

# RISE UP

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## KIDS HELP PHONE'S ACTION PLAN FOR SUPPORTING BLACK YOUTH

**2023 - 2026**





A strong team often makes for even stronger work, and that can certainly be said for the development of the **RiseUp: Kid's Help Phone's Action Plan for Supporting Black Youth**. Collaboration, community and compassion have guided each part of this journey, and will continue to do so.

Kids Help Phone would like to thank the Black Advisory Council, trained, volunteer crisis responders, professional counsellors and other staff, volunteers and board members for sharing their valuable feedback and expertise along the way.

This work would not be possible without the generosity and investment of supporters, including The Slight Family Foundation, who identified an opportunity to be a part of empowering Black youth and came forward to act.

We'd especially like to extend gratitude to Black youth and their communities from across the Afro-diaspora who've been the necessary guiding lights in this venture. From focus groups to service feedback, to emails and phone calls and coffee chats — every connection matters, and they're always at the centre of what we do.

**THANK YOU FOR BEING YOU.**



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# KIDS HELP PHONE IS UNLOCKING HOPE

Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, confidential support to young people in English and French. As the country's virtual care expert, we give millions of kids, teens and young adults a place for their feelings to go.

Since 1989, Kids Help Phone's innovation has opened more doors for youth to get mental health support. Our professional counsellors and trained, volunteer crisis responders are always there for youth from coast to coast to coast. Young people can contact Kids Help Phone for support with any issue on their mind, big or small.

We offer:

- crisis supports via **texting**
- professional counselling via **phone** and **Live Chat**
- a **peer-to-peer support community**
- an extensive library of engaging **online resources**
- a **support service directory**
- youth mental health **data insights**, and more!

Through evidence-based ways of organizing mental health services and supports, progressing from lower intensity to higher intensity, Kids Help Phone is dedicated to being there for any need, and any concern, at any time of day or night.

We continue to evolve alongside the youth we serve — from adapting our technology to connect with more young people living in a digital era to adjusting how we respond to their changing concerns in an increasingly complex world.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that our services and supports were needed more than ever. No other organization could have responded to the scope and scale of youth mental health challenges created by the pandemic like Kids Help Phone did. When demand for our services and supports grew by over 137% in 2020 compared to the year prior, we mobilized for young people like never before.



Kids Help Phone must be a space where all youth can feel celebrated and listened to, and where they know, we can grow to support their changing needs. From our professional counselling and volunteer texting services to the free tools and resources on our website and more, it's critical that young people are reflected in our services in ways that honour where they come from and where they want to go.

Our Indigenous Initiatives Program led equity work at Kids Help Phone through the implementation of **Finding Hope: Kids Help Phone's Action Plan for Supporting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Young People**, which paved the way for long term, dedicated work across other equity-deserving groups.

Black youth are no exception.

“  
Black youth are often discriminated against, and I just want them to know that they are loved, and they are just as important as everyone else in the world and anyone who tells them otherwise is wrong.

”  
— Black texter contacting Kids Help Phone

# RIISING IN SOLIDARITY WITH BLACK YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

Informed by Black youth, Black community leaders and Black organizations, RiseUp: Kids Help Phone Action Plan for Supporting Black Youth with Kids Help Phone is how we celebrate and support young people of the Afro-diaspora in all aspects of Kids Help Phone's services. It's how we shape and develop a future state where systemic anti-Black racism is eradicated. It's through this community-based lens that Kids Help Phone works toward **fulfilling our promise** of maximizing access, achieving resilience and demonstrating impact.

RiseUp will be a space where Black youth with dynamic identities can view themselves as positively and intentionally reflected in our services and can access culturally competent and community-informed support when they need it, in the way they need it most, with RiseUp as their champion.

In January 2022, the **Black Advisory Council** formed to help guide and inform the implementation of RiseUp. Comprised of 12 community leaders from across Canada (half of whom are youth) with an impressive range of personal and professional experience, they contribute expertise to the important work of eliminating anti-Black racism and creating spaces where Black youth can thrive.

Their leadership and direction has helped to shape RiseUp: Kids Help Phone Action Plan for Supporting Black Youth, and our commitments for 2023–2026. We're also able to do this work through the support of generous supporters such as The Slaight Family Foundation.



“

I love supporting Black youth because I get to provide something that I wish I had received when I was younger. My passion for this philanthropy is aligned with RiseUp powered by Kids Help Phone, so joining the Black Advisory Council allows me to help support and bring that vision to life.

”

— Black Advisory Council member

# **BARRIERS TO SERVICE: BLACK YOUTH SPEAK OUT**

Black communities have always been a foundational part of Canada's history. Over hundreds of years, the diverse Afro-diaspora has come to this country in many ways and under many circumstances. Throughout it all, they've found ways to make homes, build communities, create joy and thrive.

The stories about what it means to be Black in Canada are all very different. However, they often relate to innovation, creativity, community building and overcoming. We know that Black youth and their communities deserve to tell their own stories, and to be centred on, heard and supported.

The prevalence of anti-Black racism in Canada is staggering. Long histories of injustice and colonization compounded by tragic events can take a toll on the mental health of young people from across the Afro-diaspora, and racial trauma has wide-ranging impacts. Black communities are often exposed to factors (e.g. an affordable housing crisis, discrimination in employment, fewer educational opportunities, poorer health care, higher levels of policing and criminalization, etc.) that can lead to mental health struggles.

The systemic racism of historically marginalized people has a very real impact on well-being. Kids Help Phone's data shows that young people connecting with us about racism are some of the most distressed texters, second only to those experiencing violence in their home. Knowing this, resources focused on eliminating obstacles and championing equity play an important part in making a positive impact.

Anti-Black racism can create significant barriers when African, Caribbean and Black youth try to connect for mental health and wellness support. We strive to better understand these challenges to help ensure that our services can meet the unique needs of youth.

In August 2021, we engaged directly with more than 200 African, Caribbean and Black youth to find out more about what barriers they face when accessing support. Here's what we learned:

## **Awareness of services**

Some Black youth are unaware of the scope and availability of services that are available to them. Others are unaware of what it means to access counselling or mental health support and what that could be like. Others have heard of Kids Help Phone but are unfamiliar with the various ways that we offer support.

## **Fear and distrust**

Many Black youth share their apprehension around using mental health services because of negative past experiences of feeling dismissed, receiving poor levels of support from service providers, and fearing the risk of police contact. Discrimination is a real barrier that can range from microaggressions to outright violence and youth were clear about their experiences and the need for safer spaces.

## **Representation and relatability**

Black youth express serious concerns around feeling uncomfortable and misunderstood when their service providers don't share their lived experiences and identities. They worry that they won't receive the help they need in a way that feels relatable and resonant.

## **Stigma and misinformation**

Stigma from family, friends and community frequently comes up as a significant barrier for accessing mental health services. Youth talk to us about internalized stigma and how the pressure to appear strong and resilient can make it difficult to connect for support.

## **Systemic anti-Black racism**

Black youth highlight systemic anti-Black racism as a substantial barrier that affects the accessibility and approachability of mental health services. There's a true fear of encountering racial bias from professionals and of the implications that can have on their safety and well-being.

— RiseUp Report: Amplifying Black and Afro-diasporic youth voices



“

**My immediate family understands mental health better than the rest of my family/community. However, they still believe that adhering to the 'strong Black woman' trope means I do not need help or medication.**

”

— Black focus group participant (Amplifying Black and Afro-diasporic youth voices)

# OUR COMMITMENT TO BLACK YOUTH

**Our commitment to Black youth and their communities is action-oriented and always led and informed by members of the Afro-diaspora. This work is made possible through the generous support of donors and partners who believe that Black youth mental health is a critical issue that must be addressed.**

Kids Help Phone has an opportunity to continue to build the trust of Black youth and communities, break down barriers and rise to meet young people's mental health needs. We know from lived experience, feedback from people of the Afro-diaspora and research and data our work must be:

- community-informed and community-led
- centred on Afro-diasporic wellness and healing practices
- intersectional and celebratory of diverse experiences of Blackness
- transparent about our stance against white supremacy and systemic anti-Black racism
- adaptable, knowing the world we live in changes quickly and often unpredictably, and young people need resources that can pivot accordingly

We know that systems have often failed Black communities, and it's essential that we ally ourselves with work that inspires and nurtures the wellness and healing that comes with support and liberation from inequity. With a better understanding of the structural barriers that young Black people face when they connect for mental health and wellness support, RiseUp has positioned itself through five main commitments with actions that address their needs in responsive and innovative ways.



**INNOVATE** new and responsive ways of supporting Black youth mental health and wellness

**AMPLIFY** awareness of services that support the well-being of African, Caribbean and Black youth

**INCREASE** the representation of diverse youth of the Afro-diaspora throughout all of Kids Help Phone's service offerings

**EVOLVE** service offerings to suit the unique needs of Black youth and their communities

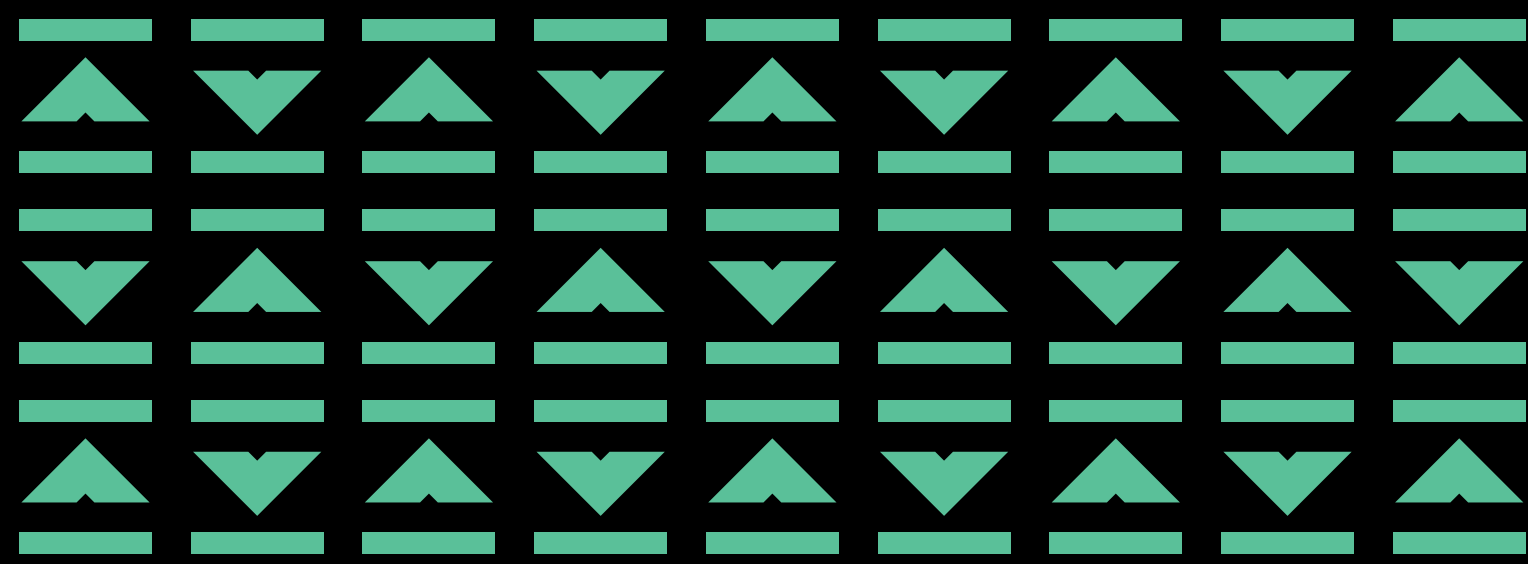
**EMPOWER** with our data to guide best practices and service provision for African, Caribbean and Black youth throughout Kids Help Phone's services and beyond



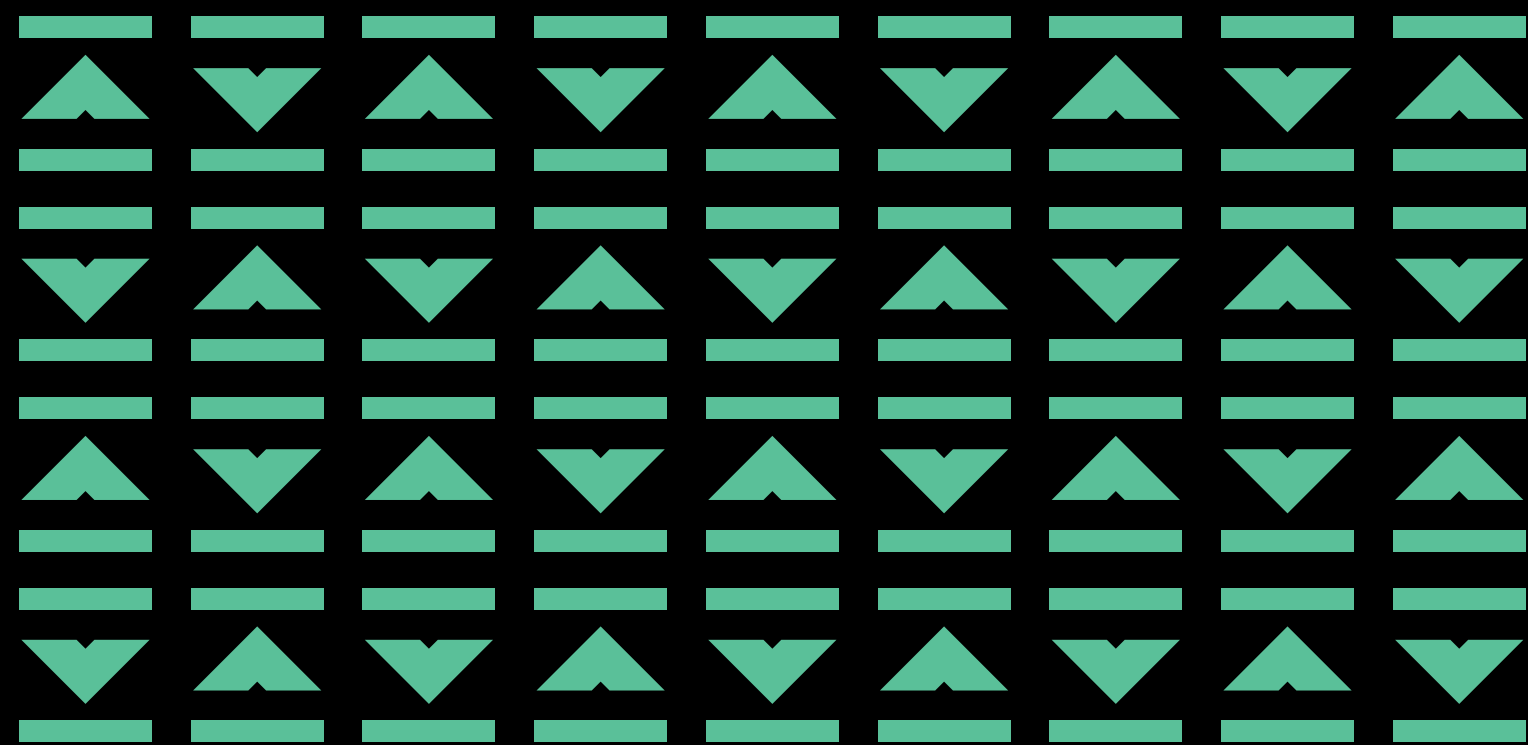
Seeing services focus on Black youth mental health is important because discrimination not only impacts our kids' mental health but also impacts how we as adults recognize our implicit and explicit biases.



— Kay Thellot, professional counsellor at Kids Help Phone



# **ACTIONING FOR CHANGE**





# #1: **INNOVATE** NEW AND RESPONSIVE WAYS OF SUPPORTING BLACK YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



The needs of Black youth are not “one size fits all,” and we’re dedicated to exploring new ways of supporting young people of the Afro-diaspora that enhance their safety net as they navigate the world around them. The systems that Black youth are often forced to engage with are rarely built with a culturally specific lens, often leading to more experiences of being othered.

Through partnerships with organizations who share values and visions of reducing anti-Black racism and who add diversity of expertise, **RiseUp: Kids Help Phone’s Action Plan for Supporting Black Youth** will tackle the cultural mistrust that exists by activating collaborations that bring us closer to the goal of making mental health and wellness support more accessible to all.

We’ll be both curious and courageous in how we plan and pilot new programs with the recommendations, guidance and feedback of African, Caribbean and Black communities to reduce isolation and promote more positive experiences when connecting for support.

To achieve these commitments, we will:

- A. Initiate new strategies in outreach and partnerships with organizations and services across Canada to promote RiseUp within Black communities and meet more young people where they’re at. This includes developing connections with community centres, pediatric hospitals, sports teams, shelters, schools, camps and youth justice organizations.
- B. Develop a volunteer outreach program taking learnings from **Weaving Threads: An Indigenous Engagement Program**, to build more awareness, connection and trust between Kids Help Phone and Afro-diasporic communities across Canada.
- C. Create opportunities for mentorship throughout Kids Help Phone and into the communities of youth we serve. We’ll use student placements, peer mentorship and other opportunities to find new ways to uplift and skill-share through intergenerational relationships between youth and established professionals.
- D. Inform new service design to meet the evolving needs of Black youth.
- E. Pilot new approaches to content creation including podcasts and video series that follow and feature the stories of diverse Black youth and their communities.
- F. Test new roles and opportunities for staff and volunteers that focus on the specific needs of Black communities.



“

It makes me so happy to see that services are finally starting to focus on Black youth. As a Black woman myself, I know what it’s like to long for somebody who understands me and who not only can, but genuinely wants to help me. The mental health stigma many Black youth have isn’t good and it’s important they know that their feelings are normal and that there’s resources that can help them. It’s important to me because Black youth are my brothers and sisters and all I want for them is to succeed.

”

— Tylene McFarlane (she / her), Crisis responder coach at Kids Help Phone

## #2: **AMPLIFY** AWARENESS OF SERVICES THAT SUPPORT THE WELL-BEING OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND BLACK YOUTH



RiseUp powered by Kids Help Phone is available to support diverse Black youth and their communities through clinical service, crisis response, and community-led content.

At Kids Help Phone, culturally informed support is accessible 24/7 in English and French via phone, text and more. However, young people must know that these services exist and that we are a space to access mental health and wellness support in a way that meets their needs. We'll continue to expand our own organizational competencies and raise awareness of services for Black youth in ways that represent and reflect their whole selves.

To achieve these commitments, we will:

- A. Create a keyword for texters of the Afro-diaspora to access support from a trained volunteer crisis responder in French or English.
- B. Increase conversations with African, Caribbean and Black service users to 10% of sessions by 2025 through intensive awareness initiatives.
- C. Help ensure that RiseUp has a presence in a variety of virtual and physical spaces that Black youth use, and that our marketing is led with insights from Black youth and communities.
- D. Create, maintain and grow a **RiseUp Network for Black Youth**, a mailing list for partners and supporters of Black young people across Canada where we can share community-based information and resources about Black youth and mental health and well-being.
- E. Establish relationships with African, Caribbean and Black content creators who can connect with Black youth across Canada and share positive messages of mental health and wellness through social media channels.



“ Reaching out and accessing mental health services needs to be normalized or promoted better.

”  
— Black focus group participant

# #3: INCREASE REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES OF THE AFRO-DIASPORA THROUGHOUT KIDS HELP PHONE



Black communities don't exist as a monolith. Blackness is expansive and inclusive of gender identity, sexual orientation, class, languages spoken, relationship to Canada, abilities and more. Our approaches to support must be as intersectional as the youth we connect with in our service provision, our branding and visuals and in how our team is composed.

African, Caribbean and Black youth and their communities must be present at every level of our service and organization. Our ability to support the mental health and well-being of young people from coast to coast is only increased when we have a foundation built with the support and knowledge of many unique experiences.

When youth can view themselves as reflected, included and celebrated in positive and empowering ways, we can let them know that thriving is something they deserve and are capable of.

To achieve these commitments, we will:

- A. Recruit 100+ African, Caribbean and Black volunteers as crisis responders each year from a variety of backgrounds, communities and experiences so that the diversity of the texting team matches that of texters.
- B. Work with the leadership of a diverse Black Advisory Council of youth and established professionals to support the goals of RiseUp by sharing insights, giving feedback and holding Kids Help Phone accountable to communities of the Afro-diaspora.
- C. Use a formal feedback loop to help ensure insights from Black youth voices guide our branding, creative work and public image, so that African, Caribbean and Black communities view themselves as positively represented in authentic ways within our services.
- D. Highlight authentic voices and experiences of Black communities by spotlighting issues, events and celebrations in our internal and external communication channels.
- E. Increase the number of African, Caribbean and Black employees at Kids Help Phone, to help ensure that the entire team of staff includes a diverse and culturally competent range of voices, skillsets and experiences from the Afro-diaspora.
- F. Identify and develop strategies to support equity-deserving groups within the Afro-diaspora, including men and boys, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, youth in care, those in faith-based communities and people from rural areas, and evaluate the success of this work with qualitative and quantitative data.



“ I would expect for the service or resources to acknowledge racism and discrimination, and the trauma that can cause. Also that the language and resources are inclusive and decolonized. Depending on the space, if there were no 2SLGBTQIA+ Black people involved, I would unfortunately be worried about facing misogynoir or homophobia. In addition, I would expect they would understand and embrace that Blackness is not homogenous or a monolith.

”  
— focus group participant (Amplifying Black and Afro-diasporic youth voices)

# #4: **EVOLVE** SERVICE OFFERINGS TO SUIT THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF BLACK YOUTH AND THEIR COMMUNITIES



In order to truly rise to the needs of Black youth, RiseUp will seek the guidance and strategic leadership of Black communities. When youth connect with us, we'll respond with respect and empathy while empowering them to be leaders in their own lives and in the spaces they care about. We'll meet young people of the Afro-diaspora where they're at by collaborating directly with them and their communities to build safer spaces and more trust, act as strong advocates for their individual and community agency and nurture new and ongoing relationships.

We know the needs of all youth are complex and changing, and we'll continue to help ensure that we plan and tailor our support in ways that unlock hope for youth of the Afro-diaspora. Whether through integrating new approaches to established programs or stand-alone initiatives, it's critical that youth are included in a way that manifests a sense of belonging and inclusion.

To achieve these commitments, we will:

- A. Use feedback, insights and engagement sessions from communities of the Afro-diaspora to tailor our methods of support and continue to innovate our approaches to connecting with Black youth.
- B. Help ensure that our frontline services continue to be informed by ongoing evaluation and innovation of policies and practices, including those that centre on safety planning and advocacy in the best interests of service users.
- C. Expand our existing services, such as the Counsellor in the Classroom Program and the Peer-to-Peer Community at Kids Help Phone, to go above and beyond our current audiences, entering directly into other physical and virtual communities to meet young people where they're at.
- D. Create learning opportunities for all Kids Help Phone staff, volunteers and council members to increase cultural competence and humility in their support of all Black youth.
- E. Help ensure that **Resources Around Me**, supported by The Grocery Foundation, includes organizations that serve Black youth in a variety of ways, including cultural centres and community-led spaces. We'll add 200 Black community resources each year that uplift and support Afro-diasporic communities.
- F. Investigate partnerships that support best practices around safety planning for Black service users.



“  
**Black youth deserve an outlet where they can express themselves and their concerns openly. People absolutely need to show support to the Black community, however, only a Black individual can speak on / about how racism affects them.**  
 ”

— Black texter contacting Kids Help Phone

## #5: **EMPOWER** WITH DATA AND INFORMATION TO GUIDE BEST PRACTICES AND SERVICE PROVISION FOR AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND BLACK YOUTH THROUGHOUT KIDS HELP PHONE'S SERVICES AND BEYOND

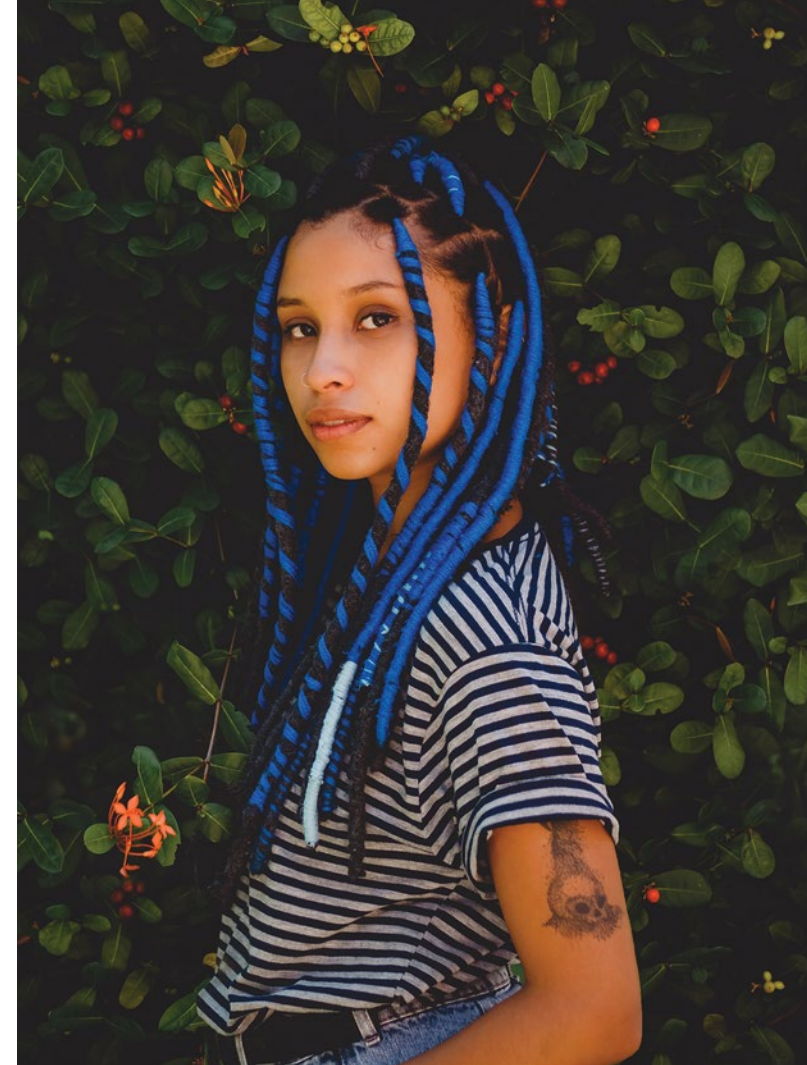


Kids Help Phone hosts the largest youth mental health dataset in Canada. Our collaborative thought leadership has the ability to shift the youth mental health system in Canada. Through data practices that put people's privacy first, we can better understand the landscape of Black youth mental health, and use this information to shape our service provision, empower our partners' work as they support Black youth and their communities and be nimble and responsive to the needs of Afro-diasporic youth.

Sharing research, data and information thoughtfully with our service users and stakeholders while committing to knowledge translation will help strengthen Black communities' understanding of mental health and well-being and further empower their own strategies for support and healing.

To achieve these commitments, we will:

- A. Create and optimize a RiseUp Data Dashboard that gathers aggregated data (with the appropriate privacy protocols in place) from Kids Help Phone's services to help us better understand the experiences and challenges of Black youth and mental health and well-being.
- B. Share aggregated data with partners, organizations and Black communities to support knowledge translation and a greater community understanding of mental health and well-being while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of young people.
- C. Showcase aggregated data on Black youth mental health through Kids Help Phone Insights to help inform community knowledge of wellness.
- D. Transform Kids Help Phone's data intelligence with data practices that support the best interests of service users and Black communities. We'll continue to develop and set out protocols to guide how we approach working with data from equity-deserving groups across our data and innovation infrastructure.
- E. Partner with research-driven organizations to increase community awareness of important issues through information sharing and knowledge translation about Black youth mental health. We'll contribute to a greater body of collective work, and counteract the siloing of information and research.
- F. Host a national mental health and healing community forum to amplify and celebrate the stories and lived experiences of African, Caribbean and Black youth and the people who support them, emphasizing and empowering Black joy and excellence.



“

If you are putting out a survey to find areas of improvement and specifically for Black youth, to me that shows you care.

”

— focus group participant (Amplifying Black and Afro-diasporic youth voices)



# LASTING IMPACT

The RiseUp: Kids Help Phone Action Plan for Supporting Black Youth is proud to provide long-term and dedicated support to youth of the Afro-diaspora, working with them to collapse barriers and co-create models of mental health and well-being services that meet their needs, now and into the future.

Through diverse teams with lived experiences and tools to practice anti-racism in their work, and steadfast advocacy throughout our organization and the sector, we aim to be thought leaders and collaborators working toward anti-racism. We dare to dream of a mental health system

that centres on and empowers Black youth and safer and more positive interactions with support services. Not just to dream, but to commit and act.

This means more evidence-based services that youth know and can trust, powerful role models and mentors, freedom to be vulnerable and ask for help and spaces where young people can feel safer and braver.

We view each service user as a whole person with a rich history and lived experiences, and work in solidarity to dismantle anti-Black racism and make room for the powerful joy and celebration of African, Caribbean and Black identities and histories.

“

**Black youth deserve to have joy and sunshine, to be able to play and explore freely.**

”

— Tanya Hales, founder of Black Mom's Connection (Courageous Conversations training)



## IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

### **Anti-Black racism**

Policies, practices and behaviours that reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudices and discrimination specifically toward Black people. This can range from daily microaggressions to explicit violence and has been used as a way to restrict the rights of Black communities for centuries.

### **Afro-diaspora**

The people and communities of African descent who migrated by force or choice throughout the world, often as a result of historic movements such as the Atlantic slave trade. People of the Afro-diaspora come from across Africa, particularly the western and central areas, and have migrated to places such as South America, the Caribbean and of course, Canada.

### **Colonization**

The act of a group of individuals who take over a selected territory and then exert their own laws and policies in order to maintain control of the resources and peoples of the new territory. Colonization is not a single event of first contact, but rather a long, deliberately damaging process, which continues to this day in Canada, including through inequitable access to essential services, discriminatory policies and underrepresentation in economies.

- **Finding Hope: Indigenous Action Plan**

### **Cultural Mistrust**

A tendency for African, Caribbean and Black people to be suspicious or wary of white

people and their motives, as well as other colonial-based systems due to a long history of violence and oppression. This can be a survival and coping strategy in the face of on-going anti-Black racism.

### **Diverse**

The variations of different characteristics in a group of people that make each of them unique. This can include gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, class, sexual orientation, abilities, citizenship and more.

### **Equity**

The understanding that an individual or community's unique needs should guide the resources and opportunities afforded to them in order to reach equal rights and outcomes.

### **Equity Deserving**

Groups and communities who've identified barriers to accessing the opportunities afforded to others because of systemic oppression, discrimination and injustices. These groups are intentionally identified as being deserving of resources and opportunities as a way of shifting our cultural biases and prejudices.

### **Historically Marginalized**

Groups of people who've been denied opportunities as a part of a long-term plan to other, delegitimize and exploit. The act of being pushed to the edges of society is intentional, systemic and enforced on groups.

### **Intersectionality**

The ways in which an individual's unique characteristics (e.g. gender identity, race, class, etc.) combine to inform their experiences, the ways in which they relate to the world and the types of social and structural opportunities and barriers that are presented to them. Intersectionality is a term that was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

### **Oppression**

The unjust exercise of control over a person or a group by a person, group or system in power that limits and restricts a person's or group's ability to access resources and opportunities.

### **Microaggressions**

Subtle, indirect and sometimes unintentional discriminatory interactions that show a bias against a group of people who are historically marginalized. To someone who doesn't experience microaggressions, they may seem insignificant, but they play a big role in creating unsafe spaces and experiences for equity-deserving groups.

### **Misogynoir**

A specific combination of misogyny (prejudice / hatred against women) and racism that targets and oppresses Black women.

### **Monolith**

A group of people who are incorrectly thought to be identical in nature, all having the same characteristics, experiences and histories.

### **Racialized**

The act of categorizing a person or group of people by their race or perceived race. This is a way of setting people apart or othering them.

### **Stigma**

A negative or discriminatory perception based on stereotypes that considers a certain characteristic to be a disadvantage. This can come from internal or external factors.

### **Systemic Racism**

The complex and historically based policies, practices and ideologies that are deeply rooted in institutions such as education, health care and criminal systems, which produce and perpetuate inequity for racialized communities. Racism asserts that some people are inferior in character, culture and intellect because of skin colour.

### **Underrepresented**

A group of people who, due to discrimination, have historically been left out of data and research, or who have faced barriers to being present in programming, activities or services, to the point of being made to seem invisible in spaces where they might otherwise thrive.



# HERE FOR BLACK YOUTH.

**Call 1-800-668-6868**

**Text RISE to 686868 (youth) or 741741 (adults)**

**[KidsHelpPhone.ca/Rise](https://KidsHelpPhone.ca/Rise)**

**We're here for the Black community and all people of the Afro-diaspora. Connect with a crisis responder 24/7 by messaging RISE over text.**

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