



ON BLACK JOY AND COMMUNITY CARE: GRANTEES SHARE THEIR STORIES

Laidlaw Foundation supports young people impacted by the justice, education, and child-welfare systems. For Black History and Futures Month, we interviewed three grantees: [Positive Change TO](#), [Youth Wellness Lab](#), and [HairStory Rooted](#) who work within these sectors to share their stories on Black joy and community care. As the month of February comes to a close, we are reminded that Black history, futures, joy, and care continue year-round.

WHAT DOES BLACK JOY MEAN TO YOU?

Positive Change TO

Black joy to us means a freedom of expression without policing or limiting our emotions, thoughts and perspective. It's about allowing nuanced lived experiences and intellectual thought process for the complexity that is Blackness in Canada.

Black joy motivates us to do better and help those in our community that need help succeeding in this world.

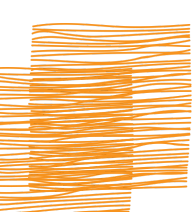
Black joy is standing our ground, speaking up, and conquering obstacles that are at times working against us.

Youth Wellness Lab

Black joy is in the moments, in the people and communities that bring you joy. It's about loving yourself and your community as Black people, creatives, legacies, leaders, and scholars. It's in realizing that your success is because of those who came before you, and that their place in and contribution to history is integral to understanding how we're able to move through this world because of what they laid out for us. **It's about thriving just by being who you are, regardless of who wants to tear your joy down. Anti-Black racism works to shrink us and the space we are allowed to take up in families, communities and systems. Black joy is the opposite.** Black joy is about having the space to fully express our endless capacity, strengths, creativity and light.

HairStory: Rooted

Black Joy to us is seeing our community anchored in their own cultures and sense of self. It looks like celebrating and living unapologetically. It feels like a warm embrace and protection. It sounds like laughter and words of teachings.





WHAT DOES YOUR GROUP FOCUS ON AND HOW DO YOU PRACTICE COMMUNITY CARE?

Positive Change TO

Our group focuses on being a support system and a voice for the Somali community when it comes to the justice system, including restorative justice by assisting parents and youth those who find it difficult navigating these systems that have embedded anti-Blackness.

The way we practice community care is by fostering an inclusive, safe environment, which implements culturally-centered active listening and healing sessions for our community members and youth in particular. PCTOI works to care for the community by focusing its advocacy and educational workshops on constructive feedback from the Somali community and its youth circle.

Youth Wellness Lab

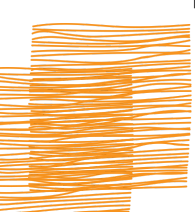
We focus on supporting youth by acknowledging and celebrating the intersectional identities that young people hold. So often, this work is done in silos, and with only a brief consultation of the young people it aims to support. YWL's goal is to place youth at the centre of the work being done to not only support and uplift their wellness, but to amplify their perspectives and voices to improve program, policy, and service outcomes for young people.

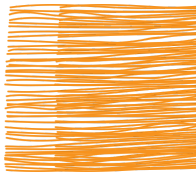
All of that is relational and community based. Simply put, we care about our community and community care starts from within. **We care about what we put out there, we care about the support we provide for each other, and we are intentional about the ways in which we show up for each other.** Our approach to this work is about creating spaces where people feel seen and valued in a real and genuine way, with ample access and opportunity to learn new things and work with different types of people. This is especially true for academia, where it's critically important for young people to have exemplars of the type of success they want but may not often see in their own peer networks. We want them to believe in themselves and that they're capable of creating and sharing knowledge that is relevant to their communities and peers. All of this in turn impacts how we each show up for the larger community. When a door is opened for you, make sure that same door, or at least a window, is left open for the next person who will come up behind you.

HairStory: Rooted

Our group focuses on advocating for systemic change in Ontario's care system by proposing recommendations that came directly from young people of lived experience.

Community care to us looks like standing behind young people as they discover or amplify their voice. We create a community that makes it safe and okay to speak up and speak out. We provide supports when it gets tough. We ensure young people know they matter!





WE KNOW BLACK YOUTH ARE SYSTEMICALLY AND HISTORICALLY PUSHED OUT OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND OVERREPRESENTED IN THE CRIMINAL AND/OR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS. SHARE WHY UPLIFTING BLACK YOUNG PEOPLE IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR GROUP?

Positive Change TO

Uplifting Black young people is important for PCTOI because we want to see our youth prosper in a society that is filled with structural and societal anti-Black racism. Black youth are resilient, intelligent, and ambitious, and must be supported in order to reach their full potential. If we do not have strong supportive systems in place for Black youth, evidence-based data have shown, they become vulnerable to the criminal system.

Youth Wellness Lab

So many decisions are made for and about Black youth in these systems, they often find themselves in situations where they don't have a say: life-altering decisions that will undoubtedly have a lasting impact, made in rooms by people who have no understanding of the lived experiences of the same Black youth for whom they are making decisions. Uplifting Black youth means giving them the space to uplift their own decision-making power, supporting them to create spaces where they feel seen, safe, and valued, and showing them that their lived experiences and perspectives are important. We need to continuously tell Black youth that they are more than capable to advocate for themselves, including, and especially, in systems that are not designed to help or support them succeed.

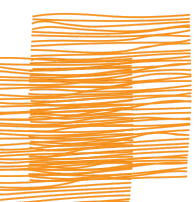
HairStory: Rooted

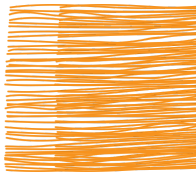
We know that our young people's voices have and will shape our future. They are innovative, change makers. There is no denying that Black youth have and continue to set the bar for what a better future looks like for social change and education. Although there is a lot of work to be done, Black young people will continuously be leaders in how that is done because we are capable, knowledgeable, loud, and proud. **They are unapologetic in holding others accountable, and creative in filling service gaps through community care and compassion.** With this experience, they intuitively know what needs to be done and how to do it. This is why uplifting Black youth voice is imperative.

IF YOU COULD GIVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE FOR OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE CREATING CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Youth Wellness Lab

Never forget that your voice holds power and never be afraid to use it.










Positive Change TO

Keep on going, don't stop. Keep on changing the world, keep on discussing difficult topics, and keep on challenging the status quo and learning.

HairStory: Rooted

Rest. We cannot pour from an empty cup. We are already fighting many systemic battles personally, and oftentimes we have been fighting all those battles our entire life. **Rest is also an act of resistance.** Being determined to take care of our physical health so we can advocate longer, harder and with more clarity. Rest more so we can pour more into our communities around us. You can't burn out now, you've come too far ❤️.

Thanks to Positive Change TO, Youth Wellness Lab, and HairStory: Rooted for sharing their thoughts on Black joy and community care. Follow these socials for more content:

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| Positive Change TO |  @PositiveChangeTO |  @psitivechangeTO |
| Youth Wellness Lab |  @youthwellnesslab |  @YouthWellnessTO |
| HairStory: Rooted |  @beyondourhair |  @BeyondOurHair |
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