

1919





# RE IMAGINING COMMUNITY

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# ISSUE FOUR





Since we last printed our third issue, *Don't Sleep*, in September of 2017 we built an initiative called 1919Radio challenging the anti-Black club spaces in Toronto. We organized and produced an art installation that aimed to critique and speak back to the exploitation of Black artist's cultural production. We also initiated a clothing drive action in service of asylum seekers and refugee claimants in Toronto in partnership with a local shelter. Missing through all of this was our fourth issue, *Reimagining Community*, that has been formed, broken, abandoned, and formed again as a result of disappointments, struggles, and tall expectations. Although void of the physical publication, there wasn't a moment when our community and support systems ceased to sustain and believe in us. Reflecting on the past 2 years and what we have accomplished, it feels like we were able to do what we wanted with this issue without ever publishing, featuring, or creating art for this issue. This thought is both comforting and affirming and I hope that you extend the same recognition towards yourself for all the major and minor ways you contribute to your intimate and larger communities.

*Reimagining Community* is a reflection of the values and beliefs that ground 1919 in the work we wish to do, the communities we represent, and the freedoms we seek. With this issue as an organizing backdrop, *Reimagining Community* brings together the voices of Black and racialized community actors to share their art, stories, and critique in conversation with each other, the reader, and their fellow community members. Its only fitting that the release of this issue falls during the last month of **201919**, because the majority of the actions we organized took place this year. 2019 has been a significant year for 1919 because more than ever we have been able to position our ideas in spaces where we can practice them. *Reimagining Community* is a testament to this. The artistic expressions by Priya Rehal, Chloe Kirlew-Giddes, Edna Ali, Milen Tewelde, Lidia Abraha, Dinan Alasad, JFAAP, and Write2Right are evidence of this. At the tumultuous intersection where we now find ourselves closing this year and decade, we hope this issue finds you, reflects you and orients you towards liberated territory rooted within local and decentralized community action.

Most significantly, over these two years, our team has also grown. Our team is Black-led and supported by the dedication, commitment, and patience of our team members who are students, artists, youth, and young adults. In the most humble of shoutouts, without the direction and guidance of Malaika Eyoh, this issue would not be finished or a fraction of what it is today. Without the organizing work by Andres Alvarez, 1919Radio amongst other community actions would fail to compare to what it is today.

Thank you for reading this, believing in 1919 and *Reimagining Community* with us.

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Chronic Illness Chronicles, Priya Rehal, 2018



# Conversations About Love and Community Healing with Artist **Chloe Kirlew-Geddes**

Written by Malaika Eyoh

**A**cross Toronto, art opens the space for communities to have honest conversations with themselves, about themselves. When I talk to [Chloe Kirlew-Geddes](#) over the phone on a cold Friday morning, she makes it clear to me that community healing is an essential part of the art. “Energy is sticky and clingy, and it’s individual to everyone” she says. “It’s important for me to open myself up as a channel and it’s cool for me to disseminate that knowledge to other people”.

Nestled behind a curtain inside of the [Margin of Era’s Gallery](#) in Parkdale, is a fuchsia-pink room lined with crochet titties and the voices of vulnerable subjects. The film playing on the wall of the installation begins with the voice

of **C**hloe, explaining how living in the urban West fucks with our perception about love and the possibilities it can offer us. Chloe’s latest project, *Hard to Love* (in collaboration with Tiana Smith) is a group of black people being asked about what love and relationships mean to them. The subjects open themselves up to the camera and talk about transplanting family needs onto a romantic partner, depressing parts of yourself in interracial relationships and trying to love when you’re healing from other traumas. “I wanted to talk to black people about how they are hard to love”, Chloe explains. The work comes out of a difficult time in her own life, as she used her experience in a toxic, abusive relationship to answer her own questions about relationships with others. Despite the project’s romantic origins, the love she





talks about is one that extends past the romantic relationship and into the very fabric of marginalized communities that are hard to love. “I really like talking about heartbreak”, she explains. “And I feel like that heartbreak extends past the romantic: I see heartbreak everywhere, with families, communities and the prison system.”

Before finding her home as a storyteller and reiki practitioner, writing was Chloe’s first passion. The writing was a way for her to tell the stories about herself and others that she wanted, and the poetry and essay writing eventually developed into filmmaking. Earlier this month, Danica Smith [wrote](#) about how difficult it is to carve out a niche for oneself in Toronto’s creative community that feels cliquey and unsupportive. For Chloe, most of her strength has been drawn from those closest to her. That group is made up of her close circle of friends and a community that is energetic and supportive about her work. “There’s kind of an uprising of QBIPOC creatives right now” she explains. “Working in this space has been a challenge to rise to the occasion”. In a landscape where black bodies of all persuasions remain on the fringe, the conversations about blackness that make it to the forefront very often feel like a rotational scheme. Rarely are topics about black womanhood, black love and community healing ever tapped into at more than a superficial level that feels easily accessible to all patrons. There are so many moments in *Hard to Love* that connect because they are unspoken words that black families and lovers have with each other.

Where community healing becomes most apparent is in Chloe’s work as a reiki practitioner. This method of energy healing has become a means through which people are able to manage their own energy and find practices of coping, strengthening and connecting with their innermost self’s. “It’s kind of like physio for the energy body”, she explains. To some, it may sound like woo-woo spirituality: but for many, reiki is a method through which they can develop tools



to survive the harshness of everyday life. For black communities, specifically, reiki offers a pathway to healing, grounding and centring oneself in the face of oppression. As a level 2 practitioner and energy worker, Chloe is able to use her craft to connect with different community subjects as well as the youth that she works with in the education sector. “A lot of energy spaces are saturated with white people” she says. “So now, I try to provide my community with quality programming that’s accessible that can hopefully make their days a little better”.

You can follow Chloe’s artwork at [@ChloGrows](#) and her reiki work at [@thereiqueer](#)



Syona Abdeen, Renee Mathews



Carah Ali



# Beep Beep: Get Outta Our Community, and Get Into Our Thoughts A Look Into Prioritizing Anti-Poverty Measures

Written by: Edna Ali and Milen Tewelde

**W**hen we talk about violence in Toronto, the focus tends to be on crime committed by the poor. By the Black, Brown, Muslim and Indigenous. By the struggling and unwanted parts of the city. The gaze is squared directly on ‘the perpetrator’. Our conversations focus on what they did and how we need more police in the area to stop it from happening again.

We both live off of Trethewey, on opposite sides of Black Creek, and everyday we feel the impact that police surveillance has on us and on our community. We see regularly what happens if you are Black and happen to be in a group of two or more people on any given day, with the audacity to occupy a local bench. We see constant police drive-bys on the Clearview stretch. God forbid you’re Black having a barbecue and get interrupted because of police surveilling the area in the name of “keeping the peace”.

We want our neighbours to feel free to enjoy a summer day without the threat of wooden spikes being installed on local benches by the Martha Eaton buildings. We want our Clearview neighbours to feel free to enjoy music and barbecue in peace; we say let them blast their music, as long as we hear Rihanna once we’re good!

Instead we are seeing a larger police presence occupying our neighbourhoods and demanding more money from the city to fund their surveillance operations. The question of who

is “the perpetrator” and who is the “problem” is still squarely placed on the shoulders of our Black and Indigenous communities.

**W**hy is it that depending on what part of Jane Street you are on, your housing is dilapidated, often unliveable? Why is it that housing is increasingly expensive, yet there are many buildings that sit empty (until a developer buys it and makes it into luxury housing)? Why is it that depending on what part of the city you are in, the schools you attend, too, are in disrepair? Why is it that you won’t find as many banks, but you will find an abundance of predatory payday lenders on every block in your neighbourhood? Why is it that if you don’t drive, whatever bus you need will take twenty to forty minutes to arrive?

We need to shift the conversation from “who” is committing crimes, to addressing **what** is responsible for crime, and how the targeted nature of poverty is the root cause of crime and violence in our communities. We ought to be asking about the violence caused by the state, and how our communities are experiencing state sanctioned harm. This is the leading cause for all other forms of violence taking place in our communities.

**I** like to play a game with friends and ask the question: “imagine your ideal city, what does it look like, and what services does it offer?” I hear a lot of my friends talking about ‘free’: childcare, comprehensive healthcare, transit, housing for all. I hear them talk about a society that is free from misogyny and anti-Black racism. My friends



are great, I know; but (and this is a hard but) there is **always** the one neoliberal in the bunch that prefers what they “imagine” with “okay, but what’s realistic?” Are we not allowed to be free even within our own imaginations? Who is confining you? Not me.

**M**y imagined city recognizes that policing does nothing to rectify any of the issues plaguing our communities, but rather exacerbates the problem through continuous criminalization. The city I imagine recognizes that poverty, and the targeted nature of it, is the root cause of crime in and around our communities.

It is imperative to remember the police do not operate in a preventative way. Police operate as purely an **after the fact** response to crime. Their attempts at “crime prevention” just translates to targeting Black and Indigenous youth and trampling on their right to just **be**. Finally, earlier this year, Justice Tulloch [released](#) a report detailing the direct negative impact that carding, as a police tool, has on Indigenous, Black, and other racially marginalized communities. Tulloch spoke to the “limited evidence” that carding is an “effective police tool”, then called for this practice to end.

On top of their inability to prevent crime, the police are often unqualified and unequipped to handle the calls they are responding to. Consider the police interactions that we hear on the news. Think specifically about the calls from folks with mental illness and people living with disabilities. Think of the calls from those discriminated against because of their race, gender, and sexual orientation in this city. Then, consider the murders of Abdirahman Abdi and Greg Ritchie; the mishandling (or to be honest the non-handling) of the missing and murdered victims of Bruce McArthur; and the attack on Dafonte Miller by off-duty police officers. Think about how the police worked internally to cover up the crimes of their officers. These are three very recent cases that have deeply impacted our communities, but there are more coming to light across this city, and across this country.

If we acknowledge that police simply are not capable of preventing crime, that they do not have the range—or qualifications—to deal with someone

struggling with mental illness or that their main function is to criminalize children and youth in our communities: then why do we need them? Why is the largest chunk of our cities budget devoted to Toronto Police Services? Why do they keep begging for more of our money?

**O**n October 2, 2019, Toronto City Council [voted](#), almost unanimously, to increase the TPS budget, again. [Research](#) and reports from different levels of government exist that are consistently showing evidence that crime prevention does not mean more police on the streets and/or [surveillance](#) measures.

I say all that to say, meaningful crime prevention starts with anti-poverty measures not the TPS. Finding meaningful ways to remove the unnecessary stress from the lives of people that are living paycheck to paycheck. We need to address poverty that looks like homelessness, but also recognize that sometimes it looks like folks that are employed but living 1-2 paydays away from poverty. We need policies that address housing, childcare, access to fresh foods, a transit system that is expansive, and access to education — for **all**.

**W**e do not need government-funded research papers that tell us poor people are the problem. We do not need more anti-Black racism departments at any level of government that will continue to produce said research. We have enough, our concerns are your concerns.

If you ever decide to play the Imagine-Your-Ideal-City game with your friends, you might find yourself face to face with a neoliberal with no imagination. When they ask you to focus on “what’s realistic”; remember everything you imagine **is realistic**. If you’re struggling to answer, “how do we make this a reality?” and “how do we pay for it?”, don’t hesitate to imagine there either. In our imagined city, we come together and demand from our City Council: **strip the police of their funding!** They are eating up too much of our municipal budget, enough is enough. I want this imagined city to be Toronto, and for that *I* intentionally do not mince my words on purpose: the police do not belong in my community. Full stop.



**“I want this imagined city to be Toronto, and for that I intentionally do not mince my words on purpose: the police do not belong in my community. Full stop.”**







# JANE FINCH ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

## Community Organization Profile

**Introduce your organization, team members, and values/mandate**

**Jane Finch Action Against Poverty: (JFAAP)**

JFAAP is a resident-led grassroots coalition of community residents, activists, workers and organizations working to eliminate poverty in our community and part of a global fight to end poverty.

**How did JFAAP start?**

JFAAP was born at the intersection of Jane and Finch on October 17, 2008 when residents took to the streets to commemorate the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and make local demands.

**I saw on your website that the group was formed in October of 2008, tell us about any of the struggles you faced then or what JFAAP means, now in 2019, for the organizers who have been with JFAAP for over a decade.**

JFAAP was to bring and cultivate community grassroots organizing and street actions out of the downtown core and bring it to Jane and Finch (we still go downtown but it's not possible for many community residents to get engaged in activities that are downtown based). Our aim is to build grassroots democracy from the ground up. It has grown into a network of community or-

ganizing and space where community can come for support and advocacy.

JFAAP has a general meeting every First Wednesday of each month and an Organizing Committee that meets regularly and all decisions are made collectively, through these meetings. JFAAP has elections every 6 months to the organizing committee which administers the decisions made and put forth at the general meetings. This is being tested as we are exploring various options to maximize members' engagement. We would like to expand across the community but realize that our resources are very limited. We do not have a fixed budget (in fact only about \$5000 to \$7000 a year); we don't apply for funding and we have not registered ourselves as a community based organizations. We have a good relationship with a number of community based and labour-based organizations and that has been helping us significantly with the meeting expenses and outreach. A lot more work still needs to be done.

**Tell us about the youth and community you are trying to reach, impact, and connect with.**

We have members that are in their early 20s and late 80s. We have built connections with the youth throughout the years, but recognize that there are youth-focused groups in the community that we connect with. We have a fluid membership and every community resident can become members at



anytime. We have seen more youth involvement on issues that are important to them.

**Tell us about the programming, events, rallies, and work your team takes on.**

We do advocacy work on issues brought by individual residents concerns as well as collective community concerns through letter writing, campaigns, community town halls, community crisis response teams, actions at police divisions, street actions, demonstrations, political education events and screenings.

**What needs or issues is your team trying to address with JFAAP?**

We work to break down all forms of systemic oppression and work towards eradicating poverty.

Few of our campaigns

- No Cops in Schools, a collective successful campaign with many other groups across the City that pressured the SRO in schools.
- Creating more arts based spaces
- Save our schools campaigns that was successful in stopping any kind of school closures in the community
- We have worked on workers' rights, minimum wage increase and 15 & Fairness campaigns
- Response to racism and racial profiling of black and racialized youth in our community and across the City
- Police Brutality Response
- Food Insecurity and work towards Food Sovereignty
- TTC related issues including service quality, lower income fair, racist fare inspection, and fair fare and free transit campaigns
- Temp agency workers' campaign, for the past three years; community based research on temp agencies in the area; Fiera Foods and upper Crust campaigns.
- JFAAP is one of the main resident-led grass-

roots groups supporting other coalitions in the community, such as Jane Finch Education Action Group and Jane Finch Economic Opportunities Action group and Black Creek Community Food Justice Coalition.

- Current Community Crisis Response: 235 Gosford Fire

**Where does JFAAP draw inspiration from?**

We draw our inspiration from the community and other working class and racialized communities that are fighting for justice and equality here in Canada and around the world.

**How does JFAAP reimagine community building?**

We want to work to strengthen community grassroots democracy, and work towards breaking down barriers that prevent community from supporting each other. We would like to create a consistent progressive community force.

Finally, tell us anything we missed! If there are questions we are not asking let us know.

***JFAAP has women of colour, from many different backgrounds and age cohorts, as primary leaders and role models.***

You can find JFAAP at <https://jfaap.wordpress.com/> and at [@jfaap](#)

# #FREEE



**Lamar is currently being detained at Warkworth Correctional Institute.**

**If you want to help Lamar Skeete or find out more about his case:  
Email [freelamarskeeteinfo@gmail.com](mailto:freelamarskeeteinfo@gmail.com) or IG [@Lamarammoskeete](https://www.instagram.com/Lamarammoskeete)**



# LAMAR SKEETE

“Real niggaz don’t crack to the coppers, muthafucka” is the lyric that sent Lamar Skeete to prison for 25 to life. In January of 2012, Skeete was on trial for the fatal shooting of a man on Dundas West and Gilmore in the West End. This new trial came after he was exonerated for this same crime in 2009.

“Real niggaz don’t crack to the coppers, muthafucka” is the lyric that sent Lamar Skeete to prison for 25 to life. In January of 2012, Skeete was on trial for the fatal shooting of a man on Dundas West and Gilmore in the West End. This new trial came after he was exonerated for this same crime in 2009. The Crown argued that these lyrics were evidence that Skeete committed the murder because the deceased had been co-operating with the police. The song that was used as evidence (Live from Don Jail) was recorded while Skeete had been held for 28 months pre-trial. His time in the bin was the inspiration for the song, and the lyrics used against him in court were about the corrections officers in the jail, not police on the outside. Still, the lyrics were found permissible in court and were the main source of evidence used to send Skeete away on a life sentence, for a crime he had already been deemed factually innocent of.

Though the Court of Appeals agreed that the judge erred in Skeete’s trial, his appeal was denied. He has exhausted all his appeals and been denied funding by Legal Aid.

Canada has made steady use of rap-lyrics as evidence of guilt to convict Black Youth. Research from the University of Windsor found 16 cases where rap music was used as evidence of guilt. According to the research, only one case involved lyrics from a genre other than rap. Additionally, research from the University of Irvine showed that subjects who read lyrics they believed to be from a rap song interpreted them negatively, while subjects who read the same lyrics but believed the genre of the song to be country had a much more positive interpretation. In Toronto courtrooms, rap videos posted online are becoming an increasingly pervasive way of prosecuting racialized youth believed to be in a criminal organization.

The use of rap lyrics puts a target on members of the Black community who use hip-hop for freedom of expression and creativity. White societies prejudice against Black culture means that the courts continue to interpret rap as strictly documentative, autobiographical confessions instead of a creative art. The use of rap lyrics as evidence unfairly tips the scale against young Black men and juries who are presented with rap music in courts are likely to play into racialized stereotypes.



# Whats Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline

Lidia Abraha

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*In the interview, he talked about being a young offender for robbing a taxi cab. "If you're from my area, you know what it is to survive... I made mistakes in my lifetime, and I just got involved through my environment," he said in the interview. Statistically speaking, many Black youths who cross paths with the criminal justice system are likely have had issues navigating the education system. In Toronto, 47% of Black students have faced suspension or expulsion, even though they make up 8% of the population.*



Lamar Skeete was 25 when he was facing twenty-five years to life in prison for allegedly admitting to murder in a rap song. He wrote the song after the murder of Kenneth Mark. He put out the track “Live from Don Jail,” which detailed the hard life on the inside of the now-closed Don Jail.

“Real niggaz don’t crack to the poppers, mutha-fuckas,” was the notorious lyric used against him in trial. The Crown argued that this proved he allegedly murdered Mark to uphold the code of silence, since Mark was cooperating with police in another investigation. Skeete was arrested and soon convicted of first-degree murder in 2012.

“At the end of the day, I know I didn’t do or say anything wrong,” Skeete said in an interview with Welovehiphop Canada. While he appealed his case, the court said there must be new evidence to change his sentence.

In the interview, he talked about being a young offender for robbing a taxi cab. “If you’re from my area, you know what it is to survive... I made mistakes in my lifetime, and I just got involved through my environment,” he said.

Statistically, many Black youths who cross paths with the criminal justice system are likely to have had issues navigating the cities educational system. In Toronto, 47% of Black students have faced suspension or expulsion, even though they make up 8% of the population.

Some have called it a school-to-prison pipeline, but Dr. Carl James, a professor at York University, says that incarceration is not a direct outcome of experiencing racism in the school systems, but instead a combination of systems seeped with anti-Black racism.

“Think of how the systems and institutions which is supposed to support them, educationally, socially, and economically have not been providing them that support that they will (need to) become productive citizens in the society,” he said.

In a recent report he submitted to the Peel Regional District School Board, James conducted focus groups with Black students, mostly under 18. The findings uncovered many students’ con-

cerns about feeling a sense of not belonging in the classroom, which may prevent them from engaging in education.

“We’re talking about an entire system that has to really do some accounting of itself. (Black students) might be seen as disruptive if they ask questions, or if they call out the racism that they might experience, or they might have a sense of teachers and the preferential treatment that they will (see) as they go through the education system,” he said.

## ***A brief history of race and education in Toronto***

It wasn’t until the 1970s that the Toronto District School Board attempted to address the ongoing concerns over diversity (or lack thereof) in education. This is when they conducted their first survey on how Black students were represented and treated in the curriculum. At the time, Canada saw a widespread influx of immigrants from the West Indies, Guyana and Africa. The study also found that almost half the students from this demographic were part of the lowest socio-economic bracket of the city.

Later surveys conducted by the TDSB found a growing trend in Black students from lower socio-economic backgrounds also experiencing poor educational outcomes. Throughout the 1970s, the TDSB implemented many different programs to address the educational success gap between Black students and their non-Black counterparts. Despite this, surveys during the 1980s and 1990s continued to show poor educational outcomes for Black students.

One survey in 1982 found that 50% of Black students in Grade 8 indicated the intention of going to university, yet 35% of them were placed in special education classes. The report also found that 33% of Black students in Grade 9 were studying at the advanced level, compared to 55% of white students in the advanced level.

In 1985, members of the Organization of Parents of Black Children met with the director of

“Some have called it a school-to-prison pipeline, but Dr. Carl James, a professor at York University, says that incarceration is not a direct outcome of racism in the school systems, but instead a combination of systems seeped with anti-Black racism.”

Toronto Board of Education (TBE), to highlight the grievances of Black students such as low self-esteem, high drop-out rate, lack of representation in the curriculum and more. A year later, TBE organized a consultative committee on the education of Black students in Toronto schools, and released a final report in 1988 which highlighted many discrepancies between Black students and non-Black students in the education system.

However, the collection of race-based data came to a halt after the Conservative government combined Toronto's six school boards. It wasn't until 2003 that the TDSB were forced to collect race-based data by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal—a decision that came after inquiring about the government's zero tolerance approach to student's discipline.

Even in recent studies, we find that Black students are disproportionately suspended or expelled from schools. In 2017, the TDSB found that 48% of Black students were expelled between 2011-2016.

## ***The Plug Program***

In 2017, a program coordinated by the Rexdale Community Health Centre and the TAIBU Community Health Centre helped Black students who were facing harsh or discriminatory disciplinary action while enrolled in Toronto schools.

With over 65 cases, the program helped students throughout the GTA fight suspension and expulsion measures with an 85% success rate. Although they were limited to helping students under the TDSB, they were often getting calls from people as far as Windsor and Ottawa.

The Plug Program was funded by Legal Aid On-

tario for one year. Liben Gebremikael, executive director of TAIBU Community Health Centre in Scarborough, says they have secured funding to relaunch the program before the end of 2019.

“We want to see if we can help change the system so that in the long-term, we won't have any expulsions or suspensions, or at least not as high as it is now for Black students,” he said.

Gebremikael says that he's seen kids as young as 11-years-old be suspended from schools—which begs us to question how teachers, administrators and people working the education system view Black students?

“We work with schools in building a capacity of understanding anti-Black racism...also to try to bridge the gap between what's happening in administration and understanding the challenges faced by some of the students,” he said.

Gebremikael mentioned a case where a 12-year-old girl was suspended for not looking at the teacher directly in the eyes. However, the student came from a culture where you're not supposed to look in the eyes of people in authority as a sign of respect.

“That could be confusing to students who think that they're doing one thing, but it's understood to be completely the opposite. And how would they process that as young as 12? So, it creates a lot of stress and distrust within the family,” he said.

The Plug will focus on systematically changing how educational institutions in Toronto, and across the province, discipline Black students by changing the paradigm.

“People were saying that they don't see colour, but at the end of the day, I need them to see colour. I need them to see colour so that they understand



the decisions they make, and how not seeing colour really has an impact on some of those decisions,” said Phil Johnson, the program manager.

Johnson says they plan to advocate for students by offering referrals and working with parents to help them stay informed of their rights, and when necessary, refer them to legal services. With the relaunch, they’ll be able to add dedicated staff to work on the project.

The relaunch of the program is provided by funding from Public Safety Canada, under the crime prevention strategy. The centre has moved forward with hiring dedicated staff, like Ahmed Jama, a community worker who has years of experience working with youth at Rexdale Community Health Centre.

“The more awareness I can bring into the schools, the staff, teachers, principals, vice principals, the more awareness of recognizing anti-Black racism—the more that can be a deterrent,” said Jama.

**E**mpowering and guiding Black students is a central part of the program, especially since many cases shows that these students become disinterested in education once they’re suspended or expelled. Gebremikael mentioned one case where a student was constantly targeted by administrators, and every small move she made, like mumbling under her breath, would result in immediate suspension.

“(So, the student) won’t like education anymore, because it’s not something that she can comfortably interact with, so then that person stops going to school,” he said.

This is often what happens to students who are suspended or expelled. They’re always trying to catch up with what they missed, which often puts them behind in their education.

“**T**he more behind they are, the more they lose confidence in themselves, hopelessness kicks in and then they lose their whole hope in what they’re doing and they’ll have to alternate into other means because they don’t think they’re good enough to do other things,” said Jama.

It becomes a vicious cycle of students dropping out because of disciplinary measures that kept them away from school, and then getting involved with street activity, which could later put them at risk of incarceration.

Although it’s a cycle rooted in systemic anti-Black racism, Dr. Carl James reminds us that it’s not a direct outcome for students constantly facing disciplinary actions. His research points that lack of belonging and lack of support when navigating the system hints at broader issues in society that may alienate Black people at a young age and expose them to the disadvantages that they’re vulnerable to.

“So far all of those systems are not working in their favor, then we are going to have a significant number of issues related to things that might not be very productive for them in terms of their social situation, one of which is prison,” said James.

While there are many systemic issues facing the Black community in Toronto—such as high unemployment rate, high representation in child welfare, and also high discrepancies with food security—when addressing issues in the education system community intervention proves to be a promising option.

“Problems are not isolated, problems are not individualized. And when we come to the African or Caribbean context, we are used to dealing with problems as a community and not as an individual person,” said Gebremikael.

**H**e says that there’s a steering committee for The Plug Program, and their role is to address challenges and barriers from a systems perspective. They have students, parents and even representatives from TDSB on the committee so that they can openly discuss solutions as a community.

“It’s not just one student in the school having behavioral problems, it is a systemic problem, and if we don’t involve the community and the system as part of the solution, we will not have a meaningful solution to the problem,” he said.



# Write2Right: Community Organization Profile

Photography by Houzayfa Zene

## **Introduce your organization, your name, and your team members (if there are any)**

My name is Hassan Mohamed (founder), I go by the name of Smooth. Write2Right is a writing program for youth to learn how to express themselves through creative writing. My team member Sami is the co-founder and program coordinator. We both run the writing sessions as a team. The organization is based in Downtown Toronto. Our organizational values are simply W.R.I.T.E: Wisdom, Respect, Integrity, Transform and Execute.

## **Tell us about the programming, workshops, and the main activities you offer at Write2Right and why you started this initiative.**

Write2Right offers weekly creative writing workshops where we learn different types of writing such as songwriting, poetry, scriptwriting, journaling and more. One of our favorite exercises is cutting out different images from magazines, like a person, a vehicle, an animal, or an object and integrating them into a short story. I started Write2Right because I was once a kid who didn't have the resources around me and I always wanted this type of opportunity when I

was younger, to be in a program like this.

## **Tell us about the youth you are trying to reach, impact, and connect with.**

Write2Right's doors are open to all youth in Toronto that are interested in expanding their writing skills through creative expression. The program offers an atmosphere where youth can freely voice their thoughts through writing. We do this by creating a safe environment where the youth can enjoy the craft of the sessions without the pressure they may feel in a classroom setting.

## **How did you get into creative writing?**

Writing has been a therapeutic means of expression for me throughout my younger years. I grew up in a rough neighborhood and writing was an escape from all the negative surroundings. I have been writing for more than ten years now. I always kept my writing in notebooks and I always pushed to develop my skills. I still learn new things daily. However, I want to offer what I have taught myself throughout the years to the youth in hopes of affecting positive change in my community.



### **Did you have access to any creative writing programs or arts programs growing up?**

There were no writing programs offered in my community as far as I remember. This has inspired me to set the bar and launch this program. So the kid writing at home knows that he or she does not have to hide their writing in the dark, that their work can be brought to the light.

### **What does increased access to art-based resources and supports mean for your community?**

General access to any programs can help boost academic performance and reduce trouble for youth. It promotes safety and wellness away from the streets. Arts-based resource programs give youth opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills, as well as, an environment that develops positive relationships with their peers.

### **How does Write2Right reimagine community building?**

Since the community has been going through gentrification, it has been out with the old and in with the new. The opportunities, programs, and resources we have lacked before are available now. Write2Right reimagines the community

through a creative lens. The program offers a space where youth can use creative writing as a tool to speak about the issues they face in their households, communities, and schools.

### **What are some outcomes that you would like to see in the youth who participated in the Write2Right program?**

Most of the youths attending the sessions want to expand their creative writing skills. However, the main outcome of this program is for youth to better their lives through writing, hoping they can use the skills and tools they have acquired to chase their dreams as writers and better our society.

### **Finally, tell us anything we missed! If there are questions we are not asking let us know.**

The Write2Right team wants to send a message to everyone that the program is not only available for writers. It is also available for those who want to voice their stories and life struggles. Writing brings us together, you write in school, you write at work, why not write together as one.

You can follow Write2Right at [@write2right](https://www.instagram.com/write2right)



## TAIBU

TAIBU Community Health Centre provides primary health care and related services for Black populations across the Greater Toronto Area as its priority population and residents of the local community of Malvern. Recognizing that systemic oppression has fostered conditions of ill-health with Black communities, we strive to deliver these services through intersectional, equity based and culturally affirming practices which promote holistic wellness, health education, and prevention.

<http://taibuchc.ca/en/home/>

## reachOUT

reachOUT is a creative, inclusive & accessible program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, non-binary, queer and questioning (LGBT\*) people in Toronto. This initiative provides individual and family counselling, workshops, drop-in groups, and arts and other recreational programming. As part of equitable representation, the staff team reflects the diversity of queer, trans and two-spirit communities, with the majority of team members identifying as Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

[reachOUT@griffincentre.org](mailto:reachOUT@griffincentre.org) or <http://www.griffincentre.org/reachout.php>

## Little Black Afro

Little Black Afro is a theatre company dedicated to creating a community for artists and providing resources for the development of new, diverse Canadian work. Services include script readings to other play-related workshops. The company is also able to connect theatre artists to local charities and engage communities through outreach.

<https://littleblackafro.com/>

## Community Directory

The following is a small list of community groups and organizations offering services to Black and racialized youth and adults in the Toronto/GTA area. If you would like your organization added to our online directory please email [nines@19on19.com](mailto:nines@19on19.com) To view the full directory please visit [19on19.com](http://19on19.com)

## The Kickback

The Kickback is an initiative utilizing the sneaker culture to put brand new, lightly worn sneakers into the hands of adolescents who would make the most out of them.

[www.thekickback.online](http://www.thekickback.online)

## Black Women in Motion

Black women in motion is a grassroots initiative, helping young women make the transition from adolescence to adulthood by providing them with diverse programming, access to information and resources to help them achieve diverse goals. Activities include creative workshops, physical recreation and community volunteering.

<http://www.blackwomeninmotion.ca/>

@blackwomeninmotion

## Latinx Group Hola

A community based volunteer-run social and support group for Spanish-speaking LGBTQ persons of Latin American origin or heritage in Toronto. The group offers a safe space for LGBTQ persons to express themselves freely in addition to providing referrals to services that assist individuals that are newly landed immigrants to Canada.

[www.the519.org/programs/latino-group-hola](http://www.the519.org/programs/latino-group-hola)

## CP Planning

CP Planning specializes in connecting non-profits, community groups, & development industries for a coordinated and informed approach to community planning. Through research and the coordination of inclusive conversations we facilitate relationships that improve access to housing, work, and play. <https://cpplanning.ca/>

## ArtsCan Circle

ArtsCan Circle is a Toronto-based Indigenous-run initiative that aims to foster artistic growth and expression in Indigenous youth in Northern Canadian communities by sending artists to facilitate creative art workshops.

<https://artscancircle.ca/>

## Women's Health in Women's Hands

Women's Health in Women's Hands is a community health centre for racialized women in Toronto and the GTA. Their services are fully accessible and care is designed with racialized women (and the specific barriers they face in the mainstream health environment) in mind. Services include mental health care, physicians, nurses, health educators, a food bank for clients and more.

<https://www.whiwh.com/>



i come from a land  
of splitting your last  
and forgiving so deeply  
you forget too

i come from a land  
where every woman is a fire  
and she blazes every trail  
she steps to

i come from a land  
of kindness so real  
you forget that people  
could hurt you

I also come from pain  
of standing with strain  
knowing odds are  
you'll be knocked down again

from helpless hurt  
decades of turmoil  
mothers' tears  
and blood soaked soil

and i wake up out of breath  
what if it is my blood next?

but isn't it already?  
it feels like it is  
i've memorized every name  
on the martyr lists

they all sounded so familiar  
faces I loved and ones i never met  
now burned into my brain  
and i will never forget

they may not be blood kin  
we weren't born from the same wombs  
but it was the same dagger that cut us  
so we carry the same wounds

we carry the same hurt  
but i know we will overcome it  
the song of freedom will sound soon  
we've already started to hum it

## Freedom Hum

Dinan Alasad

# 1919

1919 is an arts platform that aims to design safe spaces for Black and racialized cultural production. Our magazine is a critical and editorial publication that allows young artists/individuals the capacity to learn, share and amplify their voices.

19on19.com

@19on19\_