# Best Practice

Recommendations from the Stronger Together: Anti-racism Youth Project

Stronger Together was a project aimed at empowering racialized immigrant youth and young adults to acknowledge and challenge the realities they face around systemic oppression. This project utilized art-based programming[1] and trauma-informed practices[2] as methods to discuss topics surrounding racism and discrimination. Over the course of 6 months, participants participated in a wide range of workshops and art-based activities (listed in the outlined timeline)which were designed to promote their self-confidence and resilience. This best practice resource was created to capture the voices of the participants and highlight opportunities for other youth-serving organizations to better engage with racialized immigrant youth and young adults.

[1] Art-based programming is an approach to program-ming that prioritizes art as a way to encourage a discussion around issues that impact youth.
[2] Trauma informed practice/care: https://www.alberta-healthservices.ca/info/Page15526.aspx.
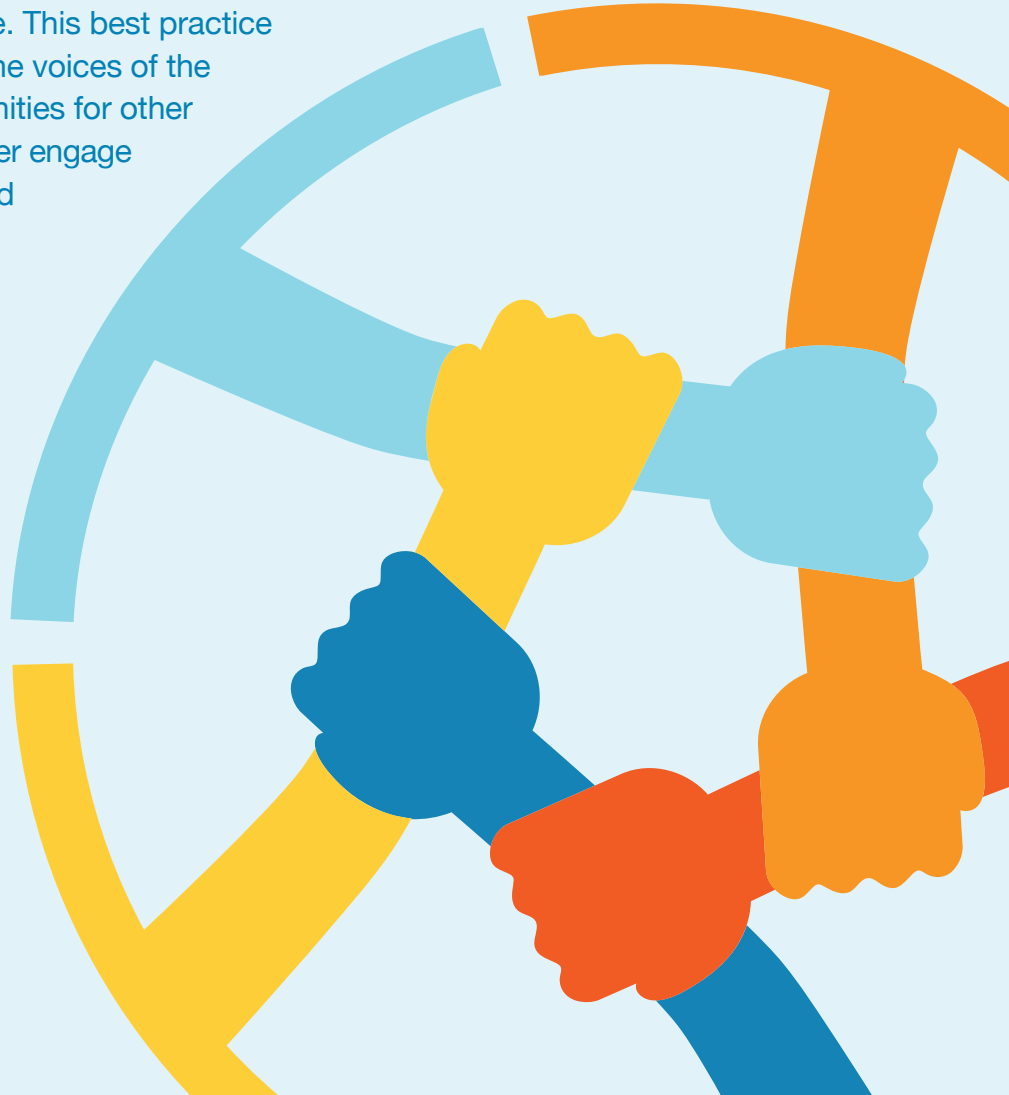
The timeline catalogues the activities that the Stronger Together youth participated in during the course of the project. Stronger Together youth met regularly leading up to the Final Project Event in January.

Project Kick Off (September)

Discussion of anti-racism and how it requires action and an understanding of power and privilege. Used various hands-on and scenario-based activities to highlight power and privilege.

"Here We Are Here" - Black Canadian Contemporary Art (October)

Art Gallery Exhibit viewing of powerful illustrations, videos, poems, photographs and sculptures that highlight the history of anti-blackness in Canada, as well as celebrate black identity. Participants engaged with the pieces and wrote up a written reflection.

Systemic Oppression Workshop - (October)

Dialogue of the barriers facing BIPOC communities and identifying systemic challenges in accessing services and resources. Incorporated videos and fun activities to keep the conversation light.

PhotoVoice Project (November)

Stronger Together youth took powerful photos and connected them with their own written piece that highlighted their identities and the racism/discrimination they have faced.

Forum Theatre (November)

In partnership with facilitators, Taitania Calarco and Adrien Choong, participants used drama as a form of expression to outline the lived-experiences of youth when facing racism and discrimination.

Illustration Workshop - Identity and Intersectionality (November)

In partnership with the MacPhee Centre, youth developed illustrations of their own versions of what superheroes with intersectional identities look like. Traits of the superheroes were discussed with the larger group.

Stronger Together Social Media Campaign (November - March)

Participants created picture profiles, photovoice testimonials and awareness-based illustrations in partnership with Reem El-Attar. These were posted on social media to engage the public on the topic of racism/discrimination.

Hip Hop Dance and Taking up Space (December)

In partnership with Unity Charity (Halifax), participants explored the historical roots of hip hop and how it was utilized as a method to resist oppression by 'taking up space.' Youth explored pronounced movements of hip hop and how the physical movement of 'taking up space' is synonymous with showcasing one's identity and being unapologetic about it.

Stronger Together Public Event (January)

In partnership with the Halifax Central Library and Theatre du Poulet, Participants had the opportunity to showcase creative pieces (theatre, dance, poetry, illustrations) involving topics on social justice. The public event also featured a panel discussion with young local activists discussing what identity and racism/discrimination looks like in Canada.

Stronger Together Participants' Viewing of "Controlled Damage" (February)

Participants were invited to a Neptune Theatre production that displayed the systemic barriers, racial injustices and challenges that Viola Desmond and many other African Nova Scotians faced and continue to face.

Focus Group and Assessment of Stronger Together Project (March)

The development of this resource was informed by the feedback received from the youth who participated in this focus group. They focused on addressing support and lack thereof within Halifax Regional Municipality.

Partners & collaborators:

Project Partners: Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM) and Immigration Francophone Nouvelle-Écosse (IFNÉ).

Project Collaborators: Theatre du Poulet, UNITY Charity (Halifax), MacPhee Centre and Halifax Central Library.

The youth that we refer to in the best practice resource:

Participants: 20 youth and young adults (between the ages of 15-24) who participated in the Stronger Together project.

Racialized immigrant youth: Refers specifically to youth and young adults who have the intersectional identity of being racialized and immigrants.

Underrepresented youth: Refers to youth and young adults who identify as racialized, LGBTQ2+, Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, Disabled and/or Immigrant.

Defining anti-racism and anti-discrimination:

Anti-racism and **anti-discrimination** is an action or actions that challenge racism and discrimination towards underrepresented communities, whether this oppression is historic or current. Discrimination can present itself in different forms including systemic oppression and harmful behaviours.

Glossary

Racialized people: Communities and individuals who are non-white and continue to be affected by racism and discrimination, rooted in systemic barriers.

BIPOC: Black and/or Indigenous and/or People of Colour.

Decolonization: A process of acknowledging colonial history and remaining colonial structures within societal institutions and actively breaking down these systems that continue to oppress Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Tokenization: Recruiting a minimal number of members from underrepresented communities in an effort to appear diverse.

Bias: Being favorable or unfavorable to an individual or group based on one's perceptions.

Prejudice: A preconceived, unfavorable assumption of an individual or group based on that person's or group's political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, beauty, occupation, education, criminality, sport team affiliation or other personal characteristics[3].

Stereotype: A generalized, oversimplified and often mistaken idea or assumption of an individual or group.

Stronger Together Anti-racism/ Anti-discrimination Programming:

Examples of how the Stronger Together project adopted anti-racism/ discrimination programming:

- Prior to the development of this programming, staff adopted a joint intention of advocacy and justice and were flexible to incorporate changes based on ongoing feedback from participants.

- The first session of Stronger Together was an interactive activity that was designed to address power and privilege and to help identify the positionality of staff and participants[4].

- Program facilitators were of diverse backgrounds and were racialized members of the community.

- Empowering participants to have a voice to speak about racism and discrimination through creative mediums was the premise of programming. Programming worked to encourage and amplify the skills of participants. For instance, at the final public event participants showcased their poetry, writing, public speaking, illustrations, dancing, acting and many other skills.

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[3] Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner. S. L. (2010). "Intergroup bias." In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), The Handbook of Social Psychology (5th ed., Vol. 2). New York: Wiley.

[4] "Exploring My Power and Privilege" https://ccdi.ca/media/1588/toolkit-2-exploring-my-power-and-privilege.pdf

Best Practices

These best practice guidelines are methods of practice that have been put together based on feedback received from the youth who participated in a focus group. The youth identified key areas of support that they need when accessing resources in the community.

Allyship is crucial when promoting anti-racism/discrimination as an approach in all youth programming. Bringing together underrepresented communities using trauma-informed approaches is key when addressing issues of discrimination and marginalization. Actively creating connections through a network of service providers, schools, and community organizations that result in partnerships and collaborations is important.

Navigate resources for youth by providing language services (interpretation and translation), bus tickets, etc., to ensure barrier-free participation.

Tailor communications to be youth-friendly. Creating online awareness to tackle important issues is a great way to reach out via social media platforms when creating an empowering and supportive environment for racialized immigrant youth.

Integrating art-based programming and using it to promote mediums of expression to discuss issues racialized immigrant youth face can be a tool of empowerment. These tools can also build skills such as leadership, confidence and resilience.

Racial justice and equity should always be incorporated in any type of programming or service to ensure that voices and experiences are heard, and that organizations are actively challenging and decolonizing structural barriers and gaps that may be present. Discussions on the impacts of colonization on underrepresented communities are important to safely facilitate, as well as discussing and understanding decolonization and how it can be implemented in our communities today.

Access to counseling services should be made a priority in all organizations. Racialized immigrant youth need outlets to discuss issues they face, and having mental health supports that are trauma informed, youth friendly and responsive to their needs is essential.

Create community standards[5] and revisit them throughout the program. Community standards help reduce traumatization and conflict, and they break down power and privilege structures. Community standards promote a positive and safe environment for both staff and youth in order to establish healthy dialogue, collective agreements and an opportunity to learn and reflect.

Incorporate input from racialized immigrant youth and communities and actively address who is at the table when it comes to decision making. This approach helps create youth-centered programming, builds youth autonomy and promotes leadership skills.

Safer spaces empower youth by allowing them to come together and freely express themselves in a manner that promotes their well-being. Decolonization and anti-oppressive approaches must be used in order to safely promote safer spaces for BIPOC youth. Hiring diverse staff who are knowledgeable in trauma-informed practices is important when creating safer spaces for racialized immigrant youth.

Make programming accessible and inviting for diverse youth. Offer diverse and inclusive programming that highlights intersectionality[6] and allows everyone to participate.

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[5] Heartwood Center for Community and Youth Development – Community Standards Resource: https://heartwood.ns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/CommunityStandards.pdf.

[6] Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989, Article 8. Available at: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

Anti-racism/ Anti-discrimination Programming

Project evaluation methods for the Stronger Together project included online surveys, ongoing feedback and a focus group. **The following content includes input and suggestions from the participants based on their experiences accessing youth-serving organizations** (youth-serving organizations are defined in the context of the Stronger Together focus group as: settlement organizations, schools, libraries, youth-based organizations, recreational services...etc.).

Types of questions asked in focus group:

1. What are the youth services you access in Halifax?
2. Define support...
3. What are you looking for from a safe space?

Creating a Safe Space

- Create a dedicated positive space for racialized immigrant youth to celebrate and discuss their identity and experiences. A safe space can act like a shield against isolation that racialized immigrant youth and other underrepresented youth face.

- Ensure that the space has a non-judgmental atmosphere.

- A safe space does not have to be a designated area, but rather an environment that can be created and kept consistent.

- The safe space is aesthetically youth-friendly and comforting.

- Collaborate with youth from partner organizations and include youth staff from these partners organizations in the development of programming and ensure their active involvement during facilitation.

Examples: Provide fun games, art materials, music, and/or culturally appropriate food. Ensure that staff are present and reflect the youth in age, gender, background, etc., and that staff provide access to counseling services support (if counselling is not available within the organization, then the opportunity to refer is available).

Barriers

- Tokenization, which occurs when racialized immigrant youth are invited into a space in effort to replicate the idea of diversity without actually creating connections and knowing the experiences of the youth involved.

- Staff who do not use an equity lens or a trauma-informed approach.

- Lack of resources to overcome barriers that many racialized immigrant youth face (transportation, interpretation and translation, prayer space, etc.)
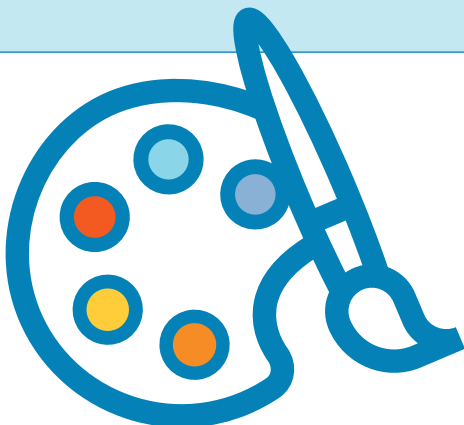
Barriers	Recommendations	Stronger Together Project Examples

Incorporating art-based programming

• Conversations about racism and discrimination can be triggering and heavy for underrepresented youth without the medium of art. • Lack of language interpretation to unpack their traumatic experiences. • Lack of knowledge, measures and precautions prepared prior to programming. This can cause uneasy conversations, noticeable lack of bonding and lack of interest from youth themselves.	• Support youth to have healthy and engaging conversations in a non-judgmental space that encourages freedom of expression. • Encourage the use of creative expression as a way to vocalize one's feelings, without the emphasis on language. • Motivate youth to develop creative skill sets, which have been proven to improve cognition and overall psychological development.[7]	• Youth were asked to identify their creative interests at the beginning of the project for program development. • Visited a Black Canadian contemporary art exhibit and had the youth write out a reflection of the pieces of art that spoke to them. • Used forum theatre to develop real-life scenarios as a way to highlight everyday experiences of racialized immigrant youth, and promoted youth to change the outcome and scenario through allyship and advocacy.

Relational-based interactions[8]

• Not holding eye contact when talking to youth. • Not focusing on developing trusting relationships. • Mainly interacting with youth that staff are familiar with, therefore causing other youth to feel unwelcome. • Not paying attention to youth when they are disclosing concerns: e.g., multi-tasking while trying to listen to the youth. • Not correctly pronouncing the names of youth or remembering the details that matter to them.	• Staff actively listen to youth and give genuine, empathetic responses so youth know they have someone to talk to. • Staff recall youth's needs and concerns and provide supportive feedback. Staff work to develop trust with youth and understand the vulnerabilities and strengths of youth. • Investing the time needed to know what details to remember and what the youth feel are important to acknowledge.	• Stronger Together staff listened to the perspectives of the youth and made sure to always check in with each youth individually. • Project budget, outcomes, and processes were presented to the youth in the beginning to ensure transparency and to create a trusting environment. • A set of agreed-upon community standards were established to safeguard any particular needs of the youth.

[7] "Creative development in young people" https://www.thirdfactor.org/laycraft-maturing-through-creativity/.

[8] Relational-based interactions are interactions that prioritize a trauma-informed lens, meaning that youth and staff are empathetic and caring towards one another.

Barriers	Recommendations	Stronger Together Project Examples

Youth-centered approach and communication[9]

Barriers	Recommendations	Stronger Together Project Examples
• Lack of compensation for youth for their time, effort and involvement. • Frequent use of non-youth friendly communication such as notifying youth to attend programming via word of mouth, phone calls, etc. • No references made to opportunities in the community that would benefit racialized immigrant youth.	• Ongoing process to capture the perspective of racialized immigrant youth when it comes to programming. • Compensate youth for their involvement through skill development and/or honorariums. • Using social media to communicate with youth, such as Instagram, Snapchat, etc., are great ways to really engage with youth. • Highlight all beneficial resources and programming that are available to youth throughout the community. • Partner and network with organizations so that youth are well-informed about various other opportunities in the community.	• Stronger Together staff asked youth to participate in anonymous evaluations to give feedback regarding programming. • Stronger Together youth were given honorariums (between $80 - $100) for their efforts and time. • Communication with youth was mainly through apps like Whatsapp and Instagram. • Workshops were done in partnership with other organizations at their locations. External speakers and facilitators were asked to lead programming for participants. Meetings were held at various organizations. Activities were planned at various locations in the city.

Accessibility

Barriers	Recommendations	Stronger Together Project Examples
• Gaps in communication between staff and youth about where the location of programming is and ways to get there[10]. • Not enough time, effort and resources spent on logistical planning regarding accessing programming (distance from where the majority of youth live and where programming or services are). • Providing the exact same services and resources to all racialized immigrant youth, without understanding the particular needs of each youth.	• Give youth detailed locations of services and programming. Assess where youth are traveling from to reach programming and provide support as needed. • Staff should assess the following: Is public transit information accessible (language)? Are there resources to provide bus tickets to youth? Is there a centralized meet up location? Is the space itself accessible? • Ensure that the space is welcoming to diverse populations such as women and girls, LGBTQ2+ youth, disabled youth, etc.	• Bus tickets were provided to youth (to get to the location and to get home again). • If youth were not aware of locations, multiple meet-up spots were organized to ensure that all youth could attend. • Accommodations were made for youth who did not speak English, such as interpretation, translation and having a family member present at programming (at times this was preferred). • Staff were knowledgeable in the diverse backgrounds of the youth and were informed and well-equipped in conflict resolution and mediation.

[9] A youth-centered approach prioritizes the perspectives and opinions of youth. It also recognizes that program delivery should be accessed on platforms that are youth-friendly.

[10] Article: Racialized immigrants utilize public transit 3 times more than any other population in Halifax: https://www.halifaxtoday.ca/local-news/new-group-launches-campaign-to-address-racist-incidents-on-halifax-transit-1132070.

Organizational Supports

Youth identified these key areas of support needed within the organizations they access.

Mental Health Supports

Racialized immigrant youth carry a lot on their shoulders, whether it is added responsibilities to support their families, learning a new language, or adapting to their new school environments. Among other stresses, racism and discrimination are also significant factors that can affect mental health. Mental health supports specifically for racialized immigrant youth are lacking. This gap can leave youth feeling isolated and can negatively affect their overall well-being. It is also important to acknowledge that within existing mental health supports, in some cases, staff may intentionally or unintentionally minimize or dismiss the experiences of youth. This dismissal legitimizes and perpetuates systems of oppression that the youth already face. Challenging and breaking down one's biases and stereotypes must be a priority when trying to understand the intersectional and layered perspectives of racialized immigrant youth and underrepresented communities.

Ways to fill this gap

- Promote the need for youth counseling services within organizations and services.

- Hire counsellors who specialize in youth and are equipped to support racialized immigrant youth, as well as have the resources and tools needed to protect youth against discrimination. This includes being able to recognize their positionality and not discount the experiences of racialized immigrant youth.

- Work to promote resilience of racialized immigrant youth through anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory approaches when addressing the issues youth face.

Sustainability and Strengthening Organizational Capacity

- Challenge all organizational policies and practices by reassessing what aspects of organizations may be rooted in colonial history (such as recognizing the power and privilege dynamic between white staff and underrepresented youth).

- Ensure that practices are rooted in anti-racism/discrimination.

- Build and continually expand community networks and establish partnerships that support underrepresented populations.

- Prioritize place-based services in order to strengthen the ways in which organizations can better accommodate the needs of communities by creating better access to services and support. An example of a place-based service would be ensuring the location of services is centrally located in relation to the community that's being serviced.

- Recognize both the opportunities and limitations of cultural competence and cultural humility training for staff in addressing issues of discrimination. Staff should be able to critically assess recommendations and best practices that may not be relevant or useful to racialized youth.

- Provide longer programming for youth and consistent staffing to help build relationships and create better outcomes for youth.

- Hire staff who are relatable to youth to build trust. This can include shared experiences and backgrounds, similar ages, gender, etc.

- Ensure that staff are aware of their power and privilege.

- Recognize that anti-discrimination and anti-racism programming cannot simply be a discussion; action is needed.

- Continually learn and provide support to ensure equity in programming and resources. Equity can be ensured by being aware of the communities you are serving (i.e. adopting an approach of consistently learning about these communities) and providing necessary resources so that all can equally access support. An example would be providing the option of language and translation services for youth from immigrant communities, depending on their need.