REPORT 4
Evaluation Report

INNOVATIVE SUPPORTS FOR BLACK PARENTS INITIATIVE

March 2022

TURNER CONSULTING GROUP

Evaluation Report: Innovation Supports for Black Parents

This report is available in French at www.blackparenting.ca.

Suggested Citation:

Turner, T. (2022). Evaluation Report: Innovation Supports for Black Parents. Toronto, ON: Turner Consulting Group Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed to and supported the evaluation of the Innovation Supports for Black Parents (ISBP) Initiative and the development of this report. A heartfelt thank you to them all. Thank you also to the ISBP funded agencies whose evaluations of these programs are used to conduct this evaluation of the initiative.

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This report was funded by the Province of Ontario, as represented by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (“the Ministry”). This report represents the position and/or opinion of the authors and is not intended to represent the opinion and/or position of the Ministry. The accuracy of the information in this report has not been verified by the Ministry.

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SECTION 1: Background

1. Introduction

Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) was introduced in March 2017 with the goal of reducing disparities for Black children, youth, and families. Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, when fully implemented, BYAP is intended to increase access to supports and opportunities for 10,800 Ontario Black children, youth, and their families across life stages, from early childhood to their transition to school and work.

All BYAP initiatives were developed with input from an External Implementation Steering Committee made up of members of the Black community from across the province. Using feedback from community engagement sessions, the Steering Committee informed the design and implementation of BYAP initiatives to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of Ontario's Black children, youth, and families.

In 2017, BYAP provided 3 years of funding to seven programs and three centres under the Innovative Supports for Black Parents (ISBP) Initiative. In the call for proposals from community agencies, the Ministry acknowledged that the research demonstrates that culturally relevant and responsive parenting supports can lead to positive outcomes for Black children as well as parents and caregivers. In particular, parenting supports that are culturally relevant and responsive have been found to promote resilience in parents and children and reduce early development of anti-social behaviours in children (e.g., acting out at school or at home).[1] Research has also identified a need for spaces for Black families to gather and access culturally relevant information and supports, with a focus on developing healthy relationships as well as parenting and problem-solving skills within families.[2]

The overall goals of the ISBP Initiative are to enhance the availability of effective, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive parenting supports for Black parents and caregivers and to improve outcomes for Black children, youth, and their families. The ISBP Initiative funded 10 applicants to develop and implement community-based, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive supports for Black parents and caregivers[3] and families using a Collective Impact and Cultural Identity (CI^2) approach.

There are two streams of programming under this initiative:

- **Program Stream**—Delivers innovative, culturally relevant Black parenting programs that are designed and delivered by grassroots groups, collaboratives, or local organizations to predetermined target communities or populations. This may include virtual or mobile parenting supports provided outside of permanent physical program sites (e.g., through an online service), and
- **Centre Stream**—Culturally focused, community-based family centres (permanent physical sites) that are targeted at Black children, youth, and families and offer programs designed and delivered by community-based groups or organizations.

[1] Coard, S. I., Foy-Watson, S., Zimmer, C., & Wallace, A. (2007). Considering culturally relevant parenting practices in intervention development and adaptation: A randomized controlled trial of the Black Parenting Strengths and Strategies (BPSS) Program. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35,* 797–820.

[2] McCready, L., James, C., Chavannes, V., Foster, N., Tewelde, Y., Kellen, A., Hay, B., & Eugene, C. (2013). Gathering our voices: The lived experiences of Black fathers in the city of Toronto. *The Black Daddies Club.*

[3] Throughout this report, when we refer to parents, we also include caregivers, which can include grandparents, older siblings, aunts and uncles, and others responsible for the care and well-being of children.

2. Overview of This Evaluation

Recognizing the need to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, and outcomes of the ISBP Initiative, the Ministry contracted with Turner Consulting Group in July 2018 to conduct an evaluation that would:

1. Assess whether the overall ISBP Initiative goals were met
2. Assess the outcomes and impacts, lessons learned, and best practices found through the delivery of the initiative that can be applied to enhance programs that target and/or serve Black children, youth, and families and more broadly through mainstream programs (e.g., accessibility, physical space improvements, outreach and engagement approaches, pathways to services, pedagogy, etc.), and
3. Create public documents that synthesize findings and make recommendations to the ISBP programs, government, and other relevant funders and sectors (i.e., early years, public health, etc.) for the programs to be improved, replicated, and/or scaled-up in the future.

To determine whether the funded programs meet the needs of the Black community, this evaluation process first explored those needs, which other programs and services are being offered, and existing promising practices in the field. To accomplish this objective, this evaluation project produced three reports in its first year.

The first report in the series—*Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents in Ontario*—explores the unique challenges experienced by Black parents and thus their needs. This research helps expand our understanding of the need for culturally relevant and responsive parenting programs and the types of issues they can support Black parents to address if they are to improve the outcomes for Black children and youth.

The second report—*Jurisdictional Scan: Programs and Services for Black Parents in Ontario*—provides an overview of the existing programs and services in Ontario and analyzes the gaps in services.

The third report in the series—*Review of Promising Practices: Supports for Black Parents*—focuses on promising practices that may be used to improve outcomes for Black children and youth by supporting their parents.

Over the 3-year life of the project, the evaluators worked with each of the 10 funded agencies to support them to collect participant and outcome data, which enabled them to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Staff from each program were responsible for

collecting feedback from participants, analyzing program data, and reporting on outcomes to the Ministry. This data and the evaluation reports produced by the 10 agencies have been used to produce the fourth and final report—*The Evaluation of the ISBP Initiative*.

3. Overview of this Report

The evaluation report begins by providing an overview of the evaluation process, including the data collected and assessed by each program, and how the data is used to inform the evaluation of this initiative. It then provides a theory of change, which maps out the desired long-term goals, connects them to the short-term outcomes the program is intended to achieve, and identifies the activities that were implemented to achieve these outcomes. This section then goes on to identify the overarching questions that the evaluation is designed to answer.

The next section of the report draws from the program evaluation reports produced by the 10 agencies to answer the evaluation questions pertaining to the following themes: relevance; access and reach; and effectiveness.

The report then summarizes the outcomes and impacts, lessons learned, and best practices found through the delivery of the initiative that can be applied to enhance programs that target and/or serve Black children, youth, and families and more broadly through mainstream programs. This section will also provide insight into future opportunities and the potential for these programs to be scaled-up for wider implementation.

4. The Funded Programs

Ten programs were funded through the ISBP Initiative. They were initially funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services through the Black Youth Action Plan from 2018 to 2021. In 2021, funding was extended for another two years, from 2021 to 2023. These programs are described below.

A Sound Mind Program: The Nigerian Canadians for Cultural, Educational, and Economic Progress (NCCEEP)

A Sound Mind program was established by NCCEEP in 2018 with the goals of improving parent–child relationships and developing a sense of belonging among Black families and their community. The program aims to increase parents' and caregivers' coping skills, relationship skills, perception of social support as caregivers, knowledge of community services and supports, knowledge of child welfare legislation, and parenting self-efficacy.

The delivery of the program and the frequency with which participants engage with the program varies depending on the needs of each participant. Activities have included social events (such as annual apple picking, family bowling night), workshops (such as Parenting in Ontario workshops), and peer support groups (such as the Dads' Group). A peer support "hotline" has also allowed the program to respond to the immediate needs of Black parents. Through the hotline, staff and volunteers are available almost 24/7 to provide assistance, depending on the need and level of urgency.

Together We Are (TWA) Program: John Howard Society of Durham Region and the Side by Side Access Services

The TWA program is a parenting program that supports parents who have Black children within Durham Region. The program aims to support and enhance parenting skills by recognizing the unique challenges that parents and caregivers of Black children face as a result of anti-Black racism.

The TWA program provides practical and culturally appropriate information to strengthen parenting skills, improve parent–child relationships, and expand the support networks and access to resources for parents. TWA delivered a 6-week (2 hours per week) facilitated parenting group for families. Separate activities were provided for parents and children, with the session culminating in a shared meal. This aspect of the program could no longer occur due to the pandemic.

By including programming for children, TWA recognized the challenges that many parents and caregivers experienced in accessing child care services. Children aged 6 to 11 were able to access child-minding services on site and the programming that went along with it. Culturally based activities were provided and included storytelling, steel pan, African dancing, and African drumming. At the end of each session, children and parents came back together, and the children often demonstrated the activity in which they had participated. This gave parents and caregivers the opportunity to practise with their children the skills they had just learned, allowing them to immediately apply and reinforce the information discussed in the group. This also allowed program staff the opportunity to observe, support, and encourage parents' and caregivers' interactions with the children, helping to support or reinforce changes in behaviour in the moment.

The TWA program was structured, yet flexible enough to accommodate the specific needs and interests of the group. The program is strengths based—designed to recognize the diversity and strengths that exist within the Black community, acknowledged the developmental stages of children and families, and utilized adult learning principles through program facilitation. Although the group facilitators had existing knowledge and expertise in the areas being discussed, the program relied on participants to share their own knowledge and experiences to contribute to group discussions and overall understanding of the challenges that parents and caregivers of Black children face.

Program topics were informed by focus groups held with parents and community stakeholders. Topics included but were not limited to the following:

- Unpacking culture and historical trauma and its impact on identity, parenting, and resilience
- Understanding child developmental stages
- Communication skills and tools
- Strengthening the parent–child relationship
- Positive discipline skills, and
- Advocacy skills to combat anti-Black racism, including preparing for meetings, speaking to teachers and health care providers, etc.

Following the completion of the group programming, parents received a follow-up call. Based on what was discussed during the call, referrals were made to relevant community services, if applicable.

Reading Partnership for Black Parents (RPBP)

RPBP is a literacy program that serves Black families with children aged 4 to 6 in the Kingston-Galloway/Orton Park region of Toronto. The program is designed to equip parents with the confidence, knowledge, and tools to teach their children to read. This is done through a culturally responsive environment that celebrates Blackness.

The RPBP is a specialized version of the existing Reading Partnerships for Parents that seeks to address the underserved population of low-income Black children by the school system. RPBP recognizes the unique realities of Blackness and anti-Black racism by including Black-centric reading materials and cultural identity and celebration.

Parents establish peer relationships, share their diverse experiences and perspectives, learn from each other as they become more actively engaged in their children's learning, and develop and strengthen culturally relevant skills and knowledge to enhance their own and their children's well-being.

With the evolution of the program and the transition to virtual programming due to COVID-19 small adaptations occurred to the components of the program. Overall, however, sessions of the RPBP program contained the following:

- Shared mealtime (in-person only) to promote literacy and healthy eating habits in their everyday lives. This event brings families together to share a complimentary lunch prepared by Culinary Art students. The meal is followed by a book reading and signing by a diverse panel of children's authors.
- Ten Tiny Tales early reader books were created with the support of local Black/BIPOC educators and parents through the Parents for Parent Circle.
- Nia Circle is a space to highlight Black leaders throughout history (in-person only)
- Separate instructional time for parents and children
- Interactive time between parents and children
- A facilitator-led story time, and
- Lessons to share strategies to be practiced at home throughout the week.

The Community Resource Centre for Black Parents / Centre de ressources communautaire pour les parents noirs (CREPAN): Regroupement Ethnoculturel des Parents Francophones de l'Ontario (REPFO)

The CREPAN Centre's mission is to support the academic achievement and social integration of Black children and to provide supervision for young people. The program specifically serves Black Francophones in Ottawa's priority neighbourhoods, particularly

targeting those from the Somali, Congolese, Burundian, and Rwandan communities. Those priority neighbourhoods are areas of Ottawa where the most marginalized and underserved families, children, and teenagers live.

The REPFO's actions are intended, on the one hand, to equip Francophone parents from Black ethnocultural communities in their mission to support their children's academic efforts and, on the other hand, to provide adequate supervision for young people between the ages of 6 and 24 years to encourage their academic success and overall social integration.

The program provides a number of services to support both children and their families, such as:

- Home visits
- Education of parents and families with young children
- School preparation program, play area, and child development
- Parental support service and skill reinforcement workshops
- School preparation program for preschool-age children
- Respite service
- After-school program for children ages 6 through 12 focusing on physical activity, nutrition, health, and well-being
- Problem-solving program
- Income tax clinic
- Summer day camps
- Individual and group therapy services
- Special education services for children and youth
- Mental health service, and
- Legal resource programs for young people and their families.

The Black Family Support Program (BFSP): Malton Neighbourhood Services

The BFSP was established with the goal of improving outcomes for Black children, youth, and their families living in Peel Region, with a focus on those living in Malton and southeast Brampton. This is done through culturally relevant and culturally responsive parenting supports for both parents and caregivers who have children up to age 12. BFSP offers

parenting workshops, clinical parenting counselling, and community presentations. The program also offers a drop-in program for children up to age 12 that focuses on school success, behavioural management, child development, and the building of positive relationships.

This program works from a culturally informed perspective that recognizes a Black family's strength and resilience and capitalized on these assets. Staff work towards strengthening and increasing capacity through knowledge exchange. The program provides opportunities to practice and enhance skills within the parent/caregiver relationship.

Parenting workshops covers the following topics:

- Parenting styles - Parents identify the way in which they were parented, which style they practice, and asses the benefits of the different styles of parenting.
- Teen identity - Parents learn about the physical, emotional, mental and social changes that occur during the teen years. They will also learn about the teen struggle for independence and control, peer influence, how to talk and encourage them to share new challenges and how to provide consistent loving disciplines with limits, restrictions and rewards.
- Parent identity – Parents explore how they deal with the fear and worry of parenting Black children and how to have frank discussions while fostering a positive outlook, and nurturing children to achieve their full potential.
- Systems navigation - It can be difficult at times for Black parents understand and find their way through the educational, health care, justice, community and social service systems. Workshops provide information on how to access these services when addressing issues that arises.
- Fostering mental wellness - Parents learn about the physical and emotional symptoms of mental health concerns, patterns of stress and how stress manifests in their parenting style and behaviour with their children, strategies for self-care, early warning signs of not feeling well, how to develop preventative and coping strategies, and strategies for communicating with family members about their struggles.
- Self-care and resiliency - This workshop provides information to parents on how to engage in self-care choosing behaviour that balance the effects of emotional and physical stressors and learning how to self-soothe or calm our physical and emotional distress.

The Scarborough Newcomer Parent Support (SNPS) Project: Heritage Skills Development Centre

The SNPS was designed to serve African and Afro-Caribbean parents with children between the ages of 5 and 17, children who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, and children who have come in contact with the law. The program's objectives are to foster positive outcomes for Black children, youth, and parents through improved parenting skills, educational support, and counselling. SNPS also improves a family's cohesiveness by supporting family members to develop relationship-building skills and thus increase their ability to support one another. SNPS was developed and delivered to reflect the culture and diversity of Black parents and caregivers and their children through culturally relevant and responsive engagements.

The project focuses on newcomer African and Caribbean parents and their families in the high-priority neighbourhoods of Scarborough East. It aims to meet the unique strengths, needs, and interests of parents to support their child's development and well-being.

SNPS includes four main components: parenting/caregiver workshops, parent–child workshops, family counselling/mediation, and networking opportunities. The program also makes referrals to other local resources and services based on the needs of families.

Parent 2 Parent (P2P): African Canadian Christian Network

P2P is a parenting program aimed at growing protective cultural identity—inner health, resiliency, and an understanding of how historical and systemic racism affects Black families' ability to support their children—and providing promotive resources (tools, skills, information, and hands-on support) to "resist threats to success." The program is promoted through church and partner networks to their members.

The program curriculum was written within the CI^2 framework to develop eight skills that parents can use to build the resilience in their children and help them stay in school and graduate:

1. **Mediate:** Parents and caregivers can position themselves, ask the right questions, and communicate in ways that get the best results when they have a difference with the school or a teacher, or when their children have a conflict with others.
2. **Educate:** Deals with the ins and outs of what parents and caregivers needs to know about the school system, including Special Ed, EQAO, and testing for giftedness, so they can help their kids get the best the system has to offer.

3. **Advocate:** Encourage parents and caregivers to join with others to bring about change to ensure that their children can take advantage of all the benefits available to them at school.
4. **Navigate:** Know what to do to prevent or deal with Black children's involvement with the justice (police, courts), legal aid, mental health, and child welfare systems.
5. **Mentor:** Teach parents how to become their child's mentor (the person on whom they model their lives); how they can identify their strengths and challenges as a parent; and find ways for them to build relationships with others in the community, to support them in this mentorship role.
6. **Empower:** Teach the history of racism, systemic and otherwise, and the impact on the well-being of Black children. Solutions are provided to help them replace these negative stereotypes with a belief in their ability to excel.
7. **Activate:** Deals with ways to activate their power to create a new vision for their children in this society. Parents learn ways to become involved in activities that will improve their lives, their children's lives, and the community at large.
8. **Negotiate:** Parents are given the language to comfortably discuss difficult topics with their children while learning how to regulate their emotions in tense situations. Themes include What to Do If Your Child Experiences Racial Profiling; What to Do If Your Child Tells You He Is Gay; or Your Child Has Been Suspended—Now What.

The program includes three components:

Circle Families: This is a peer mentoring program for parents, by parents, where those who have successfully raised their own Black children share their experiences with parents and caregivers seeking strategies as well as moral support. They also offer direct involvement of peers, such as accompanying them to parent–teacher interviews or court hearings. The program uses a reciprocal (or reverse) mentoring system so that even parents in need can share lessons in survival, perseverance, maintaining cultural identity, and excelling in different areas.

Families meet in interactive community-based events and also connect on their own to share tips, strategies, and best practices materials. The program also maintains a database of volunteers—many drawn from churches and the community—who are willing to offer more hands-on support if requested.

Community Parent Education Program (C·PEP): This component follows what is referred to as the "train the trainer." It trains individuals to become facilitators, thereby expanding the program's reach and impact by allowing the program to be shared with the wider community.

Online Parenting Support Community (OPSC): A web-based resource centre that offers information such as webinars, publications, events for Black parents, books, and information from the government.

The curated public portal is accessible to the general community. The site's private secure portion require participants to subscribe. It includes a forum where members—such as Circle families—share personal information, tools, and skills; seek and receive advice; and post articles, brochures, invitations etc., in a circle of trust. It also facilitates ongoing networking.

Mommy Monitor

Mommy Monitor is focused on providing Black birthing persons and parents with support using an intersectional approach to improve the social determinants of health. They have a full circle of care model to address the specific needs of each parent. Mommy Monitor has a team of Black maternal care professionals that they have trained as doulas. The doulas are available for companionship, peer counselling, mentorship, social support, and to provide cultural sensitivity.

The program was also funded to develop an app with a focus on improving maternal–child health outcomes for pregnant Black women and their families, including postnatal support and parenting skills (for parenting children up to 3 years old).

Mommy Monitor also provides workshops that focus on topics like patient rights, postpartum health, pelvic floor education, prenatal health, art therapy, dance classes, mental health, and many other topics important to the community.

Activities include:

1. Supporting Black parents to navigate maternal care (assisting in connecting to care providers and understanding services or care plans).
2. Increasing access to services such as:
    - Doula Support - Mommy Monitor works in partnership with OCAMA Collective to offer doula services to Black mothers and parents in Ontario.
    - Mental Health Support – During counselling, Black parents are able to share their experiences, gain support and explore mental health services. One-on-one sessions are provided monthly. Group sessions are offered once a month.
    - Birth Trauma Counselling is also provided through a therapist if needed.

- Navigation of Maternal Health Services - Mommy Monitor provides parents with support identifying services they may need to support them and clinicians or birth professionals that can be their providers during pregnancy or for postpartum care.

3. Education and resources:
   - Birth Justice Workshops are grounded in the understanding that the core component of reproductive justice is birthing rights, and these rights only exist when all women/parents/parents-to-be are empowered preconception, during pregnancy, during childbirth and postpartum to make healthy informed decisions.
   - Free workshops are offered throughout Toronto for various organizations on different topics, with opportunities for participants to ask questions during a discussion period. Workshops for clinicians are also offered.
   - Resources are shared on Mommy Monitor's website and social media.

Kujistahi Initiative: Delta Family Resource Centre

The Kujistahi Initiative was designed to build cultural pride and promote effective parenting in Black communities, primarily serving those in northwest Toronto. This initiative includes the partnership of Delta Family Resource Centre with the African Canadian Heritage Association and the Somali Women and Children's Support Network.

The Kujistahi Initiative provides an inclusive and cohesive network of supports for Black families and uses a village model to frame its programming. The model supports participants to develop stronger selves and families by providing client-centred service focusing on self-care, self-development, counselling, advocacy, and community building.

The Kujistahi Initiative intends to create a safe, culturally welcoming space where diverse Black families (Caribbean, continental African and Canadian, Christian, Muslim, Canadian-born, and newcomer) can hone skills and gain access to resources that cultivate effective parenting and support optimal child development in culturally appropriate ways, to achieve better outcomes for parents and their families.

While hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, this initiative aimed to use pop-up repurposed container infrastructure to establish a parenting centre for the Black community. While the pop-up structure has been completed, securing a location that will accommodate the necessary hook-ups for electricity and sewage has proved extremely challenging. As a result, Kujistahi has been operating without a dedicated space within Delta Family's and other community spaces.

The Initiative included several program components.

- **Drop-In Sessions**
  - Kujikids integrated African parenting practices and cultural content into Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years.
  - Young Giants offered programs for tweens (8 to 13 years old) to improve their ability to build effective relationships with their parents and support academic success.
  - Harambee Heritage Program which is an African heritage program featuring African history lessons, arts and crafts, and performing arts.
- **Workshops & Programs**
  - Motivated Mamas is a space for Black moms to connect and support each other while exploring and discussing various topics of interest.
  - Black Dad's Link is a space for fathers, guardians, and mentors of Black children to connect and discuss the struggles and successes of being a Black man/parent.
  - Parenting with a Plan is a 12-week workshop designed for parents and caregivers focusing on parenting children under age 12.
  - The Home Childcare Training Course is 12 sessions that teach how to start and operate a home-based childcare centre in Ontario.
  - Counselling Table Talk Parenting Support Group is for Black parents who are in contact with the child welfare system.
  - Breathe & Release is an 8-week program to support Black individuals who are experiencing loss.
- **Community Events African**
  - Heritage Month Celebrations
  - Kwanzaa Celebrations
  - Back to School Events
  - Seminars open to the public
- **Referrals**
  - Connecting Black families to mental and physical health services, educational and behavioural supports, recreational services, and other supports and programs offered by Kujistahi partner agencies.

The Ujima Village Innovative Support Project (UVISP): Young and Potential Fathers

UVISP was developed to improve the social determinants of health for African Canadian children and youth by educating and providing programs and services to their fathers. The focus of the program is fathers in the west end of Toronto, with a focus on Somali and Caribbean fathers currently at risk for decreasing levels of paternal involvement.

In addition, through a collaboration with many other groups—such as CAFCAN, African Food Basket, Toronto Public Health, and Rexdale Community Centre, to name a few—the project covers and provides for many needs of Black children and fathers, including food security, mental health support, counselling, unemployment, and health education.

This project includes several programs:

Super Dads Super Kids: This program allowed for the discussion of the role of fathers and was delivered in a small group setting with an emphasis on mentorship, peer support, and community building. The content covered includes child development, communication, emotions and emotional health, discipline and setting limits, physical health, injury prevention, and anger management.

Nobody's Perfect: This program covered a father's role in raising healthy children and included sessions with the following topics: Growing Body, Growing Mind, Child Safety, Attachment, Trust and Behaviour, Parents Are People.

Caring Dads: This program considers child-centred fathering, building relationships with our children; listening to, praising, and playing with our children; fathers as part of families; eliminating barriers to better relationships; responding to children's needs; discipline, etc.

Family Access Program: Supervised and non-supervised visits between fathers and their children occurred in Ujima House, a father-focused family centre.

Workshops for Parents: Workshops were also offered that focused on keeping relationships strong, praising and encouraging children, problem solving in difficult situations, rebuilding trust and healing, family and life balance, and encouraging a healthy lifestyle.

Life Skills and Support: One-on-one mentoring was also available to Black fathers, with a focus on developing parenting plans, navigating family court issues, strengthen co-parenting skills, financial literacy, as well as referrals to employment resources and social services.

SECTION 2: The Evaluation

5. The Evaluation Process

The goal of this evaluation was not to individually evaluate each program. Instead, we used the information and analysis collected by each program to evaluate the overall ISBP Initiative. Many parties played a role in the evaluation of the ISBP Initiative.

Funded Agencies

The funded agencies were responsible for designing and implementing their respective programs. With the support of the Evaluation Consulting Team, they also developed the data collection tools, collected and analyzed the data, and assessed the outcomes of their programs.

Evaluation Consulting Team

The Evaluation Consulting Team was responsible for supporting the agencies to collect their data and to evaluate the ISBP Initiative. This process included the following activities:

- Meeting with all ISBP-funded agencies to kick off the evaluation by addressing:
    - Introduction to the importance of program evaluation
    - Review of evaluation case studies
    - Introduction to theory of change and logic model.
- Meeting with each agency to better understand their programs and to begin to develop theory of change, logic model, and data collection tools

- Meeting with all agencies to finalize data collection tools, share data collection strategies, and address any issues and challenges
- Providing ongoing support of data collection
- Convening Research Advisory Committee and developing evaluation plan
- Conducting needs assessment, jurisdictional scan, and review of promising practices
- Conducting evaluation of initiative, and
- Implementing knowledge mobilization.

Research Advisory Committee

The Research Advisory Committee was convened to guide the work of the Evaluation Consulting Team. The committee provided expert independent advice on the research and program evaluation related to the ISBP Initiative to:

- Support an understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by Black parents in Ontario
- Identify possible priority areas for research based on:
    - Available evidence on the impacts and outcomes of services
    - Gaps in research
    - Emerging areas of research
    - International best practices in child care and related services
- Support the evaluation of the ISBP Initiative.

6. Theory of Change

A theory of change is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It specifies the desired long-term goals and then works backwards to identify the long- and short-term outcomes that the program desires to achieve and the activities that will lead to these outcomes. As such, it maps out what the program is intended to achieve and how it will do this through activities and initiatives.

A clearly articulated theory of change leads to better planning in that activities are linked to a detailed understanding of how change actually happens. It also leads to better evaluation by helping the evaluators understand the initiative and the desired outcomes. In this way, the evaluators can ensure that the right things are being measured at the right time and in

the right way. The theory of change for the ISBP Initiative is illustrated in the following chart. It was shared with each agency to form the basis of the theories of change for their programs. While there are common elements to the theories of change for each program, each differs depending on the specific program being implemented.

IMPACT	Emotionally and physically healthy Black families in Ontario protecting, nurturing, and guiding Black children and youth to success.
WHAT LONG-TERM CHANGE WILL YOU SEE? **(3–5 years)**	• Increased high school graduation rates of Black youth • Increased rates of employment for Black youth • Increased post-secondary participation and graduation of Black youth • Parent–child relationships remain intact as the child ages • Increased sense of belonging among and between Black children, adults, and the world around them
WHAT SHORT-TERM CHANGE WILL YOU SEE? **(up to 3 years)**	• Black parents/caregivers and their children/youth develop a strong, positive cultural and racial identity • Improved ability of Black parents/caregivers to better understand complex social systems (esp. education, child welfare, health) and successfully advocate for themselves • Improved relationships between Black parents/caregivers and their children/youth • Black parents/caregivers accessing relevant culturally responsive/appropriate services
WHAT WILL YOU DO TO CREATE THIS CHANGE?	• Provide parenting programs with a focus on parenting Black infants, children, and adolescents • Provide programs to help Black parents improve their ability to build effective relationships with their infants, children, and youth • Provide programs to increase one's connectedness to their African heritage and Black identity, to increase racial and ethnic pride • Provide parents with a better understanding of the systems with which they interact and how anti-Black racism impacts their experience with these systems

	• Provide app-based and online one-to-one support to Black women, mothers, and expecting mothers on maternal health and parenting • Make appropriate referrals to Black and culturally responsive service providers • Increase parents' knowledge, interest, and confidence in playing a role in child's learning

7. Evaluation Questions

The evaluation is designed to answer the following overarching evaluation questions:

Relevance

- To what extent are the programs relevant to the needs of the Black community?
- To what extent are they aligned with promising practices?

Access and reach

- Who is accessing the programs?
- To what extent are the programs reaching the intended client population?
- Why do participants enter and leave the program?
- How many parents/caregivers and children participated?
- For how many hours are participants involved?

Effectiveness

- To what extent and in which ways are the ISBP programs being implemented?
- Are the programs being implemented as they were intended?
- How have the programs changed over time?
- Why were the programs changed?
- Are the programs achieving the intended program objectives and outcomes?
- How well are the programs working?
- How much and what kind of a difference have the programs made for participants?
- Are participants satisfied that the programs meet their needs?

Promising practices

- What lessons can be learned for future programs supporting Black parents/caregivers and their children?
- What are the future opportunities and the potential for the programs' scaling-up for a province-wide implementation?

8. Evaluation Findings

8.1 Relevance

This section draws from the agencies' program evaluation reports to assess the relevance of the ISBP Initiative and answer the following questions: To what extent are the programs relevant to the needs of the Black community? To what extent are they aligned with promising practices?

Finding 1: The programs provided through the ISBP Initiative were relevant to the needs of the Black community.

The needs assessment report completed in 2018 documented a number of challenges faced by Black parents. These challenges persist, and the ISBP-funded programs are aligned with existing research showing that:

- Black parents experience a myriad of issues navigating systems and accessing services that are essential to their health, well-being, and self-sufficiency.
- For Black parents, effective parenting requires protecting one's children from the impact of the anti-Black racism they may experience in the school system and advocating for equitable access to education. Owing to the gaps in academic outcomes, Black parents are often called on to spend more time at home supporting the learning of their children.
- Parents' mental health also affects the mental health of their children, putting them at greater risk of developing mental illness themselves over the course of their lives, and Black Ontarians have limited access to culturally relevant mental health services.

- The racial gaps between Black and White mothers and babies are similar in magnitude in Canada and the United States, despite greater access to health care in Canada. Maternal health supports for Black and White women are different and, along with experiences of anti-Black racism, impact outcomes for Black children. African American women are 243% more likely than White women to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. [4] 2011 to 2014 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that White women experience 12 deaths per 100,000 live births, while African American women experience 40 deaths per 100,000 live births.[5]

  Maternal death rates are substantially lower in Canada, yet rose from 6 to 11 per 100,000 births between 1990 and 2013, "likely due to an increase in Caesarean sections, IVF births, older mothers, and other health conditions."[6] Without race-based health data, there is no way to determine whether and to what extent there are disparities in maternal death rates for Black and White women.

- Black women and men experience incarceration rates that are much greater than those of their White counterparts. Black women are incarcerated in the federal prison system at three times the rate of White women, while Black men are incarcerated at close to four times the rate of White men. While overincarceration has been noted as an issue facing African Canadians, what has been given far less attention is the ripple effect of incarceration on families. Involvement with the criminal justice system reverberates throughout not only an individual's life, but also the lives of their children and family, introducing significant stress into a child's life and negatively affecting their physical and mental health.

- Black fathers experience a number of barriers that limit their ability to be engaged in their children's lives. While they try to be good parents, the ability of Black fathers to participate in the lives of their children is often undermined by the myth of the missing Black father, one of the most pervasive negative stereotypes about both African Canadian and African American men. Systemic racism, rather than an unwillingness to be involved in their children's lives,

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[4] Martin, N. (2017, December 7). Black mothers keep dying after giving birth. Shalon Irving's story explains why. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why

[5] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, June 4). *Reproductive health: Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System*. https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm

[6] Johnson, C. (2018, April 11). The truth about maternal death. *National Post*. https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/the-truth-about-maternal-death

creates uninvolved Black fathers; this lack of involvement then reinforces the stereotypes about Black fathers.

The research also shows the importance of Black-focused programs that are culturally responsive. All programs funded by the ISBP Initiative were specifically designed to address the needs of the Black community and specifically designed for Black Canadians. The BYAP's goal is to reduce the disparities that exist for Black children, youth, and their families by providing them with access to supports and opportunities. This is done by framing interventions using a Cultural Identity and Collective Impact (CI^2) approach. As such, all funded programs are aligned with both this goal and framing, and focused on having effective culturally relevant and culturally responsive parenting supports.

> I am making sure that my children love themselves and feel valued and love and understand their blackness. Together We Are was an awakening for me.
>
> ~ John Howard Society of Durham Region & Side by Side Report, p 10

While parenting programs may exist in the geographic communities served by the ISBP programs, programs specifically designed to serve Black families through a culturally responsive lens are not readily available. These programs are therefore unique in who they serve and in the outcomes they produce. Many of these programs are the first of their kind specifically designed for Black families in the communities served.

Delivered through a culturally responsive lens, the ISBP programs also provide programming that Black parents may be hesitant to participate in. The staff who developed the programs understand how important it is that Black people feel connected to their communities and expand their support networks. Many agencies reported that they experienced resistance when recruiting participants, as some parents were hesitant to associate with a Black-focused group. The many Black parents that did attend kept coming back—these Black-focused groups allowed parents to openly share how they felt without fear of being judged by staff or other participants. Black parents also benefited from the Africentric programming and discussions, which helped them understand anti-Black racism and the importance of helping their children develop a positive racial identity.

In addition, flexibility was embedded within some of the parenting programs, which enabled staff to meet the immediate priorities and concerns of the participants. While some programs began with more structure, greater flexibility was embedded within them

as the programs unfolded and in response to participant feedback. Specifically, participants shared that they wanted fewer workshops and more roundtable discussions on a variety of topics, such as marital issues, grief and loss, financial challenges, rebellious children, and isolation.

These programs are relevant to Black parents because they were designed and delivered by Black staff. In addition, the support of external facilitators, partners, elders, doulas, and peers with specific expertise and experiences in anti-Black racism and Afrocentric programming and artforms has made a significant difference to the quality and cultural appropriateness of the initiatives.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, these programs were able to help meet the immediate needs of families by partnering with or referring families to other agencies to access food baskets, computer devices, and access to government programs and services. With Black communities being especially hard hit by the pandemic, these services were able to alleviate some of the stress related to income loss.

Finding 2: The programs were aligned with promising practices.

Parenting programs are considered an effective way to produce positive outcomes for children and reduce the frequency and intensity of behavioural issues. The 2018 promising practices report identified a number of promising practices that can be used with Black parents to increase the effectiveness of these programs.

The ISBP programs are aligned with a number of these promising practices, including:

- Taking a strengths-based approach that engages, educates, and empowers Black parents
- Designing culturally relevant and responsive programs that are rooted in cultural identity, recognize culture as a strength and protective factor, and include cultural traditions and perspectives on parenting and child rearing
- Programming that promotes cultural pride and identity
- Providing supports to parents to understand anti-Black racism and its impact on their families, and to advocate with public sector organizations when they experience racism
- Using trauma-informed approaches that recognize the compounding impact of systemic, structural, and interpersonal anti-Black racism, acknowledge racial trauma, and attempt to respond to the unique needs of those affected

- Teaching new skills to parents to help them transform disruptive behaviours in their children by improving the patterns of family interactions that lead to children's disruptive, aggressive, and noncompliant behaviour
- Recognizing the important role of fathers in the lives of children and supporting their participation in programming by providing father-to-father programs, and
- Recognizing that there is an increasing number of incarcerated individuals, and the impact on families and children of incarcerated individuals who are indirectly victims of incarceration.

8.2 Access and reach

This section draws from each agency's program evaluation reports to answer the following questions:

- Who is accessing the programs?
- To what extent are the programs reaching the intended client population?
- How many parents/caregivers and children participated?
- For how many hours are participants involved?

Finding 3: For the most part, programs reached their intended client populations. Some programs expanded their reach once programming went online in response to the pandemic.

These programs were designed for Black parents from across the diaspora. Many of these programs aimed to serve families in lower-income neighbourhoods, where parents and caregivers are less likely to be able to afford these programs.

Unfortunately, data collection was not consistent across programs. As noted later in this report, program staff found that participants were hesitant to complete intake and evaluation forms, and asking for demographic information at times became a barrier to participation. Where demographic data was collected and reported in the report from each agency, it has been summarized here to provide an overall profile of program participants.

The vast majority of program participants self-identified as Black. Their ethnicity or nationality varied, depending on the program and program location. For example, NCCEEP in Windsor reported that 43% of their participants are of Nigerian descent. In Durham Region, the Side by Side Access Centre and the John Howard Society of Durham Region reported that the majority of their participants identified as Black Canadian or Caribbean.

The programs also indicated that participants were mainly female.

The programs also managed to reach participants with a variety of citizenship statuses, including those born in Canada, those who are naturalized Canadian citizens, those who do not yet have citizenship status, and refugee claimants. Language spoken was also fairly diverse, with some families speaking neither English nor French at home. Some programs, like the CREPAN Centre in Ottawa, had mostly French-speaking participants, while Young and Potential Fathers served a large number of Somali speakers. Many participants had not yet been in Canada for 5 years.

Overall, it appears that a large proportion of program participants were single parents, from a low of 42% for ACCN's programs to a high of 74% for the CREPAN Centre.

The programs began with in-person sessions and generally attracted people within the local neighbourhoods. Once word about the programs began to travel, many of these programs found that they were getting inquiries from people outside of the immediate area, and up to hours away. While the distance proved to be a barrier for some parents, people far outside the programs' geographic area were able to participate when programs went online.

Finding 4: Agencies found it particularly challenging to engage fathers and older teens in programming.

Agencies reported that it was particularly challenging to engage fathers in their programs. One key barrier is that men were hesitant to participate in a program that was attended predominantly by women. They found that in order to engage men, the programs needed to be father focused and led by a man. When father-focused programming was made available, men did participate.

Agencies also found that older youth were resistant to attending programming with their parents. As such, the program had a limited impact when parents came to them with issues about their relationship with older teens or issues about their behaviours.

Finding 5: Agencies had to overcome the stigma associated with Black-focused programming.

For many agencies, the reach of these programs was limited by challenges with recruiting participants to their programs. These agencies reported that recruiting Black families to their programs consumed much more of their time than anticipated, which led to a slow start-up for many.

Many agencies reported that they had anticipated that start-up would simply be a case of "If you build it, they will come," particularly where they already served a large Black population. Instead, they found that they needed to engage in continuous outreach to families. They shared that general marketing of the program helped to attract families with some experience with these types of programs and an existing relationship with the agency delivering the program. However, this type of promotion was less effective with people who don't typically access community services and who may in fact avoid accessing such services because community agencies are perceived to be an extension of the government. In addition, agencies shared the need to ensure that marketing speaks to newcomers who may not identify as Black, and may therefore not understand that they can access these programs.

Delta reported that reactions from participants during the first phase of implementation of the Kujistahi Initiative indicated some reluctance and resistance on the part of Black parents to participate in "Black only" programming. Parents shared concerns that a focus on Black families was stigmatizing, suggesting that something was wrong with Black families and that they needed "fixing." There were also some who perceived Black history as negative and embarrassing, and hence did not want to be associated with a Black-focused program. Some potential program participants shared that they lived with the constant experience of being made to feel "othered" and less valued, and felt that a program specifically for Black parents would operate from a deficit lens and cause further harm.

Finding 6: Agencies had to overcome the stigma associated with the subject matter of the programming.

The focus of the programs—be it mental health, reading, or parenting—was a barrier for some participants because they felt it reflected poorly on them that they needed such support.

The Reading Partnership for Black Parents (RPBP) shared that there is a perception that low literacy rates in the Black community reflect a deficit within Black families or children rather than a deficit within our education system. As such, some perceived that a reading program aimed at Black families reflected this perceived deficit. Program staff shared that in the future, they would reposition themselves as an enrichment program similar to the private tutoring and after-school academic programs that middle- and upper-class families are able to provide for their children.

Delta reported that staff struggled to engage participants in mental wellness programs such as Table Talk and Grief Support Groups over the 3-year life of the program. They were able to reach only 50% of anticipated registration, well below the target participation. Program staff felt that the focus on mental health may have been one reason for people's hesitancy to participate; once staff were able to engage the participants, they found that participants were extremely committed and supportive of the program. In fact, participants requested an extension of the groups beyond the allotted 10 sessions, stating that the group was just beginning to gel and that more time was needed to address their many issues.

There were also members of the community who shared their concerns about participating in programming for parents because of the assumption that doing so meant that they are bad parents.

Finding 7: Agencies found it difficult initially to get referrals from the anticipated referral partners.

In addition to the hesitancy of Black parents themselves, some agencies also shared that public sector agencies were reluctant to refer Black parents to their programs. This was particularly challenging for the programs that anticipated referrals from public sector organizations, particularly as both the provincial and federal governments have identified anti-Black racism as a priority.

Agencies found that staff at these public sector organizations were ignorant of, and uncomfortable speaking about, anti-Black racism as well as the specific needs of Black children and parents. As a result, agency staff had to spend a great deal of time educating their potential referral partners about anti-Black racism. In addition, they found that staff at these public sector organizations did not want to be perceived as racist by singling out Black parents and referring them to these programs.

Some of the ISBP-funded agencies found that other community agencies and public sector organizations were concerned about their reputation being impacted by allying with these Black-focused programs. Agencies noted that even when these organizations have existing collaborative relationships with them and regularly refer clients to other programs, staff remained hesitant to refer clients to the Black-focused programs.

For example, Reading Partnership for Black Parents anticipated that it would easily be able to partner with schools that would refer Black parents to the program. However, they found that individual school principals and teachers were hesitant to approach Black

parents and recommend this program to them. Program staff therefore had to engage in outreach recruitment themselves and directly hand out flyers to Black parents at the schools in the communities of focus. The Heritage Skills Development Centre also encountered the same challenge; before they were able to receive any referrals, program staff had to educate school principals about anti-Black racism and the need for Black-focused programming.

The Side by Side Access Centre and the John Howard Society of Durham Region also reported receiving limited referrals from community partners. They attributed this to a lack of understanding within Durham Region about how this program would meet the needs of the Black community differently from a mainstream program. As a result, program staff had to engage in community outreach themselves to market the program. This included sharing information at various schools and events in Durham Region and online via social media. Because Together We Are (TWA) had to spearhead all the marketing, the reach of the program was limited to parents and families that accessed programs and services within the social service sector and those who attended the schools that were involved in the program. There were therefore many parents who missed the opportunity to participate in TWA.

Not all agencies were able to overcome the barrier posed by public sector organization. For Young and Potential Fathers, the reluctance of public sector organizations to support their access to incarcerated fathers meant that they couldn't deliver the intended programming to this population because they could not reach this population except through the Ministry of Correctional Services. In addition, the security protocols that surround the penitentiary system made it a challenge to offer programming to African Canadian fathers who are incarcerated. They found that "attempts to engage the Ministry of Correctional Services was not met with a willingness to engage."[7] In the end, Young and Potential Fathers concluded that reaching incarcerated fathers was not possible. They hope that in the future the Ministry would allow them to serve the needs of fathers behind bars and their families.

With the recent high-profile incidents of anti-Black racism in North America and the awareness raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, there may be a growing awareness of the need for Black-focused programs and a reduction in the discomfort with talking about these issues and referring Black parents to these programs. Going forward, more

[7] Young and Potential Fathers Report, p 2

collaborative marketing to public sector organizations and mainstream social service agencies is needed if ISBP programs are to better reach the intended program participants.

Finding 8: A total of 2,221 parents and caregivers and 8,568 children participated in the various programs offered by the ISBP-funded projects

Overall, agencies reported that they have reached or even exceeded their intended participation goals. In total, they conducted the following activities, reaching the following participants:

- 185 workshops, in which 2,221 parents and caregivers participated
- Programming that included 8,568 children
- 1,381 family mediation, counselling, and assessment sessions conducted
- 3,932 referrals made to other programs and services
- 2,483 participants in information and networking sessions
- 126 home visits
- Over 20,000 social media interactions and website visits, and
- 1,334 attendees at forums and conferences.

8.3 Effectiveness

This section will draw from the program evaluation reports to answer the following questions:

- To what extent and in which ways are the ISBP programs being implemented?
- Are the programs being implemented as they were intended?
- How have the programs changed over time?
- Why were the programs changed?
- Are the programs achieving the intended program objectives and outcomes?
- How well are the programs working?
- How much and what kind of a difference have the programs made for participants?
- Are participants satisfied that the programs meet their needs?

This section will also identify the implementation challenges, the opportunities created by the programs, and the adaptations made to effectively implement the program and address the changing needs of program participants.

Finding 9: The programs helped to improve parent–child relationships.

Each parenting program reported that they were able to increase parent well-being, improve parents' self-confidence, and improve parent–child relationships by enhancing parenting knowledge and caregiving capacity. The Reading Partnership for Black Parents reported that parents felt increased confidence in their ability to support their children's reading and that their children's reading had improved. Mommy Monitor was able to provide support to Black mothers and pregnant women and educate them about pregnancy and motherhood.

Through the evaluations conducted by the agencies, many parents indicated that one of the most significant outcomes of the programs they accessed was the impact it had on their relationships with their children. They shared that they had gained knowledge, insight, and skills in several areas, which improved their parenting and relationships with their children and other family members. In addition, parents and caregivers shared that they gained insight from the discussions about how their own parenting practices and roles as parents and caregivers are shaped by the impact of colonization and slavery. Parents and caregivers also shared that they learned about how they are affected by present-day experiences of anti-Black racism and other forms of marginalization and oppression. They identified that understanding parenting within this historical context helped them better understand their own parents and how they were parented, which has influenced their present relationships with their children. Parents and caregivers shared that these conversations, and a better understanding of the historical context of their parenting style, motivated them to make changes to their parenting practices.

Because these programs were Black-only spaces, Black parents felt safe discussing experiences specific to Black people, including the intergenerational impact of colonization and slavery, and sharing their own personal experiences. Many parents shared the trauma of growing up in families where negativity, harsh punishments, and disconnection characterized adult–child relationships and how they wished not to perpetuate this home or family environment. These programs were able to provide parents with tools and strategies designed to help them understand and disrupt their own childhood experiences. Parents reported that understanding the historical roots of such destructive dynamics and learning strategies, such as Learning Your Child's Love Language or learning to use affirmations, supported them in identifying positive ways of interacting with their children and improving their relationship with their children.

Parents and caregivers reported that the techniques and strategies shared by program staff were effective, and they appreciated the ability to apply their learnings and receive feedback. Having used the suggested techniques and strategies with their children, parents and caregivers were able to return to the group and discuss their successes as well as any challenges with using the techniques. This allowed staff and other participants to provide ongoing support and let participants understand what adjustments might be needed to their application of these techniques. Delta shared some examples of how parents have used the strategies discussed and their impact on their relationship with, and the behaviours of, their children. For example, parents reported that implementing mindful quality time reduced the overall frequency of behavioural issues.

Finding 10: The programs increased participants' understanding of social systems.

Another outcome from their participation in these programs is parents' and caregivers' increased understanding of social systems, including the education, child welfare, and family courts systems. Equipped with this knowledge, parents and caregivers were able to better advocate for themselves and their children.

Some programs gave parents the opportunity to hear directly from staff who work in the education and child welfare systems and to ask them questions. These programs also allowed participants to hear from other parents about their experiences interacting with these systems. These opportunities helped parents understand how these systems work and how they can better navigate them and advocate for their children. As a staff person from the Together We Are (TWA) program commented:

> *[A] lot of the information that those presenters were able to share added to the parents' toolbox and provided them with information that they didn't know before in terms of how to advocate for their children, who to speak to and conversations they should have, things they should be more aware of and look out for. ~TWA Staff*

Finding 11: The programs helped parents and children develop a positive racial identity.

While many participants were initially hesitant to participate in a program that was only for Black parents, at the end of the program they shared that they appreciated and benefited from the Black-focused programming and the inclusion of cultural elements.

Because the sessions included people from various ethnicities and identities, participants were able to better understand the shared cultural connection between people from across the African diaspora and the shared experience of anti-Black racism. Agencies reported that they especially appreciated the integration of African principles, concepts, and philosophies into the parenting programs. They acknowledged that this approach enabled them to uncover and honestly explore various aspects of their life experiences. They felt that because these programs were culturally responsive, their African heritage was a central feature of the program rather than add-on, which validated their experiences and helped them appreciate and embrace the richness and importance of this heritage to their lives and how they parent.

The Together We Are program reported that staff were extremely successful in increasing the awareness of cultural identity among parents and their Black children, as identity was foundational to the program and integrated into all the conversations, activities, and information provided. Together We Are also incorporated African dancing, steel pan, and African drumming in their child-minding program, which helped to engage children in active rather than passive activities and contributed to their increased excitement to continue returning to the program. Staff found that this programming was particularly important for children who weren't receiving identity-affirming curriculum or programming at school.

> *With the children, we were able to address that cultural piece that isn't talked about in schools. So, we were able to discuss with them experiences they have of being Black in the classroom. It was very powerful being able to speak to the kids in that capacity because they were way beyond what I expected them to have feelings on. I feel like they just didn't have a space to talk about it because a lot of the times they aren't asked these things, but when you give them the opportunity to speak on it, they have so much to say and so much to share. And we are able to make sure that we give them the space to guide them and discuss these things with them so that they can have a positive image. ~TWA Staff*

The Reading Partnership for Black Parents also found that reading books featuring Black characters helped both parents and children to feel a stronger connection to their Black identity.

Delta Family Resource Centre also reported that the use of culturally based activities and principles in their programs has been very successful. They found that through the Kujistahi Initiative, all participants have come to "embrace, celebrate and feel enormous pride in their African ancestry."[8] In addition, the Reading Partnership's use of Black-centric reading materials also helped build positive racial identity among children and got them excited about reading.

> *What made me feel comfortable actually was my daughter actually getting to see people that looked like her, right. Because sometimes they participate in these groups, and sometimes they're just the only one or the only one in the classroom. So for me, it was actually a great opportunity for her to be, you know, just be amongst people that look like her. ~RPBP 2021 Participant*

Delta reported that parents and children who participated in Kujistahi evaluation activities observed identifiable changes in their awareness and pride in their African ancestry. The heritage and drop-in programs were explicitly noted for improving parents' and caregivers' understanding of how ancestry and culture inform the way one sees and interacts with one's world and one's life choices. With the integration of the principles of Nguzo Saba, participants reported greater awareness and understanding of the principles and how they are manifested in their daily lives, their relationships, their choices, and in events. They further stated that the principles had become a critical factor in strengthening their resilience during difficult times.

Finding 12: The programs helped reduce stigma and increased help-seeking behaviours.

Another key outcome reported by agencies is that participants felt more comfortable and less stigmatized asking for help for the issues they were facing, including mental health issues. In the program evaluations, participants reported that they were more comfortable seeking this support because the programs and services were Black-led and Black-focused. This lessened their anxiety based on past experiences of feeling judged and experiencing anti-Black racism when trying to access services. In addition, both parents and youth reported that their knowledge of the services available to them in the community also increased, as did their knowledge of which services to access as issues arise for them.

[8] Delta Family and Resource Centre Report, p 45

In addition, by delivering parenting programs through community agencies that offer a range of other services, participants became aware of the other programs and services available to them. Staff found that these parenting programs were therefore a critical entry point for accessing much-needed programs and services. Staff reported that throughout the workshops, participants were connected with other services such as counselling supports, health and nutritional support, accessing government funding and grants, respite services, and employment programs. Staff reported that participants were very interested in hearing about the various other programs and services available, asked questions, took notes, and followed up to access these programs and services.

Finding 13: The programs helped parents develop a greater understanding of parenting in the Canadian context.

These programs were particularly important for orienting newcomer parents to parenting in the Canadian context, especially parents who may have used corporal punishment in their home countries. The programs helped parents understand the child welfare laws in Canada and develop new approaches to disciplining their children in ways that also honour their values and culture, yet minimize the risk of their children being apprehended by the child welfare system. Parents learned about the important role they play in their child's education and that they can't leave their child's education entirely to the school system as they may have done in their home countries. Newcomer parents also reported that the programs helped them become more independent and confident with parenting their children in Canada.

Finding 14: The programs helped increase parents' understanding of anti-Black racism and its impact on them and their children.

Because these programs were conducted through an anti-Black racism lens, parents were able to learn about anti-Black racism and its impact on them and their parenting, as well as the significant impact anti-Black racism has on their children. This is particularly important for newcomer parents, who may be experiencing anti-Black racism for the first time and may not be aware of it or may not understand how it manifests itself in their lives.

These programs also supported parents to have intentional and deeper conversations with their children about anti-Black racism, current events, and incidents of racism that they have personally experienced. Parents reported feeling more competent and comfortable in discussing racism-related issues with their children. Non-Black parents of Black children also reported that the program helped them discuss race and racism with their children. They shared that becoming comfortable engaging in these conversations allowed them to

form deeper connections with their child's Black parent, as they now had a better understanding of the Black parent's experiences.

Staff found that many parents lacked an in-depth understanding of anti-Black racism. They shared that while many parents are aware of the superficial manifestations of racism—such as name-calling and the preferential treatment experienced by White people—many were unaware of how racism manifests itself in less overt ways—for instance, the streaming of African Canadian children into programs of study below their level of ability and the overidentification of Black children as having special education needs. In addition, many parents had no knowledge of Canada's history of anti-Black racism, the history of African and Indigenous enslavement, and how anti-Black racism continues to influence all social systems to this day. This lack of knowledge impacts how parents frame the challenges they are experiencing and whether they will advocate for themselves and their children when issues do occur.

These programs also helped parents become better attuned to the concerns of their children. For example, some parents reported their realization that youth share similar fears, such as the increase in gun violence, especially in the summer months, which has allowed them to better understand their children's reluctance to engage in outdoor activities in the neighbourhood. Parents also reported being able to better recognize how ongoing gun violence may trigger anxiety and feelings of loss and grief in their children. By connecting violence to systemic and structural racism, parents were also able to better understand the forces that result in the gun violence in certain parts of the city. As such, they were able to engage in conversations with their children to counter the narrative perpetuated in the media that blame Black youth rather than systemic and structural racism for gun violence. This, parents said, was necessary because they felt that internalizing such misinformation was highly detrimental to the psyche of Black children and youth.

The youth themselves also reported a greater understanding of the impact of anti-Black racism. They felt that they have been able to take their learning and use it in their family environment and with their peers to make a positive impact.

Finding 15: These programs increased the confidence of both children and parents.

Parents reported more confidence in their parenting after learning more about child development and the milestones that can be observed as well as learning new techniques

for discipline. They shared that by seeing the methods modelled by the program staff, they felt increased confidence in using these techniques at home.

Parents also reported on the impact the programs had on their children. They shared that their children gained confidence, which manifested as an observable difference in their children's interactions with peers and other adults. Children in the program were also observed by staff and parents to increasingly "call out" inappropriate behaviour by other children in the program. As was noted in Delta's program evaluation:

> *At first, he was very shy, but now he is more talkative and even assertive. He has learned skills that he has used to intervene when younger children are involved in conflict. He steps in, and in a constructive way helps to come to a solution. ~Delta Parent Participant*

Staff also reported observing a marked improvement in the self-confidence of several participants who were initially shy but increasingly took on more of a leadership role in the parenting program, with some parents volunteering to lead discussion groups and become peer mentors.

In the Reading Partnership for Black Parents report, parents noted that their children took more initiative to read independently and had become more confident readers. In addition, many parents are also now able to help their children with homework and have the confidence to support their child's reading. In addition, the Reading Partnership's evaluation shows an improvement in children's reading ability in areas of letter recognition, sound recognition, sight words, reading new texts, and comprehension.

Finding 16: These programs expanded the support networks of parents.

The programs reported that they were able to help parents expand their support networks. By providing a space for parents to discuss the challenges of parenting with one another and offering strategies and differing perspectives, parents increased their comfort with opening up to the group, thereby enabling them to make connections with the other parents. Many agencies reported that these connections continued outside of the group setting, with many forming informal peer support networks that continued after the program ended.

Young and Potential Fathers reported that participants have taken a degree of ownership for the Dads' Group along with responsibility for supporting each other. This includes the creation of a WhatsApp group organized by one of the participants so that members are

able to provide ongoing peer support to each other. Staff found that the WhatsApp group offered extended support to parents outside of the group meetings, allowed participants to connect with each other when they were unable to attend a particular session of the group, and enabled parents to receive support as issues arose. Staff also found that the ability for participants to stay connected had the effect of encouraging men who had missed a group session to show up for future meetings.

Finding 17: These programs helped improve the mental wellness of both parents and their children.

Some parents reported that they were experiencing stress due to life circumstances, with some admitting that they were taking their frustrations out on their children and unable to attend to their children's needs in ways they would like. They reported that their participation in these programs provided the supports they needed and access to a range of programs and services to help them deal with various issues in their lives. By so doing, the parents reported that both they and their children were experiencing improved mental wellness.

The majority of parents who attended the parenting programs were single mothers, young mothers, and new mothers. Some of these women reported that prior to attending the workshops, they were struggling in such areas as setting limits for their children, spending quality time with their children, and finding a balance between attending to their child's needs and their own. While experiencing these challenges, many reported being hesitant to set rules and follow through with them because they didn't want to be a "bad parent" and they wanted to maintain a good relationship with their children. Through the programs, they learned the importance of setting rules and limits for children. Parents reported that implementing "household rules" resulted in their children being calmer and more cooperative. They reported that the techniques they learned not only improved their children's behaviours but also their relationship with their children and their children's other parent.

Delta also reported that participants in the Motivated Mamas' group stressed a need for Black moms to have time to focus on self-care because their lives are dominated by looking after their children and families. The pressures of caring for their families left them with little opportunity to reflect on the ongoing demands and stressors in their lives and the impact this has on their emotional well-being. In addition, they felt that as Black women, the pressure to be strong in the face of adversity can sometimes be a burden. Staff felt that

the programs helped these women learn that being vulnerable and seeking help does not mean that they are "weak."

In addition, participants shared the challenges faced by Black families in recognizing, disclosing, and seeking help to address issues affecting their mental wellness. Parents felt that while a general societal stigma implies that a mental health challenge is a sign of weakness, a personal or moral defect, and something that should be kept hidden, there are additional cultural factors, societal pressures, and stereotypes that influence beliefs about mental health in the Black community. Systemic anti-Black racism, financial instability, gun violence, and other forms of trauma cause psychological distress and increase a person's risk for mental illness. In addition, barriers such as the lack of culturally appropriate treatment and responses, as well as systems that perpetuate inequities, contribute to distrust and suspicion. These programs encouraged the open discussion of the various issues that contributed to mental health challenges while also increasing help-seeking behaviours. Connecting parents to culturally relevant mental health services also increased the likelihood that program participants would access these services.

Finding 18: These programs helped the agencies establish relationships with public sector organizations.

Despite the challenges, many agencies reported that they were able to establish relationships with public sector organizations, in particular children's aid societies and schools. These relationships were important for preventing issues and also intervening when issues did occur. Some agencies invited staff from public sector organizations to attend parenting sessions to share information about the role of the organization, their expectations of parents, and who to contact should issues arise. In some agencies, a relationship was established so that the agency received referrals from children's aid societies. This relationship enabled the agency to provide the supports parents needed to prevent their children from being apprehended. ACCN found that partnering with school principals extended they agency's reach outside the scope of religious organizations. By partnering with school principals in Peel Region, ACCN was able to offer the program to parents within their schools.

8.4 Implementation challenges

In addition to the challenges documented in the previous section, the implementation of these programs was hampered by the following challenges.

Recruiting and retaining staff

Key to the success of these programs is that they are delivered through a culturally responsive lens by Black staff. However, recruiting and retaining program staff who had the lived experience, an understanding of anti-Black racism, and the complement of necessary professional skills, experience, and knowledge proved to be a challenge in some cases. During the pandemic, the ability to retain staff became even more challenging, given the impact of the pandemic on the staff themselves and since, for most staff, this was a temporary and/or part-time job.

For many programs, it was imperative that all staff, facilitators, and volunteers have a deep understanding of the history of people of African ancestry, the impact of those experiences, as well as anti-Black racism and its intersection with other forms of trauma. Some supplemented the existing knowledge of staff with ongoing professional

development for all staff involved in the program and opportunities to discuss and debrief experiences. They found that this was essential to the success of programs and the wellness, effectiveness, and confidence of staff to deliver their programs and engage authentically and supportively with participants.

Many also experienced challenges with retaining staff as the pandemic hit Ontario, as staff had to deal with their own pressures at home while managing program requirements and supporting parents to meet their own challenges. In addition, staff who worked part-time experienced uncertainty with respect to their employment, a reduction in work hours, loss of second incomes, and other impacts as the province shut down. This led to some agencies experiencing turnover at this time as staff sought to care for their families and reduce their exposure to COVID-19. Many staff struggled with their deep commitment to providing programming and their fear of contracting the virus and passing it on to other family members, especially vulnerable family members. It was particularly challenging for agencies whose staff were in positions contingent on ongoing program funding. These challenges were expressed in the final program report shared by Delta Family Resource Centre:

> Staff lamented that employees of community-based organizations serving vulnerable populations are not adequately compensated due to the precarious nature of funding. Therefore community programs experience high staff turnover rates which can negatively impact program quality and rapport building with residents. Working from home also posed issues for maintaining good work/life balance and forced a state of constant multitasking. Some staff reported working extended hours and talked about the pressure of maintaining high quality services while you yourself are in crisis.

Another reason for turnover was the fact that some programs relied on staff who also held other jobs and only worked part-time or volunteered with the program. The A Sound Mind program made it clear that staff turnover "played an issue at times as it was hard to retain qualified, culturally competent staff that was able to work limited part-time or volunteer hours, while maintaining other employment."[9]

In addition, as the end of the 3-year funding period approached—before there was certainty about ongoing funding for the programs—some programs saw increased

[9] The Nigerian Canadians for Cultural, Educational, and Economic Progress Report, p 5

turnover as staff left to seek more secure employment elsewhere. The announcement of continued funding helped address this issue.

Staff burnout

Another challenge that many of the programs faced was staff burnout and fatigue. The stresses of the pandemic increased the needs of both program participants and staff themselves. Many agencies reported that staff, volunteers, and participants have been in crisis while expected to deliver the program. In addition, the dual crisis of the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd increased the number of participants in some programs owing to an increased sense of social and collective trauma within the Black community. At the same time, staff were asked to pivot in order to deliver the programs online while also addressing the additional needs of program participants, particularly with respect to food insecurity. As a result, many staff were asked to work extra hours, not all of which were paid. All of these factors led to frustrations for staff, exhaustion, feelings of powerlessness, and burnout.

Referring program participants to other services

While these programs were able to provide much-needed support, many parents and children needed additional services, particularly in the areas of mental health and financial support. However, the programs to which referrals were made sometimes had associated fees and long wait times, which limited participants' access to these programs.

Some agencies also reported that when their program participants were able to access mainstream programs, they found that these organizations had little to no knowledge of Black communities, their culture, their history, and how anti-Black racism impacts their lives. This in turn created another barrier to Black parents' accessing and benefiting from these programs and services, further highlighting the need for programs and staff that offer culturally appropriate support to Black service users.

Program location

A number of agencies noted that the distance participants had to travel to attend programs in person proved to be a challenge. Agencies noted that they often received inquiries from parents outside of their immediate catchment area. In some cases, they were able to refer the caller to another of the ISBP-funded programs in their area. But this was not always the case, which resulted in some participants travelling long distances to attend their program. In locations outside of Toronto, where there was only one ISBP-funded agency in the

community, Black families were travelling across the city to attend the program. As REPFO noted in their final program report:

> Workers reported that, as the program went on, they received Black families residing in the South and West Ends of the city of Ottawa (Nepean and Kanata) that are relatively far from the REPFO office, which is in the East End. The trip on the bus can be between 45 minutes and one hour depending on the circumstances.

This highlights the need for the provision of services in multiple locations to increase access to these programs and services, particularly for families who rely on public transportation.

The cost of public transit was a related challenge. As REPFO reported, word of mouth and social media led to information about their programs spreading outside of the program's catchment area. As a result, there were people wanting to attend the program but could not afford the cost of transportation. Some programs reported that they were able to offer financial support to help low-income participants attend their program. REPFO staff also travelled to meet with program participants rather than have them travel to the program. They deemed it more cost efficient to have one worker travel rather than multiple clients from the same community travel to come to the centre.

Services in languages other than English and French

Another challenge identified by a number of agencies was their limited capacity to provide services in multiple languages. They shared that if staff did not speak these languages, in some cases they had to pay for external interpreters, which is an unanticipated cost to the program. For example, in Windsor, where the agency serves a large number of African newcomers, NCCEEP was able to rely on a network of volunteers to help fill the language gap.

For many program participants, neither of Canada's two official languages is their first language. As such, it can be difficult for them to access services from government or community agencies. While some agencies were able to meet the language needs of participants, it can slow down the intervention process in some cases; in others, it can create a barrier to parents' even knowing about the program and reaching out for much-needed support.

Reluctance of service users to participate in the evaluation of the program

Many agencies reported that program participants were hesitant to participate in a formal program and provide any personal information to program staff. This extended to participating in the evaluation of the program by completing feedback forms.

The diminished trust between members of Black communities and service providers makes the community highly vigilant, extremely skeptical, and cautious about seeking support and sharing their personal information. The reluctance of Black people to participate in data collection was identified as the "concern that their information will be entered into a system that causes them to be unjustly targeted for seeking assistance."[10]

Unfortunately, this reluctance impacts the ability of agencies to fully document the effectiveness of their programs. While all agencies had developed surveys to collect program participants' feedback at the end of their participation in the program, they reported limited success in getting participants to complete these surveys. While ensuring that participants understood how the data was going to be used and that no personal information would be shared with the funder helped to increase participation, many agencies found that gathering participants' input for the evaluation was challenging.

Regulatory and other issues

Two agencies in particular found that other issues impacted their ability to implement their programs as planned: Delta and Mommy Monitor.

Delta had planned to establish a Parenting Centre for the Black Community using pop-up repurposed container infrastructure. However, once the structure had been completed, the agency was unable to secure a location that would accommodate the necessary hook-ups for electricity and sewage. As a result, the Kujistahi program has been operating without a dedicated space within the Delta Family Resource Centre and other community spaces.

Mommy Monitor experienced significant challenges and learned valuable lessons about app development for health care. They discovered that there are many regulations and liability concerns that must be addressed before they can develop an app related to maternal health. They are currently in the process of fulfilling these requirements, which includes an evaluation of the app by a reproductive and maternal health committee,

[10] John Howard Society of Durham Region & Side by Side Report, p 11

writing a scientific paper validating the need for and development of the app, piloting the app, evaluation, soft launch, and formal launch.

Mommy Monitor has also had to redesign the app twice and rethink the use of the website. They found that the stages of app development, including ideation, wireframe, prototype, UI, software architecture, and iOS/Android design, to be lengthy processes. A website also had to be built to link to the app. Despite these setbacks, the agency has managed to effectively deliver the program through their website and by partnering with a doula agency to train their initial volunteers at a lower cost.

8.5 The COVID-19 pandemic

The programs received their initial funding in the 2018–2019 fiscal year. The agencies began designing their programs, hiring staff, and implementing the programs, achieving one full year of implementation before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada. The virus was confirmed to have reached Canada on January 25, 2020. In March 2020, cases of community transmission were confirmed, and the government of Ontario declared a state

of emergency. This began a series of restrictions, including school and daycare closures, prohibitions on gatherings, and closures of non-essential businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic created and compounded a number of challenges to the effective implementation of these programs. While agencies had to quickly pivot to implement their programs to address the unanticipated challenges to start-up, as previously discussed in this report, they again had to pivot once the pandemic hit Ontario to address the needs and concerns of both program participants and staff. The pandemic impacted the implementation of the ISBP-funded programs in multiple ways, such as deepening and changing the needs of Black families; making it more difficult to conduct outreach to recruit program participants; impacting their ability to partner with other agencies and public sector organizations; impacting their ability to refer parents to other programs and services; requiring in-person programs to be delivered virtually; and creating barriers to participating in virtual programming due to lack of computer literacy, devices, and internet access. These issues are further discussed in this section.

Deepening and changing needs of Black families: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability in Black communities served by the ISBP Initiative. As the pandemic has progressed, research has shown that some of the neighbourhoods served by these agencies have borne the brunt of the pandemic. For example, public health officials reported that people who identify as Black accounted for between 21% and 23% of all COVID-19 infections in Toronto, the largest of any ethno-racial group, despite Black people representing only 9% of the city's population. At the height of the pandemic, northwest Toronto reported positivity rates approaching or more than 10%.[11] At the same time, access to vaccines were not prioritized in these communities.

Furthermore, the needs of Black families deepened, as those who were already in vulnerable economic circumstances lost their incomes. They therefore experienced challenges such as food security and getting access to devices and the internet to support their children in virtual learning. In addition, many Black parents continued to work during the pandemic because they worked in essential services and did not have the option of working from home because of the nature of their jobs. While they had to go to work, schools were closed or had shifted to remote learning. In addition, children and youth were

[11] Fox, C. (2020, October 19). Several neighbourhoods in Toronto have positivity rates above 10 per cent: New data. *CTV News*. https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/several-neighbourhoods-in-toronto-have-positivity-rates-above-10-per-cent-newdata-1.5151503

experiencing isolation and challenges due to the lack of socialization with peers and lack of extracurricular activities.

The pandemic also highlighted the fact that until a family's basic needs are met, parents are unable to participate in parenting programs. As such, it was essential for many of the ISBP-funded agencies and programs to shift their focus to helping participants access food security programs and emergency COVID-19 funding.

With socializing significantly reduced, many of these families also needed emotional support and someone to talk to about their anxiety and fear. The pandemic raised issues surrounding isolation, loneliness, and the importance of mental health, among other things. For participants who were immigrants and newcomers, there was the added concern about the safety of their loved ones living abroad. Some staff noted that the pandemic may have facilitated many Black families to accept help and open up about their own mental health issues and how it affects their ability to parent.

Many of the agencies reported receiving calls from participants requesting support for their varied needs. For many agencies, the number of calls and the need became overwhelming for the small number of staff. Because programs did not want to turn away people during this crisis, it resulted in staff contributing countless volunteer hours, as the ISBP funding could not cover the staff time required to meet the increased need. Staff at various agencies engaged in various activities to meet the needs of their service users, including creating COVID-19-related resources for parents, informing participants about the resources offered by the government and other community agencies, assisting service users to access food banks and other supports, and delivering food baskets.

Challenges conducting outreach: Prior to the pandemic, many agencies had planned to recruit participants by attending in-person events. In the first year of the programs, staff found that reaching out to parents directly at community- and school-based events was very successful in increasing people's understanding of the programs and attracting participants. The pandemic severely limited the number of such events that were occurring, and hence negatively impacted the agencies' ability to increase awareness of these programs and recruit participants.

These agencies began to change how they marketed their programs. They increased their visibility on social media platforms and relied on word-of-mouth from past participants to spread word of the program and the new online format.

Ability to partner: The pandemic also disrupted partnerships, as the lockdowns limited the ability to engage in person. While some agencies were able to adapt to the changing environment, other programs were not able to because of the nature of the partnership. For example, Young and Potential Fathers had intended to partner with the More Than a Haircut Program run by the Macaulay Child Development Centre because barbershops were closed during the various lockdowns.

Referral making: Before the pandemic, participants were hesitant to follow up on referrals to unfamiliar community resources and services. While the pandemic increased the needs of Black parents and the need to seek services from multiple agencies, it also highlighted their hesitancy to seek help even in the face of this increased need. This highlights the need for multiservice agencies, which enable people to access various services from one trusted source. It also highlights the need for staff to take the additional time to make warm referrals. This may include making the call with the service user to the referral agency and, if appropriate, attending the initial appointment with the new provider for continuation of care and to help ease the transition with a new service provider.

Virtual programming: Following the uncertainty at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies came to the realization that they needed to shift to virtual delivery of their programs and adapt their programs to be delivered virtually. It took significant effort to pivot to delivery methods that were in keeping with safety measures adopted by the province and public health units while still fulfilling program objectives. While many agencies were able to deliver programming virtually, staff found it challenging in many respects.

Missing from the virtual environment is the informal conversations that occur before and after in-person sessions that help to build rapport and trust within the group. This created some challenges, as staff found it difficult to create a safe atmosphere (similar to that of the in-person sessions) that fostered meaningful conversations during the online workshops. Staff noted that parents were not as comfortable with sharing during online sessions and shared more when the sessions were in person. Though staff tried to create a safe space, many parents were hesitant to engage in conversation in the virtual environment.

Through the Satisfaction and Feedback Surveys, parents shared that while they did enjoy that the online workshops offered more flexibility and a comfortable environment, they would have preferred to attend in-person workshops. Parents shared that in-person group

sessions allow for more natural human connection, better energy and social dynamics, and more free-flowing communication—things that are difficult to achieve in a virtual setting.

In addition, when the programs were delivered in person, an important aspect for participants was getting to eat a meal together, an activity that ended when the program shifted to online delivery.

Programs that included the participation of children also faced challenges for a number of reasons. Younger children found it difficult to remain focused for virtual programs, while school-aged children experienced screen fatigue, as they were spending considerable time on their devices for online learning. They were then being asked to spend more time online for the ISBP program. In addition, where households had only one device, parents often needed to share access with their children. In the virtual environment, parents were often in the same room as their children, so they were not able to be as open and honest about parenting challenges as they were in person—when their children were engaged in programming in another room. To address this situation, various options were used such as typing responses in the chat box or using poll questions. Agencies also revised some programming to enable both parents and children to be part of the same conversation.

Part of this adaptation included more co-facilitation with participants and relying on past participants to facilitate the sessions. The topics also changed, and increased input from participants was sought to ensure that the topics addressed their needs and concerns.

While staff were able to shift to online delivery, Zoom fatigue set in over time, and it became increasingly challenging to continue to engage with participants virtually.

Lack of computer literacy, devices, and internet access: While the pandemic made it necessary to move the programming online, it highlighted the fact that not all families had access to devices or high-speed internet. Because the majority of program participants are categorized as low income, access to technology and internet capabilities are a financial challenge for many.

Where families were able to obtain devices and internet connection, computer literacy could also be a barrier. Some program staff found it necessary to teach parents and caregivers how to set up an email account, communicate electronically, and access the virtual meetings. Staff also supported families in helping their children access online schooling and obtain computers for school.

While in some cases virtual participation allowed wider access, in others—where people were not comfortable using technology or did not have adequate devices or internet connection—participation was curtailed. The increased costs of using data and the difficulty of getting access to a device when only one was available in the home significantly inhibited participation. Some agencies were able to acquire laptops and devices for community members through partnerships with agencies and programs responding to the increased needs during the pandemic, but the need continues to be great. Home environments and parental responsibilities are not always conducive to safe, confidential, and undisturbed program participation. Where feasible, programs offered one-on-one phone or web-based sessions with individuals who were unable to join at a program's scheduled time.

Some families were not able to access ISBP programs because of these barriers when agencies pivoted to online delivery. Furthermore, because in-person outreach was curtailed, staff faced difficulty connecting with and reaching families who did not have access to technology.

8.6 Opportunities created by COVID-19

Along with the many challenges created by COVID-19, there were also a number of opportunities created by the pandemic.

Increased reach: As programs went online, agencies increased their social media presence and outreach. As a result, they began to attract Black parents outside of their geographic catchment areas. Because people no longer had to travel to attend in-person sessions, Black parents from across the province were able to participate in their programs.

The online environment also increased participants' access to a range of other programs and services, with staff noting that they have referred participants to a range of online resources and workshops.

Increased access: While the loss of in-person sessions limited the participation of many parents and caregivers, the move to online programming increased the opportunity for others to participate. These parents shared that virtual programming eliminated travel time, thereby reducing the time commitment, the need to arrange for child care, and their transportation costs. Staff noted that during some of the sessions, participants continued to cook, fold laundry, braid hair, and prepare meals for their children while still participating in the group session. For these parents, this became a much preferred way to access services, and they expressed a desire to access additional programming virtually once the pandemic restrictions were removed.

Modelling: The virtual setting meant that not only were parents participating from their homes, but so too were staff. This provided the unanticipated opportunity for staff to model with their own children the techniques discussed in the sessions. This provided participants will real-time and real-world examples of the effectiveness of these techniques. As one program staff member at Delta shared:

> *Working from home while conducting these workshops was very challenging for all of us. Oftentimes while facilitating the workshops I was interrupted by my own children, who I would swear were trying to prove me wrong and have me contradict everything I was teaching. At the end of almost all the workshops, there was always one participant who would say "most people who teach these seminars are just 'talk'; watching you deal with your own children and putting these strategies into practice while still conducting the workshop shows us that it is in fact possible." ~Delta Staff Member*

9. Findings

9.1 Program challenges

Through the implementation of these programs, staff gained insight into the various needs of Black parents and caregivers that the programs did not address. In addition, the implementation of the programs highlighted how limited the funding was, as funding often does not account for the various needs of Black parents, which creates barriers to accessing services.

Services in languages other than English and French

Agencies learned that there is a great demand for services in a language other than Canada's two official languages, particularly for newcomers, who have a strong need for programs to help them parent in the Canadian context. Where staff did speak another language, they were able to provide these services. But given the range of languages spoken by newcomers, the need and cost of interpreters proved to be a challenge. Volunteers were often relied on because program funds did not allow for translation and interpretation services.

Cost to parents of participating in these programs

While these programs were provided free of cost to parents, many participants reported that they did incur costs, including the costs of child care and transportation. For many parents, this proved to be a challenge and limited their ability to participate in the in-person programs.

Lack of funds for fun and educational activities

The implementation of the program also highlighted for some the need for parents to connect as a community and to connect with their children through fun and educational activities, which were unfunded through the ISBP Initiative. Through these activities, parents are able to build relationships with other program participants and create a support network that would continue beyond the program. It also allowed parents to engage in fund activities with their children that they are otherwise unable to afford. Owing to the cost, many programs were unable to pay for these activities.

As NCCEEP noted, these activities helped to not only increase the bonding among participants, but also created a sense of belonging in the community:

> One of the most prominent impacts that participants spoke to was increased sense of belonging through the social events and social connections made through those events. These opportunities, to be engaged in their community with others of similar cultural background, were shared to increase their positive well-being by feeling welcomed, feeling like a family, and feeling connection. ~NCCEEP, p. 14

Ongoing professional development

In addition, while agencies were able to hire highly skilled and knowledgeable staff, funding didn't allow for program staff to access ongoing professional development, which would have enhanced their ability to support the needs of Black parents and caregivers.

Need for mental health and substance use services

Some programs also noted that the challenges faced by Black parents is compounded when the parent is also experiencing mental health or substance use issues. While the need is there, the staff heard from parents that barriers to accessing services included lack of time, cultural barriers, and lack of culturally responsive services. Not having access to these services had a continuing negative effect on participants' parenting and consequently on their children and household.

Clinical work requires strong therapeutic skills because family units mean multiple clients being supported simultaneously. In addition, owing to the limited number of service providers that referrals can be made do, the wait time to access these services is long.

As Malton Neighbourhood Services noted, because trauma complexity is wide and deep, participants needed their continued support until they were able to receive service. While it was taxing to staffing resources, agencies found it necessary to continue to support these families.

9.2 Key learnings and promising practices

This section summarizes the lessons learned that can be applied to future programs to support Black parents and caregivers and their children. These lessons also provide insight into future opportunities and the potential for these programs to be scaled up for wider implementation.

Continued need for Black-focused programs

The first key learning from the ISBP Initiative is that there is a continued need for programs to specifically address the needs of Black parents and caregivers.

While some agencies found it challenging initially to engage participants and get referrals from mainstream and public sector organizations—because the programs were Black-led and Black-focused—it was because of this focus that participants connected with and benefited from the program. While some Black parents may feel comfortable attending parenting programs that are open to the general public, the Black-led and Black-focused nature of the programs is specifically what attracted many of the participants to these programs, enabling them to make meaningful connections with other participants, increase their support networks, and allow them to benefit from the program.

However, it is evident from the learnings from the program implementation that simply offering these programs is not sufficient to ensure participation. The challenges with recruiting participants highlighted the need for both education of and outreach to potential referring organizations as well as Black parents and caregivers. Both groups need an increased understanding of anti-Black racism and the impacts on Black children and families, as well as the need for culturally relevant programming if such programs are to be normalized and not seen as segregationist or stigmatizing.

Black families want and do seek help

The implementation of these programs also found that Black families want and do seek help. However, they face various barriers to accessing services, including location, arranging and paying for childcare, and cost of transportation. In addition, the lack of cultural relevance of available programs also limits their desire to participate in and complete these programs. Heritage Skills Development Centre noted in their final report that newcomer parents in particular appreciated their program:

> The newcomer parents reported that they were pleased to gain information and resources as well as network with other parents who were also struggling with various challenges and parenting issues. They were also thankful that this kind of intervention was provided to them as there was no such project in the Scarborough neighbourhood. The parents appreciated that the various activities were culturally-focused taking into consideration their cultural practices, norms and values thus promoting a sense of belong amongst them. It provided them a safe, welcoming and supportive environment that embraced their strengths as black parents and improved their relationship with their children. ~Heritage Skills Development Centre, p. 5.

In addition, these programs need to be described and promoted in a way that does not stigmatize those participating in the program. For example, participating in a parenting program suggests that there is something wrong with one's parenting. Finding the right way to describe and promote these programs will encourage the participation of Black parents.

These parenting programs also proved to be an entry point to accessing additional, and much-needed, services to address COVID-19-related as well as other ongoing issues. These needs included financial difficulties, refugee claims, and accessing disability supports for a child. But in many cases, parents did not know about these services or were hesitant to seek help. Engaging in these programs not only helped them connect to these programs, but also helped them understand that there is no shame in needing and seeking help; rather than being a sign of a bad parent, it is instead the sign of a good parent.

Agencies also learned that parents want to participate in programs. However, because parents often operate in survival mode, time restraints and child care challenges make their participation challenging. As such, programs must also address financial barriers to participation by providing childminding and covering transportation costs. Programs that also offer family outings and other activities help to increase engagement by freeing participants up from the challenges in their day-to-day lives. In addition, providing services that are readily accessible in their neighbourhoods or are accessible online will increase access for many parents.

Ineffectiveness of traditional parenting programs for the populations served; programs need to be informal and flexible

Another important learning from the implementation of these programs is that the formal, traditional model of parenting programs created a challenge to the participation of many Black parents and caregivers.

Firstly, while much of the programming offered was designed to be a more formal series of workshops, many agencies reported that Black communities have grown cautious of formal programs and prefer an informal program environment. In particular, many people are hesitant to provide personal information because of their concern that they will be entered into a system that will cause them to be unjustly targeted for seeking assistance. As such, agencies found that there is a need for these programs to be informal to encourage engagement and ongoing participation. Agencies noted that they have accommodated the need for this informality by collecting only the necessary amount of personal information,

ensuring their confidentiality and privacy, and relying on peer mentor support and elder interventions.

In addition, given that many potential program participants are newcomers to Canada, agencies also have to overcome the hesitancy of newcomers to interact with what is seen as a government agency. Some arrive in Canada with apprehension about interacting with governments and are distrustful of the system. They found that many participants were wary of participating in formal programs and fearful of what the repercussions might be. As a result, they suffered in silence without seeking help. The informality of the programs increased their comfort with participating in the programs.

In addition, formal programs with a prescribed agenda were not always addressing the immediate needs of participants. Agencies reported that particularly after the pandemic began, parents voiced the increased challenges of marital issues and conflict with children, and voiced the need for workshops that addressed the immediate parenting needs of group participants rather than workshops that followed a prescribed agenda.

Informal supports are needed outside of normal business hours or program sessions

In addition to the formal programs and supports offered, the need to provide informal supports outside of normal business hours or program sessions was reinforced.

Agencies tried to meet this need in different ways. First, the bonds created in the programs allowed participants to want to connect and support one another outside of the program. By participating in the parenting programs, participants were able to bond with others and created their own informal peer support groups. This allowed them to continue these relationships and offer supports to each other outside of the programming offered by the agency. As noted previously, participants in the Dads' Group run by Young and Potential Fathers took on the responsibility to support each other. This included the creation of a WhatsApp group organized by one of the participants so that members could provide ongoing peer support to each other.

In other cases, the program itself set up WhatsApp groups to keep community members engaged and allow them to connect outside of the program. Through this social media platform, events, community services, and volunteer and employment opportunities were shared. Participants were able to chat with each other about any issues and offer ongoing support to each other. Some programs relied on volunteers, including seniors, to provide informal and ongoing support.

Some also set up peer support "hotlines," which gave participants access to staff and volunteers on an almost 24/7 basis for assistance and support in times of crisis.

Desire to create a community of practice

There is a need for agencies offering similar services to work in collaboration with one another. While some of this occurred during the course of these 3 years, agencies expressed a desire for more formal and coordinated efforts to create a community of practice to enable them to share learnings and challenges, and share strategies to address challenges. This would have been particularly beneficial to agencies early on in the implementation of the program, as some were experiencing similar challenges with recruiting participants.

Some of this collaboration came about through this evaluation, as it brought agencies together to learn about the other programs funded by the ISBP Initiative, develop data collection tools, discuss the challenges of data collection, and share strategies to evaluate outcomes of their programs. However, there is an ongoing need for agency staff to work collaboratively with respect to programming. While various agencies made referrals to other agencies and connected on an informal basis, they expressed the desire for the creation of opportunities to dialogue with other ISBP-funded programs. With the 2-year extension of the funding, the agencies expressed the desire for such opportunities to be created.

Agencies also praised the tradeshow-style event that was held in the first year of funding, and expressed a desire for that to continue, perhaps annually. Not only would it help provide information to the Black community about the programs and services available, but it would have assisted in keeping the collaborative spirit alive between agencies by enabling the ISBP-funded agencies to connect.

Need to be aware of the sensitivities in small communities

Another key learning is the need to pay close attention to the sensitivities in small communities, both Black communities in smaller cities as well as small ethnic communities in any city. This was noted by a few agencies that shared that some people chose not to participate in group programs because they did not want to openly share their issues and challenges with others in their community. Others also hesitated to engage in individual or family counselling out of fear that the counsellor might share their intimate information with others in the community.

Recognizing that privacy is a major concern within the Black community, NCCEEP engaged a White marriage counsellor who has extensive experience working with Black and African communities. As he was not a member of the Black community, this increased the comfort level of some that their personal information would not be shared back into their communities. While he was available and some sought him out, NCCEEP noted that other participants still preferred to connect with an elder in the community, so they made this option available.

Importance of role that elders play in providing supports

Both Delta and NCCEEP found that elder intervention by one of the African/Black seniors was an important element of their programming because of the respect that elders have within Black communities. They found that elders were able to offer benefits in a number of areas. First, they were able to provide informal counselling and advice. Elders also created a culturally safe and relevant mediation and counselling environment that allowed people to be honest about their situation and gain practical advice that ultimately benefited many families. Some also found that elder intervention created a grandparent-type relationship with many young people whose parents were not available to them because they worked long hours or were not living close by.

As noted in an earlier section, while professional counsellors were available to program participants, some participants preferred having an elder to seek advice and support from, as they appreciated the value of lived experience over formal education. As Delta noted in their report:

> A grandmother, originally from continental Africa, who initially attended the program with her grandchild, continued to participate even though her grandchild no longer attends. She has assumed the role of elder and supplements information staff bring to the group with her knowledge and stories. Her participation in this way has brought richness and depth to the conversation.

As NCCEEP noted in their report, the use of elders also benefited the elders themselves, as it gave them a sense of purpose and belonging in the community. NCCEEP partnered with sister agencies, such as the Windsor-Essex Black Seniors Association, thereby extending the network of elders willing and able to play this important role. The program provided a mutually beneficial environment by keeping the seniors active and involved in the community while allowing them to support the program by lending their knowledge and

experience to other parents and caregivers. The success of elders was such that NCCEEP will be switching from formal mediation to elder intervention for family issues.

Importance of peer support

Similarly, agencies found that many parents valued the lived experiences of other parents and sought information and support from a peer. In adapting their programs to better meet the needs of participants, programs also found that participants valued the experiences of other program participants and wanted to hear from them in the parenting sessions. As a result, the delivery model was changed from one of an "expert" delivering programs to parents to one that relied more on the strengths and knowledge of program participants. This approach had the added benefit of allowing program participants to get to know each other, bond, and create peer support networks outside of the program.

ACCN noted that while it had paired mentor and mentee families, the lines were soon blurred between mentor and mentee, because "everyone has something to share, and everyone had something to learn."[12]

Need for training and ongoing support for staff

While it was critical for these programs to hire Black staff because they share the Black experience, have lived experience with anti-Black racism, and come with a certain level of cultural understanding, some agencies noted that it does not follow that they know all that they need to know to support Black parents and children.

Agencies noted that it is necessary to regularly pause and take stock of the competencies and knowledge needed, and to support staff to acquire these skills and knowledge. As Delta noted in its report:

> Ongoing training and mentoring for staff, peer workers, and volunteers of initiatives such as Kujistahi must reflect current and emerging innovations and knowledge that informs wholistic interventions that support Black families in combatting anti-Black racism and transforming their lives. Training is also necessary to build staff competence to identify and combat anti-Black racism in various sectors and systems such as education, child welfare, health, justice, economic, and media. Organizations must also recognize the human and emotional toll such work takes on staff, and integrate strategies to mitigate and address the impact.

[12] African Canadian Christian Network Report, p 8

In addition, it is important to recognize that in doing the work, staff are always innovating. As such, it is critical to offer opportunities to identify, recognize, and document these best practices and learnings. Such opportunities are often missed, as staff are simply focused on providing the highest quality of service possible to clients and don't themselves recognize their own innovations. Ensuring that such innovations are celebrated, shared, and integrated into the program model is essential to strengthening capacity and expertise in working with Black families.

Need for no-cost programs

While there is a clear need for these programs, many agencies noted that providing them at no cost removed a significant barrier and was a major factor in the success of these programs. Being of no cost to participants is particularly important, as many of these programs are provided through agencies that are located in and serve low-income communities. As the Reading Partnership with Black Parents report noted (p. 29), "the vast number of parents said that if the program were to charge a fee, they would not be able to afford it."

Need to provide services locally

While the programs themselves were of no cost, it is important to understand that there was still a financial cost to parents of child care and transportation as well as a time commitment to participate in the program. Parents who participate in these programs tend to be low income, work multiple jobs, use public transit, and have child care needs, all of which create barriers to participation.

As such, the location of the services proved to be a barrier to participation for some people. Providing these services in one's community would reduce the impact of these barriers. Many programs noted that they have had calls from potential program participants outside of the local catchment area. Some participants decided to join, but experienced challenges to participating because of the distance. As REPFO reported, they have program participants who live in the West End of Ottawa and have trouble getting to their services. Those families, specifically those living in Nepean and Kanata, are penalized by the time they spend on the bus, sometimes an hour each way, to access services. The distance also makes it harder for the home visit team.

Programs need to engage parents as partners and use a strengths-based approach

As noted throughout the reports from agencies, one key learning from the implementation of the ISBP Initiative is that Black parents must be engaged as partners using a strengths-

based approach. While all programs included a strengths-based approach in the design of the curriculum, some program found that they needed to go further by redesigning their delivery model. The programs were designed with the goal of empowering parents to feel like the experts on their own experience, introducing concepts for discussion, facilitating meaningful and powerful conversations, and setting the tone for sharing in a safe environment. However, for most of these programs, the original model was conceptualized with an "expert" sharing information and leading discussions. Program staff quickly learned that this model was not effective at engaging Black parents. These parents wanted a more collaborative structure that allowed them to deal with their immediate issues rather than a prescribed curriculum, share their experiences, and learn from other parents.

Throughout many of these programs, program staff informed the structure of the next groups and/or sessions with input from participants. Additionally, program staff adopted a client-centered and solution-centered approach in how they delivered the groups. This meant that staff would allow parents to be the experts in the conversations being held and let them guide the conversations. Topics that were discussed among parents included: unpacking culture and identity, parenting styles, communication skills and tools, strengthening parent–child relationships, and developmental stages.

"[T]here have been many sessions where I had an idea of how a session will go and what we will talk about, and the parents always end up leading the conversations and they end up sharing advice and support amongst each other on the topics being discussed." ~TWA Staff

Other adaptations included having separate sessions for mothers and fathers to encourage the participation of fathers. Some programs also enabled participants to lead sessions, with some participants regularly facilitating sessions and becoming peer mentors. Some agencies also reported that participants became so empowered by participating in their program that they were motivated to start a group to support parents and children within their own community.

Program staff also found that in order to sustain the involvement of participants, program design and content must remain adaptable to address the changing and emerging issues facing participants. As Delta noted in its report, such adaptation first requires humility on the part of the service organization to acknowledge that something is not working. It also requires a commitment to listening to the wants of participants and to making the

necessary adjustments. In order to allow for this flexibility in the program, supporters such as funders and donors must be flexible and accept that the organization and community are the experts in creating workable and effective solutions.

Need for separate sessions for Black fathers

For those programs that did not have specific programs for fathers, they found that if they were to include men in these programs, they needed to have programs that were specific to Black fathers. When these groups were not made available, agencies found it challenging to engage men. When a fathers' group was provided, agencies found that men enthusiastically participated and spoke passionately about the welcoming and family feel of the group, comparing it to a sports team and referring to it as "family." They commended program staff on making the group safe, welcoming, and non-judgmental, a place where self-expression was encouraged and they could talk freely, sharing both the negative and positive. Young and Potential Fathers noted that one participant drives from outside of the GTA to attend the group because of the comradery and feeling of belonging.

Importance of referral partners and their ability to serve Black service users

Another key learning of these programs is the importance of referral partners, specifically the need to conduct warm referrals to agencies that are able to effectively serve Black service users.

As Delta noted, "Even when the referral may be seen as internal, i.e., from one program to another program within the same organization, it is important to remember that, for the individual accessing a new service or speaking to an unfamiliar service provider, it is a huge leap of faith."[13] By accepting a referral, participants are transferring their faith in the referrer to the referral partner. As such, there is the obligation of those making the referral to ensure that they are confident that the agency is able to meet the needs of the Black service user. In addition, staff noted that it is important to make warm referrals to support the connection of the participant to the new program.

Furthermore, the receiving organization must be welcoming and prepared to offer a similar quality of service grounded in like principles. While it may be easy to partner with or refer to mainstream agencies, doing the foundational work to understand these partner agencies' values, policies, and practices, and to negotiate the provision of supports to

[13] Delta Family Resource Centre Report, p 42

address the unique needs of Black families, is a responsibility that Black-focused programs assume on behalf of Black families.

A key aspect of Young and Potential Fathers' Ujima Village Framework is the building of a network of agencies and programs to benefit participants. Staff attend conferences, community meetings, and seminars; sit on panels; present via webinars; and attend professional development sessions in order to adequately facilitate the smooth transition from their agency's care to other services. By building this approach into the Ujima Village Framework, staff were able to successfully refer clients to meet their needs. Clients shared that they are thankful and happy to know that Ujima House staff have the connectivity in the professional community to assist them. This gives Ujima House the feel of a much bigger organization. These relationships also mean that clients are referred to Young and Potential Fathers by referral partners that do not have services that specifically address the needs of Black fathers.

Importance of educating those from whom referrals are desired

In addition to building relationships with those to whom program staff will make referrals, staff also found that it is critical to build relationships with and educate those from whom referrals are desired. This highlights the additional work that these organizations must undertake because of the lack of knowledge among public sector organizations of the need for Black-focused groups and anti-Black racism. Recruitment to these programs is also limited by the lack of relationships built by public sector organizations with Black parents, which makes staff hesitant to refer Black parents to a program that they could benefit from.

While the ISBP-funded agencies expected that they would be able to easily obtain referrals from public sector agencies, they experienced barriers that slowed down the start-up process. As noted previously in this report, some public sector organizations and mainstream agencies did not understand the need for a Black-focused program or were hesitant to refer Black parents to the program. This resulted in the ISBP-funded agencies undertaking the additional work of educating their referral partners about anti-Black racism and the issues faced by Black parents. Where these agencies continued to be hesitant to refer Black parents to the program, the ISBP-funded agencies now had to engage in recruitment, work that they had not anticipated.

In addition, staff noted that some service providers were resistant to partnering and collaborating with them because they initially perceived a Black-focused program as competition for their Black service users.

Malton Neighbourhood Services notes that they have made progress by having difficult conversations with partners, stakeholders, and the community to focus attention on the issues faced by Black families. They noted that they have had to educate staff in these organizations that the issues Black people face are not driven by their culture or personal deficiencies, but rather largely by the anti-Black racism that they experience.

Importance of word-of-mouth recruiting and building relationships in the community

Connected to the hesitancy of public sector organizations and mainstream agencies to make referrals to Black-focused programs is the need for agencies to recruit through word of mouth and to build relationships in the community. Many agencies noted that they relied on word-of-mouth recruitment and found that if parents were happy with the program, they told their neighbours, friends, and family. When the information comes from a trusted source, parents are more likely to attend. In addition, they have likely been given a great deal of information about the program and know what to expect when they register.

As Young and Potential Fathers noted:

> A great aspect of our outreach was effected through satisfied clients who were instrumental in spreading the message that at YPF, our services are accessible and responsive to Black parents / caregivers and children with varying abilities and cultural, language, socio-economic, sexual orientation and religious backgrounds or identities.

Need to recognize and serve diverse Black communities and address the needs of various groups within these Black communities, including Black 2SLGBTQ+ families, Black fathers, and Black parents who speak neither English nor French

ISBP-funded agencies also noted the need to recognize and serve the full diversity of Black communities across the province. They noted that while Black people from across the diaspora have common experiences of racism in Canada and cultures rooted in common values, there is a need to ensure that the programs are inclusive toward people from various cultural groups and identities.

These programs must therefore speak directly to the issue that the Black community is not homogeneous while also highlighting the common values and experiences of all Black communities in Canada. This helps to reduce the barriers that may be created when participants come from different ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and age groups. Participants reported that they specifically appreciated the comfort of a shared experience and background with other participants, and not having to censor what they said for fear of offending or not being understood by non-Black participants. Younger fathers participating in the Young and Potential Fathers programming also shared that they valued having more seasoned fathers in the group.

At the same time, these programs must recognize the particular challenges faced by Black people who are also newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+, and other marginalized identities. Staff must also be aware of the particular nuances among various cultural groups. For example, there are some communities that will not participate in programming unless there are staff from that community. This is particularly true for those from the Somali community. As Young and Potential Fathers noted, they initially had difficulty engaging with Somali fathers; they eventually learned that they needed to hire a Somali father in order to engage with that community. Once they were able to hire a Somali Father Support Worker, they were able to make significant progress in addressing the needs of Somali fathers and build strong partnerships with community organizations, leaders, and community members.

While many agencies identified the need for additional programs and services for particular communities, their capacity was limited because of the program mandate and financial constraints.

Some families from countries where neither French nor English is spoken experienced challenges accessing services from government agencies or community organizations. For them, being able to access programs in a language they speak is important. While some programs were able to use staff, volunteers, or paid interpreters, it slowed down the process in some cases and added unanticipated costs to the program.

Need to help program participants identify and address systemic and structural anti-Black racism

While participants know their own lived experiences, they may not understand that these are experiences common to other Black families. In addition, while they may understand racism in the form of interpersonal interactions, they may not understand that racism may be embedded in the policies and practices of an organization. As such, it was important for

participants to hear the experiences of others, understand how racism operates both systemically and structurally, and learn about and develop strategies to address the issues.

As Malton Neighbourhood Services noted in their final report, discussions about anti-Black racism were important in helping participants understand that much of their experience is due to systemic and structural anti-Black racism rather than their failings as parents. It is only within this context that Black parents can then understand and build on their strengths. The agency also highlighted the concept that "knowledge is power" and the importance of understanding the historical context of systemic anti-Black racism that continues to impact Black Canadians. This helps participants understand the need for these programs but also helps them understand their own experiences, particularly their interactions with public sector organizations.

Need to overcome past negative experiences accessing services

Program staff also learned that in order to recruit parents and get them fully engaged in the program, they often had to overcome the damage to trust among program participants. They shared that they experienced challenges getting participants for the program because other programs have let them down. They noted that a benefit was that the programs were offered through trusted community agencies, and so they were able to leverage the outstanding reputation of the agency and the longevity of service in the community to recruit participants.

They also identified that the Black community feels an overall lack of trust in governments, which is transferred to social service agencies. Historically, the Black community has not been treated fairly by government bodies and organizations. This treatment extends to health care, social programs, criminal justice, and education. As such, many people in the Black community have little trust for these kinds of programs. This lack of trust hinders the community from fully taking advantage of such programs.

10. Conclusion

Parenting is one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences. Anti-Black racism makes it even more challenging as Black parents must navigate anti-Black racism and deal with the personal impacts on their physical and mental health, while also trying to shield their children and help them heal from its damaging effects.

As is evident from the reports submitted by the ISBP funded agencies, these programs have helped parents across Ontario deal with the personal impacts, understand and navigate anti-Black racism, understand the impact on their parenting, better parent and support their children, and welcome healthy Black babies into the world.

At the same time, this evaluation has helped develop a better understanding of the issues and promising practices that can be used to develop and deliver programs to Black parents. Most importantly, this evaluation has captured the learnings from the implementation of the ISBP funded programs to gain insight into how best to design and deliver parenting programs to the diverse Black communities in Ontario. These learnings will be relevant to social service agencies, school boards, child welfare

agencies, and other organizations seeking to better serve Black families. These learnings will also be relevant to the ISBP funded agencies themselves to strengthen the programs which have been funded for an additional two years.

While the COVID-19 pandemic offered challenges to the delivery of these programs which, for the most part, were designed to be delivered in person, these agencies were able to not only pivot to deliver the programs online, but also connected many families to the supports and services that they needed during this difficult time.

Since these programs began, the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd have spotlighted the continued existence and impact of anti-Black racism in Canadian society, exposing the need for ongoing Black-focused programs and supports, delivered in a culturally responsive manner. The implementation and learnings from these programs point to how best to provide these ongoing supports to Black parents.