

# Employment Strategies for Youth with Police Records in Jane-Finch

**Final Report  
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# OVERVIEW

Roughly 80% of young people in the Black Creek community are racialized and a growing number of these young people have been, or are vulnerable to becoming, in conflict with the law.

Through our experiences with delivering youth programs and past community research projects, we learned that young people who are racialized and from low-income households often face a range of complex barriers to employment, self-employment, and accessing employment supports. Barriers include discrimination based on name, address/postal code, racial background; educational inequities; and a lack of caring adults or mentors in their lives. Having a police record further exacerbates these systemic barriers and creates a higher likelihood of being unemployed.

This Youth Employment Strategies project was designed to better understand the experiences of young people with police records from the Jane-Finch area with:

- (a) accessing employment-related services and supports;
- (b) seeking, finding, and keeping employment; and
- (c) creating and maintaining self-employment opportunities.

The project was led by the Jane/Finch Centre, with financial support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

# OUR APPROACH

Using a combination of community-based action research and people-centered design approaches, our ultimate goal was to engage the Jane-Finch community in generating a set of strategies and/or actions that would address current barriers to (self-)employment and have a high level of buy-in from local stakeholders, including young people and service providers.

Since this project was specific to the Jane-Finch community, we employed the following geographic boundaries: Wilson Avenue to the south, Steeles Avenue West to the north, Weston Road to the west, and Keele Street to the east. Our target participants were service providers and young people who lived and/or worked within these boundaries.

We began with our Discovery Phase, by conducting a brief literature review focused on identifying any key issues specific to young people navigating employment with police records in the Jane/Finch community. Project staff also strengthened existing relationships, and built new ones, with community-based service providers, neighbourhood and resident-led planning tables, and young people to be able to effectively engage local stakeholders and implement the project. We then conducted interviews with nine service providers and one young person; as well as four focus groups with 5-9 youth participants per session. The interview and focus group questionnaires focused on gaining insights into the experiences of and barriers facing young people with police records in navigating employment, self-employment, and access to

employment-related supports. Youth who participated in this phase were provided with \$50 honorariums, tokens, and lunch or dinner.

We then moved into our Design Phase, in which we conducted six workshops, also known as design labs, to develop and test potential actions (or prototypes) at a high level, based on what we had heard in our interviews and focus groups. These workshops engaged both community-based service providers and young people with police records. The first two workshops were mixed, with both service providers and young people, while the third and fourth were youth-only. The fifth session involved only service providers and the final session engaged young people once again to validate the ideas and feedback gathered over the course of the design phase. The workshops were held in different locations across the neighbourhood including a community centre, youth space, and our own office. Youth who participated in this phase were provided with \$60 honorariums, tokens, and lunch or dinner.

	Interviews	Focus Groups	Design Workshops
<b>Total # of Sessions</b>	10	4	6
<b>Total # of Participants</b>	13	27	61
<b>Timeline</b>	April-September 2019	July-August 2019	September-November 2019

After some initial project planning, partnership development, and staff hiring process, the main activities were implemented over a period of nine months. The Discovery Phase was implemented from April to August 2019, while the Design Phase was implemented from September to November 2019.

In total, we directly engaged about 100 young people and services providers through our interviews, focus groups, and design workshops.

# DISCOVERY

## What We Heard

Through our discovery activities, we heard a long list of barriers pertaining to navigating employment, self-employment, and accessing employment supports facing young people with police records.

### Seeking, Finding, and Keeping Employment

a. On top of having a police record, discrimination based on postal code/address, name, race, skin colour, or how someone presents themselves is a major barrier. Several participants said that they felt this issue was never going to change. It is a societal issue as well as a systemic barrier, because employers and service providers discriminate against young people based on them being Black, with a record, from the Jane-Finch area. It is a lot harder to affect change, when it comes to addressing this level of discrimination. Another youth said: “If you’re born black, you already lost ten points.” Unfortunately, we found this to be both perception and reality for many young people from the Jane-Finch area, and have heard several times over of how mentally discouraging navigating employment and self-employment can be as a result.

b. Stigma: Further to discrimination, there are most often negative assumptions, biases, and stereotypes associated with having a police record. Family and friends may look at or treat young people with records differently, and employers often have negative perceptions of them.

c. There is an absence of elders (or older heads) to guide and support young people: elders who are not dead or in jail are often disconnected from the younger youth, because they have been away and/or the younger youth feel like the elders do not check in on them or deserve their respect. As a result, the youth do not seek out or accept guidance from them.

d. Young people often do not know how record checks and record suspensions work, especially under new legislation in Ontario. During our sessions, a lot of the youth barely had any knowledge about the different types of record checks and what employers can and cannot ask them.

e. Young people lack and/or have limited knowledge of their rights in both the job seeking process and in the workplace.

f. Young people lack and/or have limited knowledge on how to sell themselves to employers, both in general and with a record. They often do not know how to put together a resume, or have anything to put on a resume, like work experience or volunteer hours. Even still, when they try to earn hours, they are discriminated against because of their record. They feel that are not being given a chance to take a different path and obtain legitimate work.

g. Limited resumes: Many youth do not have much work experience, but need it to gain employment. They also have a hard time getting volunteer experience or hours to put on a resume due to police records. After a while, they give up. Youth suggested that employers need to take the time to understand what they have been through and why they made the choices

they did, and then they will potentially be able to have a better understanding of why they do not have any experiences listed on their resumes.

h. Jobs that are available to youth with records are often low-wage, non-standard jobs, usually in factory work, cleaning, general labour, etc. This barrier was raised in every workshop. Youth are often only able to obtain these types of jobs that barely support them and their families, which keeps them in a cycle of needing money or needing to go to school and experiencing the associated barriers.

i. It is mentally discouraging for young people when they know their record is a barrier. Young people often have negative perceptions of what employers will think of them.

j. School and family: If a young person has a family to care for, they are often unable to go to school or work. And if they have to go to school, they are often unable to juggle school with working to make money. Youth also identified a number of barriers to attending school. These barriers take a mental toll, making them want to drop out.

- "It wasn't safe to go to school," due to school politics, e.g. turf/territorial issues, police in or around school, etc.
- School Resource Officers (SROs) were taken out, but some schools still have regular police officers
- They got "knocked" there, meaning they were arrested at school
- They feel like they are always being surveilled or watched, and have no privacy wherever they go
- There are always school patrols at particular local high schools, making them feel like they are in jail
- They feel like teachers do not care about them
- Suspensions and expulsions are often linked to conflict with the law, and young people often lose credits due to these suspensions or expulsions

k. Many young people are living in a constant state of survival (or survival mode) and are often unable to focus on finding employment while in this state. A key question that came up in this regard was "how do you survive while looking for employment?" When asked about their state of mind, one youth said: "How can you give money meaning when you don't have it?"

l. It is hard for young people, who are hustling by other means, to go "legit" even if they want to for the many reasons listed above. Having trouble finding legitimate employment, has led to some young people going back to doing what they already know or are comfortable with for survival, e.g. selling drugs, committing robberies, etc.

m. Fingerprint and police reference check fees, as well as processing times, create delays when starting new jobs or positions. Fees are also a barrier to getting a record suspension.

n. Youth often face a dilemma when disclosing their police record and "checking the box" on employment applications. If they lie and a record check is requested, they will likely be fired for both having a record and lying about it. If they choose not to tell the truth, they likely will not be called for an interview.

o. Trauma and mental health: Young people in the Jane-Finch area are surrounded by neglect, crime, violence, poverty, lack of positive guidance, and lack of opportunities and hope. They are also heavily impacted by over-policing, incarceration, issues in the education system, and

involvement in the child welfare system. Growing up in the area can be traumatic and can have a huge impact on their day-to-day mental health.

p. Young people with police records experience a great deal of grief and loss, including loss of life, loved ones, freedom, time, opportunities, relationships, and personal belongings, all of which have significant impacts on their mental health. Often times, grief and loss can happen over and over to the extent that youth become desensitized. It is also a cycle that keeps happening from older generations to younger generations.

q. Having legitimate employment competes with other more lucrative alternatives (e.g. hustles). One youth said: “How can you care for money when you live in poverty.” If a young person needs to feed kids now, or needs somewhere warm and safe to stay at night, why would they care to go through long processes and technical ways? The job finding process creates many barriers for young people with records, and sets them up to fail. With this burden and their past mistakes hanging over their heads mentally and in reality, what other option do they have than to stick with the hustle?

r. There are many restrictions and conditions related to being involved with the justice system that can be barriers to gaining and/or maintaining employment. For example: bail, probation, and parole are types of community supervision that come with conditions one needs to abide by to avoid custody, e.g. non-association with specified individuals, curfew, geographical boundaries, surety accompaniment, and/or reporting requirements, among other restrictions.

## **Creating and Maintaining Self-Employment**

a. Getting a loan to start a business is often difficult. Credit checks and questions about their personal background can make it hard for young people to get loans. When they are unable to access funds, some youth try to get a job or make money from their other “hustles.” If they go the job route, they face the same barriers to finding employment with a record, which can lead to the same predicament and cycle of doing “what they know” to get the money.

b. Lack of role models: Youth lack awareness of and/or access to people who have successfully started their own businesses with a police record.

c. Youth feel that they do not know how to go about starting their own businesses. They do not know where to start, the logistics or processes involved, or what it takes to maintain a successful business.

d. The process of starting a business can be mentally discouraging. It is easy to give up, especially when a young person does not have someone who has their back and/or supports them.

## **Accessing employment-related services and supports**

a. Many young people do not know what is available in terms of employment services or supports.

b. Some youth are aware of programs or services, but not interested in accessing them, because of a lack of trust. Other reasons for not using a service or support given by youth included:

- Knows there are programs out there to help, but does not do it because there is a long process and it is a waste of their time
- Feels like they don't "give a shit about you"
- Feels like programs are "boxing you in," don't care about what you want or your goals
- Feels like you're "just a number"
- Getting rough treatment, bad attitudes, at reception and/or from service provider(s)
- "They are just rude and have no respect, if they don't like their job they shouldn't work there"
- Lack of communication from service provider(s), e.g. program start changed and they were not informed, so they attended on original date and wasted their time
- Staff are not aware of and/or considerate of turf issues in the Jane/Finch that would make it unsafe for someone to go to another neighbourhood for a service or program
- Feels like programs are not helpful

c. There is a lack of meaningful/relevant benefits: Some youth are going to programs or accessing services just because they get paid to attend them and certifications are free.

d. Programs and services are not relevant to youth or different age groups. "The programs don't show you how to build yourself, they don't show you what you need to know," said one youth. Youth also shared that some programs fail to consider their audience. In reference to a financial management workshop one youth said: "When I can't get a job how can I save money?"

e. Time conflicts: Programs and services often conflict with their availability. Some youth may be dealing with scheduling conflicts related to their court appearances, or appointments with and/or expectations of their probation or parole officers.

f. Lack of representation: A major theme that we heard throughout the project was that organization staff are not representative of/do not look like the youth they are serving, especially at the management level. They are most often not from the community and lack experience living in Jane-Finch with a police record. At one of the focus groups, one youth said: "You can't come and talk to me when you have no idea fully what I'm going through, cause they never experienced it nor understand it."

g. Lack of cultural and youth-specific lens or competence: Service providers often do not understand the cultural norms and contexts of the youth, and do not know how to engage and maintain relationships with youth.

h. Lack of consistent services or supports: In terms of the consistency and/or quality of employment services, it often "depends who you get." One young person may get a worker who is caring, while another gets a worker that does not seem to care. High staff turnover rates within some programs and services have also resulted in youth not being able to maintain consistent relationships, and feeling abandoned, making them skeptical of and/or unwilling to engage with new staff as a result.

i. Many service providers do not have genuine relationships with the community or with youth. This barrier also relates to lack of representation of people with lived experience. A theme throughout the project was that workers come across as though they do not care and it is just a job. Their attitude and the way they deal with youth is often problematic. How they speak to them, approach them, their body language, and overall attitude towards them, is a major barrier that makes young people not want to return to a program or service.

j. There is a lack of programs and services in the Jane-Finch area specifically for youth who have police records and/or have been in conflict with the law.

k. Lack of self-awareness: Service providers are often unaware of or fail to check their own internal biases and assumptions while working with young people who have police records. Youth identified at least nine local employment agencies and youth-serving organizations where they had experienced this barrier.



# DESIGN

## Design Labs 1 and 2

At our first two design workshops, we reported back on all of the themes that had emerged during discovery phase and gave participants an opportunity to give their feedback or additional thoughts. We then had them vote on what themes they felt should be prioritized for action. The activity involved two rounds of voting, in order to narrow down on key themes. We then tallied up the votes, revealing four main themes:

1. Discrimination based on race, postal code/address, and police records.
2. Young people with records have limited access to the employment supports they need.
3. Young people with police records have difficulty/face barriers to getting both short- and long-term employment.
4. Finding employment and/or starting a business with a record is often mentally discouraging.

## Design Labs 3 and 4

Our next two workshops only targeted youth to make sure that they were driving the solutions. We designed two activities to help them come up with ideas. The first activity involved dividing participants into four groups based on the four top themes. Each participant then got an activity sheet that asked them about their current experiences and what they would like to see happen in the future. This activity was designed to get the participants thinking about their specific theme in a deeper way. The second activity asked them to generate a “big idea,” and work through what was needed to put this idea into action, who would put it into action, where it would be held, and how often. There were also given space to elaborate on their idea in more detail and how it would help address the issues facing young people with police records in Jane-Finch. In total, participants generated eight prototype ideas.

## Design Labs 5 and 6

We designed our final two workshops to test and collect feedback on the eight prototypes with service providers and young people, in order to refine the ideas, facilitate buy-in, and begin to understand possible implementation strategies.

Only service providers were invited to workshop #5. At the session, we asked them to provide feedback on each of the potential actions, according to the following four questions:

1. Do you feel this idea address the barrier or issue?
2. Do you feel this idea makes sense for the Jane-Finch community?
3. What do you feel could be potential short-term and long-term impacts?
4. Is the idea worth developing further for potential implementation? Why or why not?

Our follow-up conversation focused on identifying what was missing, potential barriers to implementation, sustainability concerns, next steps, and existing community resources that could be leveraged.

Our final workshop re-engaged young people. As with the previous workshop, we started by explaining how the potential actions had been generated. We then discussed the feedback for each action from the last session with service providers. From there, we then had a facilitated discussion to collect their final feedback on the actions.

## Prototypes

Below are the eight big ideas generated by youth participants during Design Labs 3 and 4, along with the raw feedback collected during Design Labs 5 and 6.

<b>THEME</b>	Finding employment and/or starting a business with a record is often mentally discouraging
<b>BIG IDEA #1</b> Program and service	There should be more workshops to teach youth different ways to get jobs with a criminal record and motivate them so they won't give up on finding a job
<b>WHO</b>	The government, or people like this project's staff [who have lived experience]
<b>WHEN</b>	Everyday or two times a week
<b>WHERE</b>	Somewhere close, because if its not then we would have to wake up early or pay to go on the bus
<b>WHAT</b>	More people like this project's staff to motivate people with criminal records so they do not give up on getting a job
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does this idea address the issue?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, depending on who is facilitating</li> <li>- Brushes on issue, but not fleshed out</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Meets needs of Jane and Finch</li> <li>- Short-term: Youth engagement</li> <li>- Long-term: Increases employment stats, potentially</li> </ul>

	<p>increases retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Further development for implementation? Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increases engagement</li> </ul> </li> <li>- We think the idea better addresses the issue of young people with records having limited access to employment supports</li> </ul>
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<b>THEME</b>	Young people with police records have difficulty/face barriers to getting both short- and long-term employment.
<b>BIG IDEA #2</b> Program and training	Diversion type program for youth who have been charged
<b>WHO</b>	Youth worker from the community, who cares and can connect with youth
<b>WHEN</b>	Every other week (3 times) during the summer. Each session should be drop-in style with chill time
<b>WHERE</b>	In our community and Driftwood Community Centre for safety reasons
<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sign contract to agree to program</li> <li>- Make sure there are food and supplies</li> <li>- Create resumes</li> <li>- Help apply and get job</li> <li>- Check-ins weekly to give feedback about the job</li> <li>- Charges get dropped if you finish and keep the job</li> </ul>

**FEEDBACK/  
SUGGESTIONS  
FOR ACTION**

**Service provider feedback:**

- The Diversion and after school programs could be integrated somehow as they may have similar outcomes and target populations
- I do believe it makes sense for the community. Noticing with a lot of the issues in the community it paints a negative image of the community and the residents that live there
- How do referrals get determined?
- No clear process for diversion referrals. Is there a standard process?
- Accountability is a major issue
- Sounds like two young people with similar needs may get referred to two different places with different outcomes
- Short-term, I think the impact would redirect the youth with charges that don't feel they are still integrated in society to be leaders and find a different outlet
- Long-term, it can span across the country and impact not just our community
- I do feel a diversion type program for youth is beneficial for our young people of today who have made mistakes in their lives. It provides hope and motivation in our young people to rehabilitate themselves, others and community. Young people who often get charged don't feel as if society still value their lives or what they can contribute
- We need to reach people that are out of high school - community organizations need to be aware of us. "Young people can't know we don't exist."
- Some programming exists up town.

**Youth feedback:**

- Really needs to be run by people in the community who have lived and experienced it to fully understand and be able to communicate with the youth
- They don't necessarily need to have experienced the same exact thing but need to have an understanding, similar experiences, witnessed it, etc.

<b>THEME</b>	Discrimination based on race, postal code/address, and police records.
<b>BIG IDEA #3</b>  Program, education, training	Two parts:  (1) Allowing us to get the things we would need in life (2) Training for teachers and educators on how to deal with youth, including effective communication, attitudes, and social skills improvement
<b>WHO</b>	People that care about us  E.g. Success Beyond Limits (Shanaz really wants you to graduate)
<b>WHEN</b>	Every weekend at 3:00pm, starts 20 minutes after arrival
<b>WHERE</b>	At school or job
<b>WHAT</b>	Allowing us to be able to get any job and get into any school we want to without having to worry
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<p><b>Service provider feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I really think it's about looking at this shit the other way around. Perhaps, it's about finding employers in the city/region that want to hire folks with records for their own benefit. Also, I think if there was a Bys2Men group that had some older heads to talk to kids at Jefferies, Westview, etc. it would add so much depth in terms of community</li> <li>- There has to be accountability on the part of teachers</li> <li>- Training for teachers &gt; accountability!</li> </ul> <p><b>Youth feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It's a good idea, they still really need to hire the right people. You can't really train a teacher how to deal with certain people because they won't be able to do that because they don't fully understand what we go through and think a certain way because of how they were brought up, so they need to have teachers and educators with actual lived experience</li> <li>- How they hire teachers needs to be looked at (teachers</li> </ul>

	need to be a representation of who they are teaching)
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<b>THEME</b>	Young people with records have limited access to the employment supports they need
<b>BIG IDEA #4</b> Service	Fundraiser
<b>WHO</b>	Community centre staff would help us out and Success Beyond Limits would also support
<b>WHEN</b>	Every other week for 5 hours, on a busy day / Friday
<b>WHERE</b>	Driftwood Community Centre
<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access careers is an employment service</li> <li>- We would reach out to them and help them raise money so that they can have more funding and they'll be able to get more applicants with [police records] for jobs</li> <li>- So basically, raising funds to help subsidize hiring of young people who have records</li> </ul>
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Both this idea and the know-your-rights training could incorporate mentors</li> <li>- This can help provide some funds to those in a small group</li> <li>- This will work, but may be hard to get community members that are low-income to help those that are also low-income</li> <li>- Short-term &gt; Funds for basics</li> <li>- Long-term &gt; Hands-on experience with dealing with money and sales</li> <li>- It can work in any youth spaces</li> <li>- Laidlaw Foundation would be a great connection to facilitate the fundraising aspect</li> <li>- Could possibly identify very specific needs and create an</li> </ul>

	<p>NGO/team from the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which is what young folks are asking for</li> <li>- It addresses the barrier, I just wonder how much overlap there is in terms of services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If there is a need, run with it</li> </ul> </li> <li>- I think it's worth finding one collective issue with folks with records and build something from that</li> <li>- Another possibility is raising money for community organizations to tackle it. This way, community organizations can also hire folks from the community with lived experience.</li> <li>- I think the idea is to use faces from the community and show folks you can get paid even despite your lived experience</li> <li>- Yes, I feel this addresses the barrier. I think that having as much active support in the process will help people be in positions to continue to advocate for themselves and others with lived experience, while creating a safe space and creating a space for mentorship if possible</li> </ul>
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<b>THEME</b>	Young people with records have limited access to the employment supports they need.
<b>BIG IDEA #5</b> Program, service, advocacy, education and training	Facilitate people leaving custody and coming back into society with programs that will offer part-time or full-time employment, as well as paid training and apprenticeship opportunities
<b>WHO</b>	People with knowledge of the system! <b>FUBU</b> (For Us By Us)
<b>WHEN</b>	3 times per week 3-6 months or 9-12 months
<b>WHERE</b>	A marginalized community where everyone can participate
<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People with criminal records would sign up for the program</li> <li>- Intake process to see which position is suitable</li> <li>- A certificate of completion</li> <li>- A graduation ceremony for their accomplishments</li> <li>- It would be done through social support, media, outreach, therapist</li> </ul>

<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, I feel this addresses barrier. Yes, this idea is worth it because it helps create a “smoother” transition/builds relationships, also addresses the financial component however safety may be an area to focus on while developing a plan</li> <li>- Address the issue? No; Worth developing? Yes, because it is an underserved population but should be done with other wraparound supports and incentives; Makes sense for Jane/Finch? Yes.</li> <li>- Employer training around hiring young people with police records is needed too</li> </ul>
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<b>THEME</b>	Finding employment and/or starting a business with a record is often mentally discouraging.
<b>BIG IDEA #6</b> Program, service, education, training	Create an entrepreneurship program for incarcerated people
<b>WHO</b>	Individuals that have experienced incarceration
<b>WHEN</b>	Every 6 months (e.g. 60 applicants for the program)
<b>WHERE</b>	G.T.A.
<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop entrepreneur business skills</li> <li>- Certification</li> <li>- Networking with a lot of black entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Engage community organisations, employment services, probation officers</li> </ul>
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<p><b>Service provider feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combine this idea with the idea of running workshops on getting jobs and increasing motivation</li> <li>- Combine this idea with fundraiser idea, workshops, entrepreneurship, part-time/full-time employment ideas</li> <li>- Addresses the issue</li> <li>- Meets needs of Jane and Finch</li> <li>- Short-term and long-term impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increases employability by developing existing transferable skills</li> <li>- Increases motivation</li> <li>- Access to opportunities</li> </ul> </li> <li>- This addresses the issue as it will provide training for those to start businesses in a direct manner. It will have to focus on the barriers and provide a space to express the issues that come in the process.</li> <li>- Jane and Finch needs more programs like this, with</li> </ul>



	<p>mentors that have gone through it as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long-term &gt; Self-sustainable youth/adults, skills to pass on to future generations</li> <li>- Short-term &gt; Confidence building, relieving stress, supports system</li> <li>- This has potential as it doesn't rely on employers to hire the youth - they can create their own income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only issue would be start up money</li> <li>- Setting up branding so they are not discriminated against</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Short-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides individuals coming out of incarceration the opportunity to garner new skills and knowledge in a business setting they normally wouldn't have access to, or would be discouraged to due to a criminal record</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Long-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop the necessary business and entrepreneurial skills to create and sustain a long-term business and how to make business relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Youth feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus more on building businesses instead of finding jobs because people don't realise they can really start their own job (selling service rather than product, you don't need a capital)</li> <li>- Everyone wants to start their own business they don't want to help anyone else start their own business</li> <li>- Collaborate on own business initiative with other people as well</li> <li>- Need to make employment program/organisation specifically for people with records so they can get a second chance.</li> </ul>
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<b>THEME</b>	Young people with police records have difficulty/face barriers to getting both short- and long-term employment.
<b>BIG IDEA #7</b> Program, service, education, training	Program for youth that provides a safe space and supports them through any issues they may be experiencing at home
<b>WHO</b>	Someone they respect, how they carry themselves, how they act and how they approach people Mentors
<b>WHEN</b>	After school

	<p>4-5 hours  Everyday or 5 times per week  Ages 10-18</p>
<b>WHERE</b>	<p>Jane-Finch  Close to PEACH (local youth space)</p>
<b>WHAT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take youth off the streets</li> <li>- Help them get jobs</li> <li>- Group work, wood shop, play games, help with school work, take them on trips</li> <li>- Promotion through social media, i.e. instagram</li> </ul>
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<p><b>Service provider feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create new specific programs within organizations already. A lot of programs exist, just not for folks with records. Use spaces that already exist with specific and allocated times to run new programs. Reach out to organizations in the area and pitch the reason and need for it. Community organizations want to build their portfolio too at the end of the day!</li> <li>- I do believe it makes sense for the community. Noticing with a lot of the issues in the community it paints a negative image of the community and the residents that live there.</li> <li>- This idea would provide soft/hard skills for participants to be more prepared in the society, where that training may not happen at home. There are many after school programs that already exist - unsure if they are focused in this way. It can benefit existing programs.</li> <li>- Long-term prevention from involvement in criminal activity &gt; sense of belonging. Short-term &gt; Having a place to go and mentors/adult role models</li> <li>- This will benefit youth who are “at risk”</li> <li>- Maybe addressed issue # 1 (discrimination)</li> <li>- Seems like it will sit under a category of mentorship</li> <li>- Short-term impact &gt; Engagement and life-skills training. Long-term &gt; Positive modelling and community building and widens network</li> <li>- Addresses prevention and intervention</li> <li>- Meets needs of Jane and Finch</li> <li>- Worth developing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creates extracurricular activities that are very need specific</li> <li>- Creates the bridge for wraparound supports</li> <li>- Validates youth experience</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Youth feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is needed because there’s not many out there like that – good role models, supportive of them. They do have</li> </ul>

	programs out there, just not being used, some kids just don't even want it. "It's who wants it or not."
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<b>THEME</b>	Discrimination based on race, postal code/address, and police records.
<b>BIG IDEA #8</b> Training	More training in the community about police and your rights
<b>WHO</b>	People who understand rights and people in community with experience with the law
<b>WHEN</b>	Ongoing
<b>WHERE</b>	Community centre
<b>WHAT</b>	Exchange of information between people who have experience with the law, or know their rights, with community members
<b>FEEDBACK/ SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This will address the issues of youth speaking with police officers and possibly eliminate charges that can be prevented</li> <li>- Yes, perfect for Jane-Finch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can't be the police running it</li> <li>- Lawyers/those who have experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Long-term &gt; Less youth getting picked up off the streets</li> <li>- Short-term &gt; Feeling safer on the streets</li> <li>- Addresses the issue? Yes, but more training for whom?</li> <li>- Jane and Finch? Fore sure!</li> <li>- Short-term: Marring an otherwise divisive relationship between community members and enforcement</li> <li>- Short-term/Long-term: Increased advocacy/awareness</li> </ul>

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION LEARNINGS

Through the implementation of this project, we have learned not only about the issues and barriers related to navigating employment and self-employment with a police record, but also some unique considerations for similar projects in the future.

## Turf Issues and Logistics

The Jane-Finch community has long standing territorial issues between those living north and south of Finch Avenue West. In consideration of the safety of the young people who participated in this project, we had to run our focus groups and design workshops on both sides to make sure that everyone was included. We used Driftwood Community Centre on the north side, PEACH on the south side, and our own Green Change/Community Development office as a neutral, central location.

The timing of sessions was also a key consideration, particularly for the workshops involving both young people and service providers. Many of our youth participants were in school and were not available until 4pm or later, while service providers were typically finishing work around that time. To try to accommodate the availability of both groups, we decided to run the mixed workshops mid-afternoon around 3pm.

## Confidentiality

The sensitive nature and subject matter of this project (i.e. experiences of young people who have police records) called for extra care, in terms of handling the privacy and confidentiality of our youth participants. This process was difficult to navigate at times, however, due our time constraints (e.g. not having time to submit for formal ethics review), and organizational policies requiring full contact information to be collected from youth receiving honourariums for their participation.

The latter procedure ran contrary to the informed consent process that we developed and implemented for our interviews and focus groups, in which we provided and read through informed consent sheets before asking for verbal consent. This consent process did not request personal information or signatures. It is important to note that we had taken this approach to getting consent, because understandably, young people are typically reluctant to participate in and/or share personal experiences about matters of such a sensitive nature, as it can exacerbate the barriers they face should they be identifiable and linked to what the information they are sharing.

## Importance of Lived Experience and Relationships

Two additional factors which impacted whether or not young people chose to participate, and the degree to which they shared information, were: (1) their existing relationships with our staff and/or the referring service providers and (2) project staff identifying as people with lived experience, or 'peers,' and disclosing their own lived experiences. Both of these assets helped establish a level a trust from which we could facilitate meaningful exchanges with the youth participants in ways that would otherwise not been possible.

The key take away is that it is important to have representation in any actions, programs, or services that are developed and delivered for, or to, young people with police records. This means having people who are coming from the given community, or similar communities, and have similar backgrounds, identities, and/or experiences. Without this representation, it will be challenging to understand and meaningfully connect with young people and move the initiative forward, as has been illustrated by many of the key themes (or barriers) we heard throughout this project.

## **Positioning This Work in Jane-Finch**

The stigma associated with young people who have police records or who have been in conflict with the law often translates into the optics of and/or level of genuine buy-in from service providers, in terms of developing and implementing actions and supports specific to this population group. This likely explains why, one key theme established through this project, is the general scarcity of actions, programs, and services that are designed for the unique needs of young people who have police records, both within and beyond the Jane-Finch community. Further, over the course of building relationships with and attending the meetings of local resident-led groups and neighbourhood tables, project staff noted the lack of consideration and understanding of how housing, education, and employment, among other social needs, are impacted by having a police record. These concerns were not on their radar when we started our project, and remain low priorities, despite the deep conversations and potential actions generated over the past year.

# NEXT STEPS

Based on the feedback that we have collected, we have narrowed down our ideas to five actions to now move forward: Diversion, Training for Educators, Support Hub, Entrepreneurship, and Afterschool Programming. We plan to continue bringing young people, service providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders together to flush out the viability, feasibility, desirability, and impact of each of these ideas, and developing the pilot projects. In the process, we hope to further explore the current overlaps between the ideas as well as potential opportunities to combine them to create more robust solutions.

Other critical next steps include:

- Sharing the findings from this project with others within and outside the neighbourhood to build knowledge and commitment to action;
- Strengthening partnerships with other organizations to increase coordination of proposed actions and , and avoid duplication of programs, services, and resources;
- Advocating to local employment agencies, schools, and other service providers to change their protocols, policies, and practices to better address the specific needs of young people with police records, including their hiring processes to ensure frontline staff reflect the youth they are serving.