

**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**Black Youth in Child Welfare**  
**Care ~ The Importance of**  
**Developing an Ethnic Identity**  
**Rooted in Black Cultural Pride**

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## Literature Review: *Black Youth in Child Welfare Care ~ The Importance of Developing an Ethnic Identity Rooted in Black Cultural Pride*

### 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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The purpose of this literature review is twofold:

- ✚ To examine the extant literature regarding the importance of the relationship between Black youth in child welfare care developing an ethnic identity rooted in Black cultural pride. The review entailed examining the evidence regarding the benefits and outcomes of such interventions.
- ✚ To use the learning gained from this review to examine possible enhancements to the Children's Aid Society of Toronto's ~ Soul Journey Program. More specifically, the benefits of a mentorship component for Black youth in child welfare care.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND

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#### 2.1 *Ontario Child Welfare*

In Canada, child protection (CAS) comes under the purview of each province. In Ontario, the Ministry of Children & Youth Services (MCYS) has oversight of the 47 CAS agencies; 35 CASs are situated within a geographical region, nine are Indigenous and three are religious (two are Catholic and one is Jewish); each CAS is mandated to uphold the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) that aims to protect children/youth, ages 0-16, from maltreatment; CASs conduct their mandate through interpretation of the CFSA, as well as MCYS, field and agency policies, guidelines and best practices (Contenta & Rankin, 2016).

Across the 47 CASs there is over 8,000 child protection staff. Annually, over 80,000 of the 171,000 calls to the 47 CASs result in a child abuse investigation, of which three-quarters (77%) do not require further protection service. The top three referral sources to CAS are professionals: police, schools and other CASs. The five predominant reasons for service are: 1) "request for assistance", 2) "child exposed to partner violence", 3) "caregiver with a problem", 4) "physical force/maltreatment" and 5) "inadequate supervision" (OACAS, 2016b).

*Disproportionality* is the under or over-representation of a racial or ethnic group compared to its percentage in the total population. The disproportionality of Black, Indigenous and mixed youth who experience child welfare care has been a known issue in the British, American, Australian and Canadian child welfare systems for over forty years (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2016; Bywaters et al., 2014). *Disparity* refers to the unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group (e.g., likelihood of investigation, likelihood of verification of maltreatment, placement of child in out of home care) compared to outcomes for another racial/ethnic group. Disparity of services to Black and Indigenous youth is also well known (Fallon et al., 2016). While the reasons for both are complex, known drivers include poverty, single parenthood, community risk and systemic bias. What is well accepted is that race impacts child welfare decision making. Key questions that arise are:

- ✚ ***What does that mean for Black children and youth involved in child welfare?***
- ✚ ***What does it mean for Black children and youth in child welfare care?***

## 2.2 **CAST and Black Youth in Care**

In fall 2014, Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) released its 2013/2014 child in care data to the Toronto Star; results showed 41% of youth in care were Black, which demonstrated clear disproportionality as the Black populace in Toronto is 8-9% (Contenta et al., 2014); an Ontario study's results found that Black children and youth are more likely to be apprehended and are more likely to stay in care longer than white children (Fallon et al., 2016).

The preponderance of Black youth in CAST care are from the African-Diaspora community and of African-Caribbean-Canadian heritage. Of equal concern is the high percentage of Black children and youth who not living in their community but residing in predominately white foster homes, communities and care institutions (e.g., group homes). Given a large percentage of Black youth are growing up in care, often residing in non-Black homes and non-Black communities, can mean there is little opportunity for the individual Black youth or the cohort of Black youth in care to learn about and experience their Black heritage. Emerging questions are:

✚ ***“How do Black youth in care develop a strong ethnic identity rooted in Black cultural pride when surrounded by whiteness?”***

✚ ***“How can CAST workers, staff, caregivers and volunteers best support Black youth in care?”***

## 2.3 **BEAC**

CAST established the *Black Education Awareness Committee* (BEAC) to provide topic leadership within the agency, as well as take the lead in promoting and celebrating Black History Month.

Key objectives of BEAC include:

- 1) Providing youth and staff with opportunities to understand and learn about Black History;
- 2) Helping empower children/youth from Caribbean or African descent who are involved with CAST, by providing them with knowledge about their history and roots through educational opportunities (e.g., Soul Journey);
- 3) Aiding in identifying, bringing awareness to, and addressing the systemic barriers that exist in child welfare.

## 2.4 **Soul Journey**

More specifically, Soul Journey expeditions are one of the main methods used with Black children/youth in the care of CAST over the past decade to help them advance their knowledge, understanding and connection to their Black cultural history. At its very essence, the hope is that the Soul Journey experience provides Black youth in the foster care system with opportunities to feel secure, connected and understood in their ethnic identity.

In operation for over 10 years, (2006-2016), Soul Journey is one element of BEAC's mentoring initiatives for Black youth in care. In sum, Soul Journey affords educational, cultural and spiritual awareness learning opportunities for children and youth of Caribbean-Canadian or African-Canadian descent who are receiving support from CAS of Toronto.

### 3.0 Literature Review Methodology

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The review of the extant literature on the **Importance of Developing an Ethnic Identity Rooted in Black Cultural Pride** commences with an examination of key concepts. More specifically, the rationale and research on the role of parents and caregivers related **ethnic identity** formation and **racial socialization** for Black children and youth. Finally, the review explores the importance of **mentorship** as a component in the Soul Journey program.

#### 3.1 Defining the Term “Black”

For the purposes of this literature review the term *Black* will be used to describe peoples of ancestral lineages stemming from African and Caribbean nations, Canada, United States, Latin America, Europe, etc. Recognizing the vast heterogeneity within this group, the term *Black* was selected as a means to describe the shared challenges in systemic oppression that people of the African and Caribbean ethnicities face in society.

#### 3.2 Literature Review Methodology

The literature used to identify key elements that inform the development of a strong, positive ethnic identity for Black children and youth was obtained from a variety of sources. These included but were not limited to: peer-reviewed journals, presentations from peer-reviewed conferences, published books, and agency and government reports. Qualitative research from Canada, United States, and Australia was also used for this review. Databases that were reviewed included: Google Scholar, Scholar’s Portal, ScienceDirect, PsycARTICLES, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Each was used to search for relevant research articles. The keywords used in searches included, but were not limited to:

Black, African American, African-Caribbean, race, ethnic identity, ethnicity, racial socialization, disparity, disproportionality, overrepresentation, child maltreatment, family, child abuse, child welfare, child protection, mentoring, risk and protective factors.

### 4.0 Ethnic identity and Racial Socialisation

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#### 4.1 Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is generally conceptualized as an affiliate construct where the focus is on the formation of social and emotional bonds with others or the desire to create such bonds. More specifically, ethnic identity is where an individual identifies or has a sense of belonging to a specific ethnic or cultural group (Branch et al., 2008). Generally, the family is the institution or site where such socialization occurs and where a child’s attitudes, values and beliefs about self and others develop (Demo & Hughes, 1990). The parent-child interactions within the family setting, including the processes of attachment, identification and role modelling, can have a profound or detrimental effect on how children see themselves in relation to others (Demo et al., 1987).

A Black youth’s ethnic identity development is primarily the result of racial socialization practices (Bennett, 2006) [see 4.2]. When Black children/youth enter child welfare care, their ethnic identity processes can be interrupted, delayed or not attended to. Since ethnic identity serves as a form of protection for Black youth against a white dominated Euro-centric racist society (Duncan, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011), the weakness or absence of the promotion of ethnic identity and their links to their Black heritage can have short and long-term adverse effects on the youth’s self-identity (Barbarin et al., 2004; Bennett, 2006; Quintana, 2007).

A review of the extant literature notes a robust finding: for full socialization to occur for Black children and youth they must develop a strong sense of ethnic identity (Barbarin et al., 2004). Healthy family relations and ethnic socialization are protective factors for Black youth who live in a society where their identity and status as Black people continues to hold violent and negative assumptions and stereotypical notions (Kwate & Myer, 2011; Rogers & Way, 2016). Ethnic identity imparts racial pride in their identity as Black people and elevates the importance of understanding the history of their culture (Boykin & Toms., 1985; Saleem & Lambert, 2016). Viewed as a developmental process, ethnic identity is then similar to other identity formations that occur during puberty. Moreover, it has been suggested that ethnic identity development for Black and racialized adolescents has heightened importance over other forms of identity development given the anti-Black and racially antagonistic society that the African-Canadian/Black population/people encounter in their daily lives (Reese et al., 1998). Of particular relevance, it is usually during the adolescence phase that cognitive development, in the form of abstract thinking, introspection, and further development of social-cognitive abilities occurs, and it is also the period when racial and ethnic identity fully develops (Quintana, 2007).

The importance of the adolescence period for establishing racialized youths' ethnic identity is the focus of Jean Phinney's ethnic identity developmental, multidimensional model (Phinney, 1992, 1996); he posits that ethnic identity formation occurs in three phases.

- ✚ Phase 1 ~ *Unexamined Ethnic Identity Phase*. Racialized children and youth are often aware of their racial identity but are not particularly attentive to it (Phinney, 1992, 1996).
- ✚ Phase 2 ~ *Ethnic Identity Exploration/Search Phase*. Racialized children and youth are in the process of searching for the meaning of their identity in relation to self, their ethnic minority group, and in society as a whole (Yasui et al., 2004).
- ✚ Phase 3 ~ *Ethnic Identity Achievement Phase*. Racialized children and youth are secure and comfortable in their respective ethnic identity and its relation to their ethnic group membership and society at large (Phinney, 1992, 1996; Phinney & Landin, 1989).

The Ethnic Identity model argues that Black children and youth who successfully achieve a full understanding, and appreciation of their culture and are comfortable with their ethnic identity will be more likely to see their identity as a protective factor against a hostile society that devalues their worth as racialized persons (Greig, 2003; Stewart et al., 2009). As well, the model both acknowledges the cascading, developmental element to the process of achieving ethnic identity, as well as it underscores that acquiring a positive ethnic identity does aide in the development of coping strategies and social competencies; more specifically, ethnic identity informs one's self-esteem and relays important messages: 1) it relays one's value as a person, and 2), it relays one's value as a racialized person; both are critical elements in surviving and thriving in a race-based society (Eccles et al., 2006; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007; Yancey et al., 2002).

For Black children and youth who fail to achieve a strong ethnic identity, and as a result, have difficulty developing healthy self-esteem, studies have found these youth often suffer from poor social and developmental results that can include: anxiety, delinquency, depression, low academic achievement, low self-esteem, school dropout mental illness and substance abuse use (Greig, 2003; Harper et al., 2011; Yancey et al., 2002; Yasui et al., 2004). Research shows that the lack of a strong ethnic identity coupled with low acculturation is a strong predictor for poor social, emotional, and psychological outcomes (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). In sum, it is important to ensure that Black children and youth in child welfare care are exposed to their culture in order to support their development of a strong ethnic identity that is firmly rooted in positive Black culture and affiliation.

## 4.2 Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is another important concept in that it relates to the tasks associated with cultural transmission that are specific to parents of ethnically underrepresented youth. Most relevant for this review: Black children and youth.

Racial socialization refers to parents or caregivers needing to take on the role of preparing their Black child or youth to be able to counteract and successfully navigate the oppressive, racist, discriminatory messages the Black youth receives from the broader society (e.g., school, health care, legal system, child care systems and media). For example, Thornton and colleagues (1990) used narrative-based, open-ended questions and asked 2,107 Black American families: “*In raising your children, have you done or told them things to help them know what it means to be Black?*”; two-thirds of parents indicated they did communicate in some form to their children what it means to be Black in America (Thornton et al., 1990, 407). Research on racial socialization finds it too can be an effective protective factor for Black youth related to the positive messages it relays, which in turn helps prepare and arm them against the impact of systemic biases (Rodriguez et al., 2008; Saleem & Lambert, 2016; Stevenson et al., 2002; Thornton et al., 1990; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007; Yancy et al., 2002).

Racial socialization messages can include:

- ✚ **Pride in being black/racial self-acceptance** (e.g., participation in Black Lives Matter);
- ✚ **Raised awareness/being alert to racial inequalities** (e.g., Black youth are 8x more likely to be suspended at school than white youth);
- ✚ **Suggestions on how to counter racism** (e.g., emphasis on being a good student);
- ✚ **Use of silence about race issues** (e.g., take the approach that race does not matter);
- ✚ **Effective use of discipline/parenting monitoring** (e.g., obedience to ensure safety of child). (Saleem & Lambert, 2016; Stevenson et al., 2002; Stewart et al., 2009; Wyatt, 2009).

### 4.2.1 Positive Family Influence

The intent of racial socialization of Black children and youth is to prepare them for both the innate systemic racism, bias and discrimination that exists in society regarding their race *and* to give them coping tools and navigation skills in how to counter the biases (e.g., do not run from police, keep your hands quietly by your side). As any parent would, Black parents socialize their children to be familiar with and adhere to the rules and norms of society in general. However, Black parents have an additional teaching burden – they must also teach their children about the historical and contemporary socio-political factors that dictate how, as an individual and as part of a cultural group, they will be regarded and targeted outside their home (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Harper et al., 2011; Rogers & Way, 2016; Saleem & Lambert, 2016; Thornton et al., 1990). Black parents must both instruct their children on how to maintain ethnic and cultural pride *and* instruct them on how to protect their physical and psychological well-being against the prevalence of physical and/or verbal assaults they will encounter in society (Hurd et al, 2013; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Stevenson et al., 2002). Caughy and colleagues (2002) study on racial socialization with African American preschool children found homes rich in Black cultural elements (e.g., books, pictures, toys, clothing) were correlated with the child having greater knowledge of Black history and improved problem solving skills.

#### 4.2.2 *Negative Family Influence*

While the role of the Black family is to impart knowledge on how to resist oppression, some families face many challenges that adversely impact their ability to aid their children in racial socialization. One example is parents who are/may be in conflict with the law (Demo et al., 1987). The parent(s) criminal involvement can diminish the ability of the parent to provide positive racial socialization and ethnic identity lessons and strategies. Parents who are criminally oriented may display behaviours and values that are contrary to the positive values, attitudes and behaviours needed to create healthy identities for Black children and adolescents (Hawkins et al., 1998; Kohen, et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2012).

#### 4.2.3 *Community Influence*

Although it is known that racial socialization in Black families is a strong predictor of positive ethnic identity development, external factors, such as neighborhood risk may undermine or counter the development of a positive ethnic identity development for Black children and youth (Boardman et al., 2001; Herrenkohl et al., 2001; Kohen, et al., 2008; Stewart, et al., 2009). Environmental racism often leads to the ‘ghettoizing’ of neighbourhoods that many of Black youth reside in (e.g., Jane & Finch in Toronto west-end, Malvern in Toronto east-end). The neighborhoods and related postal codes that families reside in can have a significant role in influencing and impacting the developmental outcomes of children and youth who reside there; this is particularly true for racialized children and youth (Martin et al., 2011; National Audit Office, 2016; OACAS, 2015).

A consistent finding in the literature is that impoverished neighborhoods with a higher exposure to community violence (e.g., drugs, guns, low social and economic capital) are directly linked to families who are negatively impacted by the social health determinants, such as poverty, unemployment, poor health, few resources (Boardman et al., 2001; Bennett, 2006; Gaddis, 2012; Grant et al., 2014; Kohen et al., 2008). In other words, despite a family’s efforts to create positive racial awareness and ethnic identity, for families living in at-risk/vulnerable communities it may be the adverse, negative community factors the Black families face will counter the family’s positive racial socialization messages; the result may be poorer outcomes for those Black children and youth in those communities (Hawkins et al., 1998; Murray et al., 2012).

#### 4.2.4 *Black Youth in Child Welfare Foster/Group Home Care*

Knowing that positive racial socialization and strong ethnic identity development occurs mostly in the homes of Black families, then for the Black children and youth who are in child welfare care (and most are *not* in a culturally-matched home), how can CAS best support Black youth in continuing to develop a positive ethnic identity and ensure racial socialization?

To understand the experience of Black youth in care begins with understanding the likelihood of Black youth coming to the attention of child welfare compared to other racial and ethnic populations. The term for over or under representation of a cohort in care compared to their percentage in the entire population is called *disproportionality*, whereas the term *disparity* refers to unequal outcomes for one racial group compared to another in the services they receive from child welfare like: investigation, verification of maltreatment, receipt of ongoing services and entry to care (Fallon et al., 2016; National Audit Office, 2016). For the last 40 years there has been an over-representation of Black youth in care in child welfare agencies across Canada, United States and the United Kingdom (Bywaters et al., 2014).

So what is known about Black youth and their experience and related outcomes of being in child welfare care?

- ✚ Generally, Black children and youth who come from poverty are more likely to be apprehended by children's aid societies and placed in foster care (Bywaters et al., 2014). This finding is supported by international studies that find the more disadvantaged the neighbourhood the child lives in, the more likely the child is child welfare involved/in-care (National Audit Office, 2016). Ornstein's 2006 study of Toronto and low income rates by ethno-racial categories found the poverty rates of West Asian and African origin families (46%) and Caribbean (30%) far exceeded that of European (17%) and British origin families (15%). Of concern from a racial socialization lens, is the preponderance of Black children once placed in-care, are placed with white families in white neighborhoods (OACASa, 2016);
- ✚ Generally, most white foster parents are not able to engage in positive racial socialization of Black youth to the Black culture as a result of not having the lived experience of being a Black person in a white dominant, racist society. Ergo, the protective outcomes realized as a result of ethnic identity and racial socialization practices are limited or non-existent for Black children and youth in-care placed with white families in predominantly white communities (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Branch et al., 2008).
- ✚ Generally, most white foster parents do not have ethnic specific knowledge on how to best promote and deliver effective ethnic identity and racial socialization strategies for Black children and youth in order to protect or promote their racial heritage and cultures (Smith et al., 2015). One example, and an issue that is frequently raised by Black families whose children are placed in white foster homes, centers on the cultural importance related to Black hair care; more specifically the lack of care, respect and awareness of white foster carers regarding how important Black hair care is to the child, their family and their community/cultural identity (Miller et al., 2014; Prince, 2009);
- ✚ Generally, while some white foster parents may attempt to engage or make efforts for the Black children and youth they are caring for to have positive racial socialization in and outside of their homes and community, the limitation with that approach is that the racial socialization attempts are often facilitated by white workers, who work in a white-dominated institution based on Euro-centric modalities (Lipsitz, 2006; Smith et al., 2015);
- ✚ Generally, Black children and youth placed with white foster parents experience an increase in isolation; the in-care experience results in further emotional trauma, not only as a result of the separation from their parents/caregivers and community, but the harm that occurs as a result of being placed in an environment where there is a very real probability that the child will experience racism and discrimination in and outside of the home based on their skin colour and stereotypical assumptions (Feigelman, 2000; Miller et al., 2014; Quintana, 2007);
- ✚ Generally, when the Black cultural and community bonds have been disrupted or displaced for Black youth as a result of being placed in child welfare care with white families, the Black youth struggle with developing positive self-images, strong community ties and supportive peer relationships (Miller et al., 2014; OACASa, 2016; Smith et al., 2015). The National Association of Black Social Workers in the 1960's stated similar concerns when they condemned transracial adoption of African-American children because it acts as, "...*cultural genocide because it puts these children and youth at risk of losing vital cultural connections and resources that shape their development and wellbeing*" (OACASa, 2016, 39).

- ✚ Generally, Black children and youth in foster/group home care are moved more frequently from one home to another and from school to school (Miller et al., 2014; OACASa, 2016); Black children are also more likely to be placed in special education or applied programs, are more likely to be disciplined/suspended and are less likely to complete high school (OACASa, 2016; Yu et al., 2002).

In sum, in today's context where most Black youth who enter child welfare care are not placed in a culturally matched home, it means their ability to develop a strong ethnic identity is probably compromised. What is also diminished is the Black youth's ability to acquire particular developmental cultural/ethno-specific competencies that aid in their becoming socially and emotionally healthy adults who embody Black pride (OACASa, 2016; Smith et al., 2015). It means the placement of Black children and youth in care into these predominantly white communities increases the likelihood that Black children and youth will experience racism in their foster homes, schools and communities without the appropriate availability of family/culture/social supports and racial socialization strategies that are to help them navigate these psychologically damaging and painful experiences (Harper et al., 2011; OACAS, 2015; 2016a; Smith et al., 2015). It means the ability for Black children and youth in care to form strong ethnic identities based on their culture and heritage is weakened.

#### 4.2.5 Black Youth In Kin Care

Kinship care arrangements refer to when a child or youth is removed from their homes and placed with other family (kin) or community (kith) members. For reasons noted in 4.2.4, kinship care is the optimal out-of-home placement type for Black youth as it has the potential to reduce instability while fostering a positive ethnic identity and reducing care costs (Dubowitz, 1994; Duncan, 2005; Rubin et al., 2008; Ruffalo & Fowler, 2016). While the research that is specific to Black youth and kin care is still in the development stage, in theory and in best practice, kinship care is the optimal option for out-of-home care as it can increase the likelihood that Black children and youth will experience racial socialization practices via Black family and community members. As well, kinship care holds great promise in also being able to provide other key protective factors Black youth need such as: exposure to positive racial interactions, fostering the development of a strong ethnic identity, nurturing critical racial development and promoting attachment to the Black culture that is needed for Black youth to grow up to achieve optimal outcomes (Hall, 2006; Lindsay-Dennis, 2011; Miller et al., 2014; OACAS, 2016a; Sanchez, 2005; Smith et al., 2015; Washington et al., 2017).

## 5.0 Soul Journey ~ Nurturing the Black Identity for Black Youth in Care

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As noted previously, CAST's Black Education Awareness Committee (BEAC) has been leading the Soul Journey program for the past ten years (2006-2016). The Soul Journey program was established to provide African-Canadian youth in care an opportunity to go on a week-long trip funded by CAST to visit sites of Black historical and cultural significance. Annually, 35-40 Black youth in care along with 10 chaperones (e.g., foster parents, workers) have attended these trips. Evaluation of the events found the journey and process to be worthwhile and successful in helping the Black youth connect to their history and culture.

While Soul Journey does provide a portion of Black youth in care with an exceptional annual opportunity to raise their awareness of their Black history and heritage, this special cultural expedition does not provide Black youth in child welfare care with ongoing positive racial socialization opportunities. To date, Soul Journey does not provide ongoing events throughout

the year that foster positive connections, communications or relationships related to embracing and understanding their Black identity. Soul Journey also does not embed follow up sessions with the attending youth to allow critical racial discussions to occur.

Soul Journey does excel at lighting a spark in Black youth regarding their racial awareness; however, Soul Journey in its current iteration is not designed to help sustain those deeper identity connections in building Black cultural pride. Research suggests that in order for Black youth to develop a strong and positive ethnic identity they need to have racially and culturally appropriate mentors in their lives to support them in their development to becoming socially and emotionally healthy adults with strong ethnic and racial identity formation (Jackson et al., 2014; Liang & West, 2007; Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011; Wyatt, 2009).

### **5.1 Mentorship for Youth In Care**

Overall, the use of mentorship as an intervention strategy for vulnerable youth has grown over the last decade. Mentoring tends to be categorized into three types of models:

- ✚ *Natural Mentor* ~ the youth engages with a mentor naturally and normally in their own environment (e.g., bus driver, sports coach);
- ✚ *Content Mentor* ~ youth has brief contact with a mentor (e.g., inspirational speaker);
- ✚ *Program Mentor* ~ youth connects with a mentor through a formal or structured program (e.g., Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Club, Homework Club, 1:1 mentor).

A 2011 systematic review of 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programs examined the evidence of the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs on positive youth development and found modest gains in the following areas: behaviour, social, emotional and academic (DuBois et al., 2011). In applying a developmental model to examine outcomes, researchers found the span of mentoring impact is broad and can range from early childhood to adolescence, site variability does not impact effectiveness (e.g., agency site, community site, school site, faith-based site, e-site), and the different methods of delivering mentoring (i.e., peer, adult and group) show comparable impact. That said, knowledge gains in understanding effectiveness across substantive areas has been limited (e.g., youth justice, mental health) as has been the sustainability of those gains and the differential impact by gender and ethno-racial groups. Nevertheless, mentoring does appear to hold much promise as a promising strategy and intervention with improving outcomes for vulnerable, at-risk youth (DuBois et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Satchwell et al., 2006; Wyatt, 2009). Generally, within the North American model of mentoring, a youth mentorship program is comprised of youth who are paired with an adult or peer volunteer from the community where the modality may be 1:1 (e.g., Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Peer Project) or a group format (e.g., Homework Club, Math Club).

### **5.2 Mentorship for Black Youth In Care**

There is limited research to date that examines the impact of mentoring for just Black children and youth and more specifically, for Black youth in care (Miller et al., 2014; Washington et al., 2017; Woodland, 2008; Wyatt, 2009). In the absence of culturally specific literature with robust findings, the overall findings from the youth mentoring literature (see 5.1) suggest that providing Black youth in child welfare care, in particular the Soul Journey youth, with culturally responsive caring mentors and role models during their time in care will be beneficial in providing culturally relevant support and ethnic identity guidance (DuBois et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2014; OACASa, 2016; Satchwell et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2015; Rubin et al., 2008; Woodland, 2008).

### **5.3 Mentorship Goals**

A consistent finding in the literature is the expected positive outcomes for youth who receive mentoring. Therefore, it is reasonable that the Soul Journey program consider augmenting its current racial socialization strategies with more structured mentorship opportunities. It is anticipated that by adding mentoring as an intervention strategy for Black youth in child welfare care that this will ensure there are more opportunities for sustained ethnic identity discussions, which would foster ethnic identity development. From these discussions it is hoped the youth will gain a deeper understanding what it means to *be* Black and what it means for *them* to be Black. The overarching goal of a mentorship program for Black youth in care would be to help them develop and maintain a positive ethnic identity that will in the long-term, build resilience and competencies to ensure a positive transition into adulthood. More specific goals include:

- 1) To provide ongoing, sustained support in the youth's socio-emotional development (e.g., employment mentors, academic support, Black identity coaches);
- 2) To reflect the cultural, racial and gendered composition of the mentees;
- 3) To provide Black youth with opportunities for cultural, racial and gendered conversations;
- 4) To support Black youth in child welfare care in engaging in culturally appropriate, meaningful and healthy civic engagements;
- 5) To support the development and creation of personal relationships in healthy environments.

(Barbarin et al., 2004; Grant et al., 2014; Harvey & Coleman, 1997; Hurd et al., 2013; Liang & West, 2007; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Miller et al., 2014; Sanchez, 2005; Wyatt, 2009).

### **5.4 Mentorship Principles**

Inclusion of certain, key principles should be built into the mentorship program for Black youth. Research has shown that effective mentoring relationships are relationships that are characterized by principles of mutuality, respect, and trust (Rhodes, 2002; Wyatt, 2009). Furthermore, mentoring relationships are more likely to support positive developments in youth if the mentoring activities and strategies are focused on contributing to the social-emotional, cognitive development and identity development of the youth (Rhodes, 2002; Sanchez, 2011). A Black youth mentorship program should be rooted Black history, its diverse cultures and the effective roles for both Black men and women (Lindsay-Dennis, 2011; Washington et al., 2017).

#### **5.4.1 Mentors**

To achieve an optimal mentoring model for Black youth in child welfare care every effort should be made to engage, recruit and train ethnic specific mentors in a way that would shape the mentor-mentee relationships; the aim is for the mentoring relationships to make a long lasting, positive impact on the Black youth in care receiving the intervention (Sanchez & Colon, 2005; Washington et al., 2017). Ongoing training and support of the mentors is needed in order to be able to aid the development of the youth in the aforementioned areas (Rhodes, 2002; Washington et al., 2017). The focus of the mentors' work should be on helping the youth establish a positive, Black ethnic identity (Sanchez, 2011; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007) and supporting the youth as they create their own Black ethnic identity. Ergo, the mentors should be representative or matched to the racial background of the youth (Gaddis, 2012; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Washington et al., 2017) as ethnic identity is a sense of positively belonging to a

group of people with a common heritage and place of geographical origin (Branch, 2014). Finally, due to negative systemic societal messages with youth regarding gendered blackness, the mentor should also help the youth understand the roles of both Black men and women. This point suggests that the mentors should be matched to the youth based on gender (Lindsay-Dennis, 2011; Washington et al., 2017).

#### 5.4.2 Trauma Informed Approach

Black youth in child welfare care are more likely to be coming from impoverished families and low income postal codes due to historical and contemporary socio-political barriers and systemic racism that many Black families experience (Bywaters et al., 2014; Fallon et al., 2016). Either through early family and/or community deprivation experiences and/or a maltreatment history and/or mental health issues and/or through the experience of entering/staying in child welfare care or other adverse factors (e.g., health, education, systemic racism) a significant portion of Black youth in care exhibit varying degrees of trauma symptoms (Greenson et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2009). These symptoms can impede a youth's ability to meet required developmental and ethnic identity milestones; additionally, it may mean a youth experiences adolescence differently as a result of their trauma history (Griffin et al., 2009); and it may mean a youth displays negative behavioural traits in adolescence and into adulthood (Hall, 2006; Sanchez, 2005; Smith et al., 2015; Washington et al., 2017). Therefore, an effective mentorship program should train mentors to understand trauma expressions and ensure the Black youth is supported in discussing issues of culturally based trauma and/or past violence as it relates to their understanding of their Blackness and their ethnic identity (Harvey & Coleman, 1997; Harvey & Rauch, 1997; Washington et al., 2017). More specifically, in order for these discussions to occur, mentors should be trained-up in Afro-centric trauma-informed care and in providing culturally-centered youth development interventions (Harvey & Rauch, 1997).

Creating a mentorship program that purposely and positively changes the lives of the Black youth in child welfare care takes time to build, test and refine. The structure of such a program requires all elements are conceptually and theoretically integrated and interventions are linked towards how well two key outcomes are achieved: O1) positive ethnic identity, and O2) racial socialization. Other outcomes may also be important to measure: educational success, civic engagement, career development, and building leadership skills to the youth (Lindsay-Dennis, 2011; Sanchez, 2005; Washington et al., 2017). In sum, a Mentorship Program for Black youth should be culturally responsive, deeply grounded in the ethos of care (Jackson et al., 2014) and focused on each youth acquiring a positive ethnic identity (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

## 6.0 Summary

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It is critical that Black youth in child welfare care be supported towards the development and attainment of a positive ethnic identity rooted in Black cultural pride. A recent meta-analysis of 46 studies found the more minority/racialized youth feel positively about their ethnicity or race, the fewer symptoms of depression and emotional/behavioural issues they exhibit (Rivas-Drake, et al, 2014). When they are facing systemic racism, oppression, anti-Blackness and inequitable treatment - all effective strategies to help them thrive should be employed. Soul Journey has provided hundreds of Black youth in care with important, meaningful opportunities to raise their awareness of Black history and culture through attending culturally relevant trips. However, to ensure ethnic identity and racial socialization are embedded protective factors for all Black youth in child welfare care, other strategies and interventions beyond Soul Journey are needed. Adding a mentorship component to the Soul journey program is suggested for the positive benefits that accrue; it won't solve all the problems but it has the potential to help with many.

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