

Systems, Community & Collective Responses to the Exploitation of Black Boys

Report • The Exploitation of Black Boys Community Discussion
DurhamONE: Pita-Garth Case, Executive Director
Lisa Fabian, Board Chair

SESSION ATTENDANCE & DEMOGRAPHICS



201

Total Attendees

158

Community
Residents

34

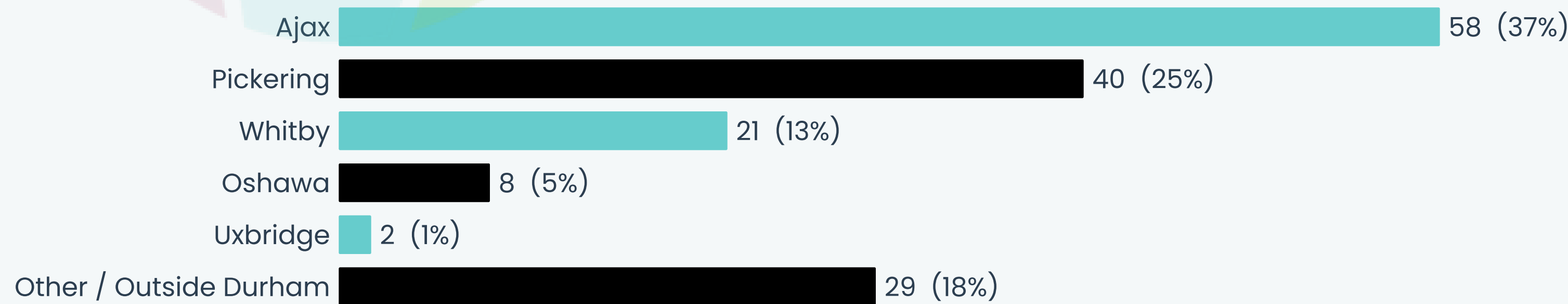
Vendors

9

Caterers &
Entertainment

23 Participants Were Youth Under the Age of 24

Resident Breakdown by Municipality (of 158 Residents)



CORE THEMES & STAKEHOLDER FRAMEWORK



PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Prevention & Structural Accountability

- Overrepresentation of Black youth in justice & welfare systems
- Lack of civilian-lens community liaisons (unlike Toronto/Peel)
- Systemic "silos" preventing cohesive cross-agency action
- Need for mandatory data on racial disparities

COMMUNITY ORGS

Amplification & Safe Spaces

- Chronic underfunding limiting program reach
- Need for non-sports programming: tech, trades, leadership
- High barriers to entry (cost, age restrictions)
- Wrap-around, co-ordinated services urgently needed

COMMUNITY / FAMILY

Advocacy & Mentorship

- "Village" mentality, shared responsibility model
- Combatting cultural stigmas around seeking help
- Near-peer mentors are scarce in Durham Region
- Parents & youth must be co-participants in solutions

Three-Level Prevention Framework: Individual (self-worth) • Community (visibility & back-watching) • Systems (dignity in everyday interactions)

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES & BARRIERS



The Durham Gap

Lack of local mentorship compared to Toronto. Geographic barriers (e.g., Pickering to Oshawa) render many programs inaccessible to youth who need them most.

Economic Realities

Suburban stereotypes ("Pickering families are wealthy") mask true financial struggle, preventing youth from accessing fee-based programs.

Institutional Mistrust

Historical legacies of harm by CAS, regional/municipal services, school boards, and law enforcement continue to create barriers to engagement and trust-building.

Education Gaps

High suspension and expulsion rates, combined with a lack of Black educator representation, are leading indicators for high-risk behaviour.

Digital Isolation

Post-pandemic digital dependency has weakened relational development. Social media reinforces harmful norms and further isolates youth.

Missing Voices

Youth actively in conflict with the law are almost entirely absent from programs, consultations, and solution design — the highest-need group is invisible.

The 'OT Economy'

The Profitability Gap

High-risk activities generate immediate, substantial income that low-wage entry-level jobs simply cannot match for youth without connections or credentials.

Ease of Access

"Going OT" is viewed as an easier, faster path to financial independence than navigating a workforce riddled with transit barriers, racial bias in hiring, and gatekeeping.

The Need for Legal Hustle

There is an urgent call to channel entrepreneurial mindsets into tangible legal ventures — local businesses, trades, and high-paying skills training.

Community response must address the Social Determinants of Health — with economics as the primary driver considering intersections

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: ACROSS SECTORS



01

Civilian Community Liaison Team

Fund a dedicated department of civilian staff — modelled on Peel and Toronto — to bridge the gap between police, government, and the Black community.

02

Transparency Through Data

Implement mandatory data collection on suspensions and police interactions to hold systems accountable for documented racial disparities.

03

Economic Reframing

Present social investments through a "Long-term Savings" lens: upstream youth funding reduces downstream justice and healthcare costs.

04

Re-integration Support

Increase funding for Youth Outreach Workers specifically tasked with supporting boys transitioning back to community life post-legal involvement.

For DDSB / DCDSB / French Board & Educators

05	Schools as Community Hubs Open school facilities after hours for free or low-cost grassroots programming led by community organizations.
06	Grade 7–9 Transition Support Develop specific resource toolkits for parents and students navigating the Grade 7 to 9 transition — a documented high-risk period for gang recruitment.
07	Academic Diversification Expand beyond sports. Fund tutoring, financial literacy, public speaking, music, and entrepreneurship programs as equally valued pathways.
08	Rites of Passage Programs Formally create culturally grounded, community-led rites of passage that teach Black boys community responsibility, dignity, and healthy identity.

YOUTH VOICES: WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



23 youth under 24 participated. Their insights are the most important data in this report.

SCHOOL

- Teachers who genuinely see youth potential — not just problems — can be life-changing
- Curriculum must include real life applications (life skills, taxes, etc.) and normalized conversations about conflict, mental health, and justice

FAMILY

- Youth need parents to talk WITH them, not AT them — silence driven by fear of anger is dangerous
- Exposure to jobs, travel, and mentors outside the community is protective

POLICING

- Youth want 1-on-1 conversations with police before incidents occur — at schools, courts, and community centres
- Get to know youth and community for who they are, not just as a response to a police call
- Police consistently defer to adults over youth, eroding trust; respectful communication matters more than race

CRITICAL GAP: THE MISSING VOICE



Youth In Conflict With the Law Are Absent From Nearly Every Conversation

Organizations engage youth who are already stable — not those who are actively missing, criminally involved, or entrenched in street life.

Programs are designed without authentic input from youth on probation, bail conditions, or potentially involved in gang activity.

Consultations where youth in conflict with the law are not present create a false sense that the problem is being addressed.

Resources flow to organizations that may not be reaching the highest-need youth, while those youth remain without support.

"If the rooms where decisions are made do not include those who are actively missing or in conflict with the law — we are not solving the problem. We are managing our discomfort with it."

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS



1

Joint Task Force

Establish a working group — RoD, DRPS, and Grassroots Black-led organizations — to align goals and avoid service duplication.

2

Community Resource Map

Create a centralized, digital map of Durham family supports to eliminate the "we didn't know it existed" barrier.

3

Faith-Based Engagement

Partner with local churches and faith communities to address cultural shame and create safe disclosure spaces for families.

4

Municipal Budget Review

Conduct a budget inquiry to ensure youth (12+) funding matches the actual demographic need in suburban areas.

5

Specialized Liaison Position(s)

Fund community-systems liaison role(s) to translate community needs into institutional action and ensure cultural responsiveness.

CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION



***The village must show up. Systems must break down their silos.
Organizations must tell the truth about their reach.***

SYSTEMS

Move beyond policy — focus on the dignity of everyday interactions with Black boys and their families.

ORGANIZATIONS

Be honest about who you are and are not reaching. Co-design with youth who are justice-involved.

THE VILLAGE

Show up collectively. Combat toxic narratives. Create visible support circles for every at-risk youth.

YOUTH

Must be at the table as architects of solutions — not subjects of conversation.

One Community ... One Vibe ... ONE Durham

It Takes a Village,

Pickering • Ajax • Whitby • Oshawa • Uxbridge • Brock • Scugog • Clarington



CO-HOST

Ladder
2Rise

COLLABORATORS



DDSB
Ignite Learning



LiveWise
ASSOCIATES INC.



Black
Parent
Collective