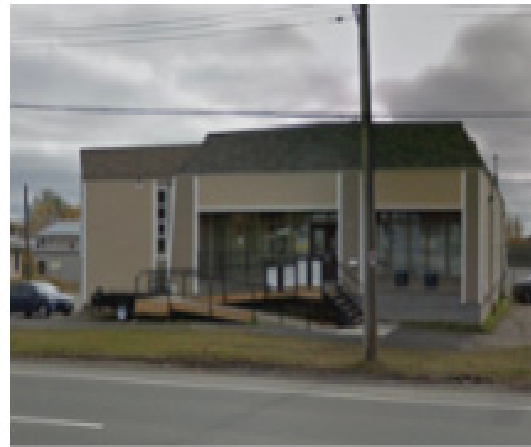
The NACCA Scholarship is awarded to York Region students who self-identify as persons of African descent to assist with their post-secondary education.

Visibility

NACCA maintains an active social media presence and a website that provides links to relevant resources, including educational resources and Black-owned businesses. More information about NACCA can be found [here](#).

Indigenous Community Hubs

Other communities that are desirous of a space that provides culturally-relevant and responsive services have also successfully established community hubs within Canada. Indigenous communities, for example, have established Friendship Centres across Canada with a vision of “improving the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian society and which respect Indigenous cultural [distinctiveness](#)”. Examples of such hubs within Canada are provided below.



Google Images



North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre

North Bay, Ontario

The North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre serves as a gathering place where “Aboriginal culture is celebrated, friendships are made, knowledge and skills are shared and good times are enjoyed”.

Structure

The Centre is operated by a Board of Directors comprising a President, Vice President, Secretary and Director. Also serving the community via this Centre is an Indigenous Executive Director and other Indigenous staff.

Programs and Services

The North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre connects the Indigenous community of all ages to programs and services focused on health, culture, the legal system, employment and housing. A few of the Centre’s key initiatives are highlighted here.

- Aboriginal Healthy Children - Health Babies Program

Aimed at families with children between 0 and 6 years old, this program offers home visits, education and support around elements such as cultural teachings, parenting, nutrition, building self esteem, and the promotion of healthy living and healthy relationships.



Mission

“To improve the quality of life for First Nation, Metis and Inuit people in the urban environment of North Bay by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access and participation in society and which respect Aboriginal culture distinctiveness.”

- Indigenous Children’s Wellness Program

Grounded in cultural traditions and utilizing cultural resources, this program promotes positive development and life choices of Urban Indigenous children between 7 and 14 years old who have experienced violence.

- The Aboriginal Drug & Alcohol Program

Designed as a community-based assessment, referral and support program, this initiative aims to promote lifestyles free from drugs and gambling within the Indigenous community, and to provide education and culturally appropriate addiction treatment services for Indigenous persons with addiction issues.

- Indigenous Community Justice Program

Based on Indigenous concepts of justice and traditional teachings, this program was designed to provide a meaningful alternative to the mainstream criminal justice system by offering support to the Indigenous community on justice and court related issues, to address the over-representation of Indigenous peoples in the justice system.

- A place to Gather (Enjamonjading)

This initiative focuses on providing cultural approaches and land-based activities, such as collaborations with elders, language retention, culture camps, and Indigenous Cultural Awareness Sessions to facilitate traditional knowledge transfer.

- Suswin Housing First Program

This program was developed to help urban Aboriginal people facing housing barriers find safe, affordable housing with community support in the Nipissing region.

Visibility

The Centre receives noticeable engagement on its virtual platforms, with its Facebook page being ‘liked’ and ‘followed’ by almost 4000 people. The Centre also maintains a website that details its history, mission and services. More information about the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre can be found [here](#).



Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre

Thunder Bay, Ontario

The Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre (TBIFC) was founded in 1964 and incorporated in 1968. TBIFC aims to empower and support Native people in Thunder Bay via a wide array of programs and services.

Structure

TBIFC is operated by a Board of Directors comprising a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Directors.

Programs and Services

TBIFC offers a wide range of programs to serve the Indigenous community in Thunder Bay. A few of the TBIFC's key initiatives are highlighted below.

- Indigenous Healing and Wellness

This strategy aims to reduce family violence, promote healthy lifestyles and deliver culture-based programs and services to promote holistic healing.

- Anishnawbe Skills Development Program

The Anishnawbe Skills Development Program offers Mathematics and English services for individuals aged 18 and over.

- Apatisiwin Employment Program

This program aims to provide Aboriginal people with opportunities to gain the relevant education, experience and skills to achieve and maintain meaningful employment.



Mission

“Rooted in culture, the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre strengthens the lives of Indigenous people by providing holistic supports, services and advocacy”.

- Youth Life Promotions (YLP)

The YLP program, founded on cultural reclamation and self-determination, is designed to support the success of urban Indigenous youth between 13 and 24 years old.

- Wiisinadaa: Let's Eat!

This is a food-based, diabetes prevention and management program that seeks to improve health outcomes for urban Indigenous people. Program strategies include increasing access, knowledge and skills around healthy eating, nutrition, traditional foods and traditional ways of knowing.

Visibility

The Centre receives noticeable engagement on its virtual platforms, with its Facebook page 'liked' and 'followed' by over 4500 people. The Centre also maintains a website that details its history, mission and services and offers services by phone, the web, and in person. More information about the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre can be found [here](#).

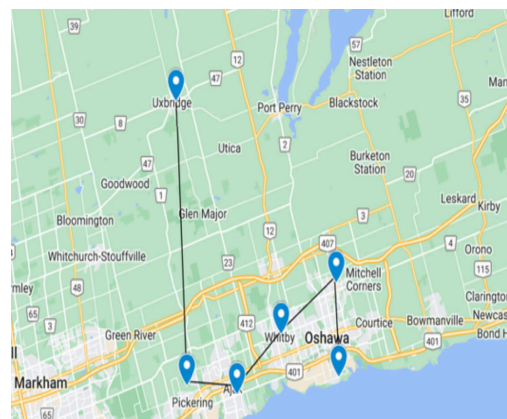


Durham Region

Community Feedback and Recommendations

Amongst the various theories considered within the social sector to guide the development of social services for communities is the cross-sector alignment theory of change. This theory posits that social services can better meet the needs and objectives of the communities served if, when change is being made, the will of the community in question is considered and reflected upon²⁶. Input from the community is therefore critical to the consideration and planning of any community-centred space.

The following section outlines the views and recommendations shared by a sample of eighty-seven Black, African and Caribbean Durham community members who provided feedback on the significance and benefits of establishing a Black-led, Black-serving community hub in Durham Region. Engagement sessions were conducted both virtually, via the Zoom platform, and in-person, to provide the opportunity for maximum accessibility and participation.



Google Maps image illustrating the locations of the in-person engagement sessions.

North Durham
Uxbridge Secondary School, Uxbridge ON

Pickering
Pine Ridge Secondary School, Pickering,
ON

Whitby
Region of Durham HQ, Whitby ON

South Oshawa
G.L. Roberts Collegiate & Vocational
Institute,
Oshawa ON

North Oshawa
Maxwell Heights Secondary School, Os-
hawa ON

South Ajax
Ajax High School, Ajax, ON

Guiding Questions

Participants were provided with the following guiding questions to help facilitate rich dialogue:

- What issues have you faced as someone with a Black identity within Durham Region?
- What core values are shared within the African diasporic community living in Durham Region?
- What would the benefits be, if any, to the formulation of a Black community hub in Durham Region?
- What elements would be crucial to the success of a Black community hub in Durham?

Common Issues Faced

While the cultures and experiences of Black communities are rich and diverse, many Black people report similar experiences of discrimination and inequitable treatment as a direct consequence of manifestations of anti-Black racism within Durham Region. Awareness and understanding of some of the key challenges faced by Durham's Black community can assist with the creation of a dedicated space that meets the community's needs.

1. Challenges with accessing culturally-reflective services within the community

A recurring concern shared by participants was the difficulty in finding community programs and services in Durham that feel safe, comfortable and culturally-relevant. Many participants stated that available programs in the Region are not reflective of the Black community, and that when they are able to find culturally-reflective programs, there is limited accessibility, either due to geographical location or to cost.



“You have to travel to Toronto to get access to appropriate programming.”

Participants also lamented the lack of culturally-appropriate services for elders; elder-access to familiar foods and culturally-appropriate activities were identified as lacking within Durham, indicating a need for a space where elders can interact with their peers in a welcoming, comforting setting. A gap in culturally-appropriate services for children and youth was also identified; participants emphatically advocated for the need for accessible programs and services that could help with the personal, social, academic and professional development of Black children and youth. One participant highlighted limited access to culturally-appropriate STEM-related programs as an example, and stated that this gap serves as evidence of marginalization and implies that Black youth are not considered “smart enough” to engage in these and similar programs. In addition, participants identified general challenges with accessing culturally-reflective resources, education and mental health support, positing that this gap in services leads to systematic displacements, with Black people in the Region being ripped from their traditions.

“Black youth don’t even think that cultural services exist here.”

Overall, participants identified the need:

- To have a space that is culturally-relevant and accessible
- For advocacy and support for Black families, including migrating families, to be able to navigate all systems
- For resource directories that outline Black agencies and organizations
- To have a dedicated space for Black historical teachings
- To have a dedicated space where various skillsets and knowledge bases can be brought together
- To intentionally meet the needs of persons of various age groups, including youth and elders

2. A lack of inclusiveness and belonging within the Region



“Mentors and coaches often don’t look like us.”

A recurring concern shared by participants was that of not feeling welcomed in non-Black spaces, due to experiences of over-policing, over-surveillance and micro-aggressions. These experiences were described as often leading to discomfort and feelings of not belonging, particularly for Black children. Black children, in fact, were described as being “adultified” and not being allowed to feel or act like children in schools or in other ‘white’ programs such as organized sports, due to existing biases and stereotypes.

Terms like “hovering”, “being watched” and “being followed too closely” were frequently used to describe interactions in Durham’s community spaces, including within the school system, where Black students are described as being treated differently than their white peers. Overall, participants identified feeling mistreated and misunderstood, and shared a desire to have a space where they could interact with people of the same culture.

“All of these issues are resulting in trauma for us and are re-emphasizing the incredible need for a healing space operated by people that we can trust.”



Shared Values

While many participants reported sharing similar feelings of displacement, a lack of belonging and a loss of identity in non-Black spaces, they also enthusiastically spoke about many of the values that are shared and treasured throughout the Black community. Many of these key values are listed below, and can be consulted and incorporated in the development of a Black Community hub.



Benefits of a Black community hub

All participants identified immense value in the creation of a dedicated Black Community space in Durham Region. In line with this report's literature review, participants proposed that such a space:

- Would provide a sense of belonging
- Would provide an opportunity to connect with similar people
- Would help with mental health issues that Black people face
- Would give children and youth the confidence and knowledge that there's a space which offers support for what they need
- Would help increase and sustain economic empowerment
- Would foster a sense of pride for Black people to be able to gather with peers that they can relate to
- Would provide a space to feel seen and heard

Community Recommendations

The recommendations in this section have been directly informed by representatives from Durham's Black, African and Caribbean communities, and focus specifically on the potential structure, culture, and priorities of a Black Community hub in Durham, as well as on promotional strategies.

Recommendations on promotional strategies

A common, recurring theme stemming from engagement sessions was the significance of having an effective marketing strategy to ensure public awareness and to build positive regard for the community space. Participants suggested that emphasis should be placed on community outreach, word of mouth and on creating a strong media (including social media) presence, to facilitate the effective marketing and promotion of the hub. Participants also emphasized the importance of going into Black communities to spread the word of the hub's existence so that community members with limited media access are also reached. Churches, schools, and events were highlighted as places where hub promotion could occur.





“We need to go where the people are - to the Barber shops, the West Indian grocery stores.”

Recommendations on Hub Structure

- The hub should be easily accessible by public transit
- The hub should have solid and consistent funding. As the wealth of Black businesses increases, especially if Black businesses are leaned upon as a resource, these businesses will be able to give back to the community
- The hub should be led by passionate community members who have a strong understanding of community needs and are able to develop meaningful network connections
- Consultants should be hired in the planning stages, and any subsequent Black hub staff should be compensated
- Experts should be used for grant writing
- The hub should be guided by advisory boards that keep track of community needs

Recommendations on Hub Culture

Participants suggested that the Community Hub should:

- Have an accessible and inviting atmosphere
- Be a positive space where people can be authentic and feel valued and uplifted
- Be adaptable and responsive to community needs
- Instil hope and optimism
- Foster growth, healing and creativity

Recommendations on Hub Priorities

Participants overwhelmingly identified the following elements as key priorities:

- A focus on meeting the diverse needs of Durham's Black communities
- The provision of networking opportunities
- An emphasis on accountability
- Opportunities for collaborations with existing Black organizations and groups
- Community outreach
- Community gardens, green space access and a Farmer's Market to be able to grow food
- Opportunities for cultural learning
- Tutoring programs
- Specific programs and services for elders, as the knowledge-keepers of Black communities
- Intervention services
- Opportunities for positive, informal community gatherings
- Access to mental health services
- Mentorship opportunities
- Newcomer support
- Professional services, including life courses, career guidance and skill-based job shadowing
- Youth awards and scholarships

“We want to move from surviving to thriving.”

It should be noted that many of the key priorities identified by participants have been successfully incorporated in other community hubs, as illustrated in this report's environmental scan. This provides an optimistic outlook on the ability to successfully implement a similar model in Durham Region.



Summary & Conclusion

Black Community hubs provide a dedicated space for healing, learning opportunities, kinship, and advancement of the community served; benefits made even more significant in light of anti-Black racism and its deleterious impact on Black communities' sense of belonging, identity, opportunities for progression, and overall well being. Over eighty-five Black community members from Durham Region participated in engagement sessions to provide input on their experiences and collective needs as a Black community. The overwhelming majority of participants stated that existing community spaces in Durham lack culturally-appropriate programs and services, and that the culturally appropriate spaces that do exist are either too expensive, or too far away. Participants also highlighted innumerable experiences of discrimination and inequitable treatment that have led to feelings of discomfort, exclusion and other individual and collective consequences. The deficits in culturally-relevant and accessible services illustrate a clear need for a Black Community hub in Durham Region, with benefits including an increased sense of belonging, the facilitation of healing and kinship, and opportunities for growth and advancement.

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