

**From the Village to the Vision:
Leadership Born of Community**



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From the Village to the Vision: Leadership Born of Community

BY TANITIA MUNROE, SENIOR RESEARCH COORDINATOR
PHOTO IMAGE: BSSLP STAFF ORGANIZE NAMETAGS FOR
JUNIOR LEADERS

Inspired by the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child,” this summer’s Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) is a living testament to the power of collective care, cultural pride, and intergenerational knowledge. Our 2025 theme—“From the Village to the Vision: Leadership Born of Community”—reminds us that Black youth leadership doesn’t emerge in isolation. It’s nurtured by the hands, hearts, and histories of those who uplift, guide, and believe.



Photo Image: BSSLP staff mentors sort through name tags in preparation to welcome Junior Leaders on the first day of Orientation Week.

This year, we are piloting a new two-stream model, both grounded in experiential learning placements with community agencies. In one stream, Junior Leaders are engaging in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)—examining issues that matter to them and presenting their findings through creative, community-based research projects. In the second stream, Junior Leaders are focused on professional development and leadership capacity-building, participating in hands-on workshops, mentorship, and placements that strengthen their skills and expand their career pathways. While the focus areas are distinct, both streams are designed to affirm Black student brilliance, foster confidence, and cultivate leadership rooted in community and care.

In this issue, we highlight key moments from the 2025 BSSLP journey—from orientation and placement highlights to student reflections and featured research projects. These stories remind us that our villages birth visionaries—and those visionaries are already building the future.

Walking to the Beat: A Leadership Launch Like No Other

BY TANITIA MUNROE, SENIOR RESEARCH COORDINATOR

On Wednesday, July 2, Junior Leaders gathered for their first day of orientation at George Brown College — marking the official launch of the 2025 Black Student Summer Leadership Program.

The day began with a heartfelt welcome from Clayton La Touche, Director at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), who emphasized the importance of showing up for one another and celebrating this powerful first step in the students' leadership journeys.



Photo Image: TDSB Director Clayton La Touche opens the day with a heartfelt welcome, emphasizing the power of community and celebrating the first step in each student's leadership journey.



Photo Image: Dr. Terry McQuaid welcomes students and shares a message from GBC President Dr. Gervan Fearon, who reminds them of their power and purpose.

Next, Dr. Terry McQuaid, our dedicated liaison at George Brown College, brought warm greetings and introduced a special video message from Dr. Gervan Fearon, President of George Brown College. Dr. Fearon reminded students of their power and purpose, stating:

"IT IS FUNDAMENTAL THAT YOU SEE YOUR VOICE, YOUR ACTION, AND YOUR DECISIONS AS IMPORTANT AND IMPACTFUL. THERE ARE ALWAYS OTHERS WHO ARE WATCHING YOU, LEARNING FROM YOU, AND INSPIRED BY YOU."

— DR. GERVAN FEARON

Adding vibrant energy to the room, members of the TDSB leadership team were each invited to walk up to the stage to the sound of their favorite songs. From reggae classics to soca and hip-hop anthems, the music reflected the leaders' roots, personalities, and joy — creating an atmosphere of celebration and cultural pride that resonated deeply with the students.



Sheldon Dixon, Graduation Coach for Black Students, sharing vibes and inspiration through music Day 1 of orientation for the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP).

Associate Director Audley Salmon kept the momentum going, engaging Junior Leaders in a lively roll call of their schools and encouraging everyone to speak proudly, connect, and participate fully.



Photo Image: System Superintendent Karen Murray closes the welcome with a powerful sentiment.



Photo Image: Associate Director Audley Salmon of the Toronto District School Board offering words of encouragement to Junior Leaders.

The welcome segment concluded with System Superintendent Karen Murray, who grounded the day in this year's guiding theme: "From the Village to the Vision: Leadership Born of Community." She reminded students that they are not alone in their journey — they are surrounded by a village committed to their growth and success, and their vision will help shape a more just and inclusive future.

Where The Journey Begins!



Photo Image: Junior Leaders standing in the lobby of George Brown College, awaiting registration during Orientation Week.



Photo Image: Peer Mentors, BSSLP Staff Mentors, and Research Team members registering Junior Leaders at George Brown College.



Photo Image: Graduating Junior Leader Tiasia poses proudly for the camera.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders waiting in line for registration during Orientation Week.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders engaging in thoughtful group discussion during a workshop session.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders take a moment to connect and build community during Orientation Week.

If I Were Mayor: Junior Leaders Envision a Better Future

BY SOPHIA BARNETT, BSSLP PEER MENTOR

The Junior Leaders kicked off their orientation with a powerful activity that invited them to step into a role of civic responsibility and advocacy — imagining what they would do “If I were Mayor.”

Working in small groups, Junior Leaders developed proposals to address pressing social issues such as housing, food insecurity, unemployment, community safety, education, and mental health and well-being. The activity emphasized collaboration, critical thinking, and youth voice.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders presenting their policy recommendation from the “If I Were Mayor “ activity.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders presenting their policy recommendations from the “If I Were Mayor “ activity

This early activity helped Junior Leaders deepen their understanding of complex community challenges and explore creative strategies for change. These insights will inform the research topics they’ll be developing throughout the summer. For returning Junior Leaders, this work will evolve into actionable recommendations that can help inform the Toronto District School Board’s strategies — and extend beyond.

**“WE ENCOURAGED ONE ANOTHER TO SPEAK IN FRONT OF THE GROUP, SHARING WHAT DREW US TO A PARTICULAR SOCIAL ISSUE AND LEARNING TO PRESENT PERSUASIVELY.”
— JUNIOR LEADER**

These young people already carry the mindset and passion of leaders. What they've been given is a platform. Through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), they are supported with the tools and guidance needed to turn their ideas into impact.

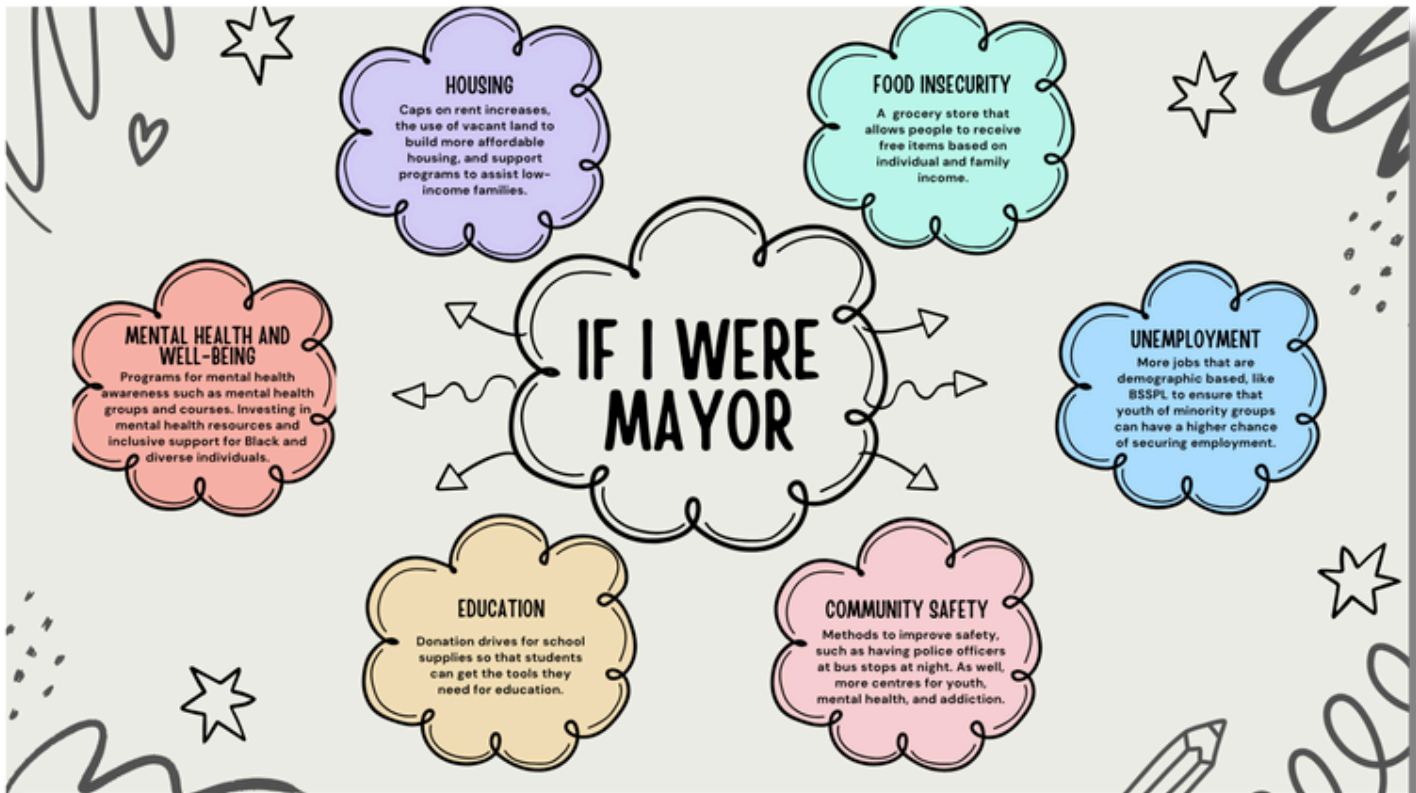


Photo Image: Junior Leaders policy recommendations

As the summer progresses, Junior Leaders will continue to harness their creativity, sharpen their research, and share their findings. Some may indeed grow up to be Mayors, policy-makers, or community advocates. But one thing is certain — they are already leading with purpose.

Balancing Checks and Avoiding Strikes

BY DONIELLE FRANCIS, BSSLP PEER MENTOR

Being financially literate is an essential life skill — especially as young people begin earning, saving, and planning for their futures. At the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP), Junior Leaders don't just gain leadership and research experience — they also get paid. That's why financial literacy is a key part of our programming.

On the first day of Orientation Week, Junior Leaders participated in a Financial Literacy Workshop led by **Checks Over Strikes** — an organization dedicated to making financial education accessible, especially in underserved communities.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders brainstorming during a budgeting activity to build their financial literacy skills.



Photo Image: Dean Chambers (left) and Craig Brown (right)

Dean Chambers and **Craig Brown**, the co-founders of Checks Over Strikes, took different paths in life, but shared a common goal: building wealth and ownership on their own terms. Now, they've come together to teach youth how to manage money, build credit, avoid debt, and shift their mindset. As they say on their YouTube channel:

"WE'RE TWO GUYS COMMITTED TO MAKING MONEY WORK FOR YOU, INSTEAD OF YOU WORKING FOR MONEY."

They've also co-authored a financial literacy guide called *"Don't Be A Waste Yute"*, paired with an online course that offers youth-friendly, practical lessons for building financial independence.

When we spoke to Junior Leaders about the workshop, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Many shared that it was both relatable and packed with useful information.

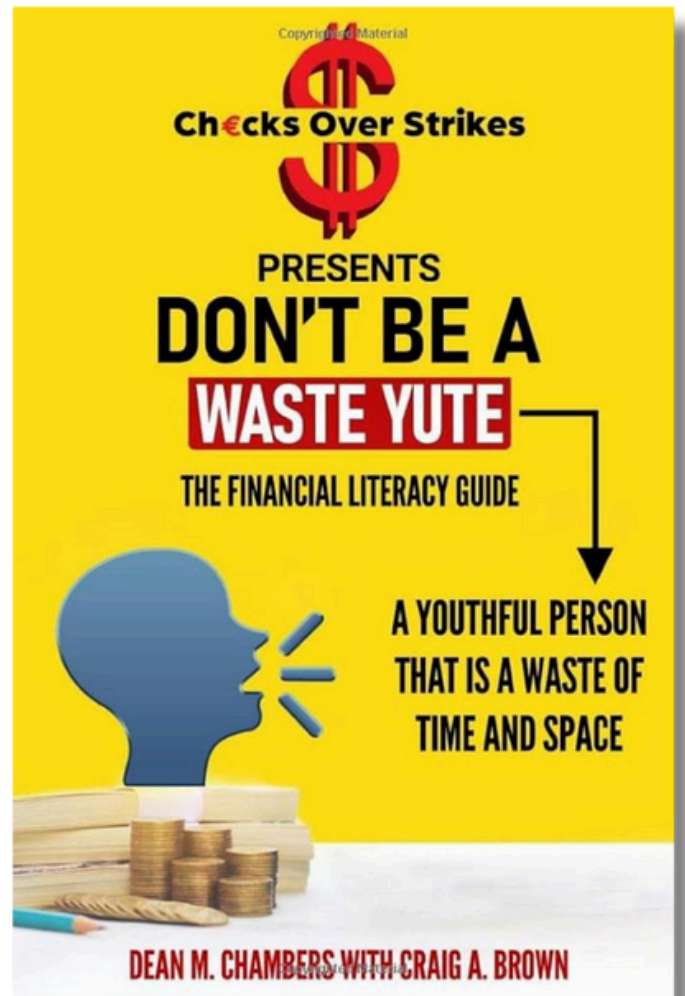


Photo Image: Book cover of "Don't Be A Waste Yute"

“YEAH. I FEEL LIKE A LOT OF US, LIKE, ONCE WE GET THAT PAYCHEQUE, IT’S MOSTLY GOING TO BE, LIKE, CLOTHES, GOING OUT, FOOD. I FEEL LIKE MOST OF MY MONEY GOES TO FOOD. AND SO, LIKE, HAVING THAT MONEY SAVED UP — A LOT OF US ARE GOING TO GRADE 12 OR ALREADY GOING TO UNIVERSITY. SO KNOWING HOW TO BUDGET THAT BEFORE GOING TO UNIVERSITY IS VERY IMPORTANT.” - JUNIOR LEADER



Photo Image: Dean, financial literacy workshop facilitator, stands at the podium outlining the day's agenda for Junior Leaders during Orientation Week.



Photo Image: Craig leads a discussion on budgeting, offering practical tips to help Junior Leaders build strong financial habits.

The workshop didn't just cover money basics — it sparked real conversations about habits, goals, and the kind of future our Junior Leaders want to build. As another Junior Leader put it:

“...IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BUDGET, IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAVE, IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BUILD CREDIT, AND IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO NOT GET INTO DEBT — THEN YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS. AND YOU, YOU CAN, LIKE, REALLY MESS THINGS UP FOR YOURSELF.”

At BSSLP, we believe financial literacy is more than just numbers — it's about freedom, choice, and empowerment. By investing in these skills early, our Junior Leaders are already making powerful moves toward long-term success.

Preparing for Success: Professional Development Workshop & YPAR Launch

BY AKAI AH CARTER-SAM, BSSLP PEER MENTOR



Photo Image: Junior Leaders presenting during the "What Would You Do?" workplace scenarios activity.

As Orientation Week came to a close, Junior Leaders engaged in a full day of professional development workshops designed to prepare them for success in their upcoming experiential learning placements. The day featured a series of hands-on, skill-building sessions that fostered confidence, communication, and career readiness.

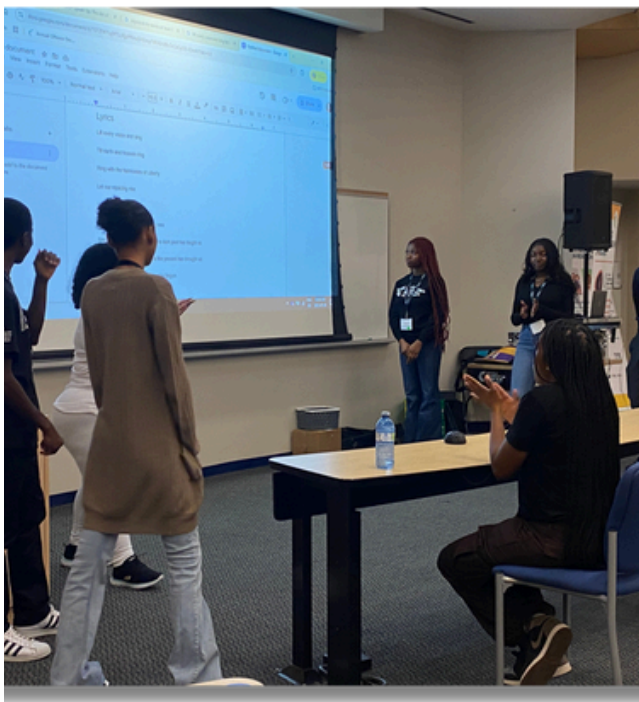


Photo Image: Junior Leaders presenting with confidence during the "Speak Up: The Art of Public Speaking" workshop.

The morning began with "Speak Up: The Art of Public Speaking for Student Leaders," where students explored strategies for powerful storytelling and self-expression. This was followed by "Job Readiness 101," an interactive session focused on navigating workplace expectations and making a strong first impression. An energetic networking activity rounded out the morning, helping students practice relationship-building in professional spaces.

Afternoon sessions included "Professional Communication in the Workplace," where Junior Leaders learned how to navigate emails, meetings, and interpersonal dynamics with clarity and confidence. In "Leadership in Action: Bringing Your Best Self to Work," students reflected on the qualities of effective leadership and how to lead with purpose, even in new environments. The day concluded with a Workplace Preparedness Check-In, giving students space to share reflections, offer feedback, and mentally gear up for the journey ahead.

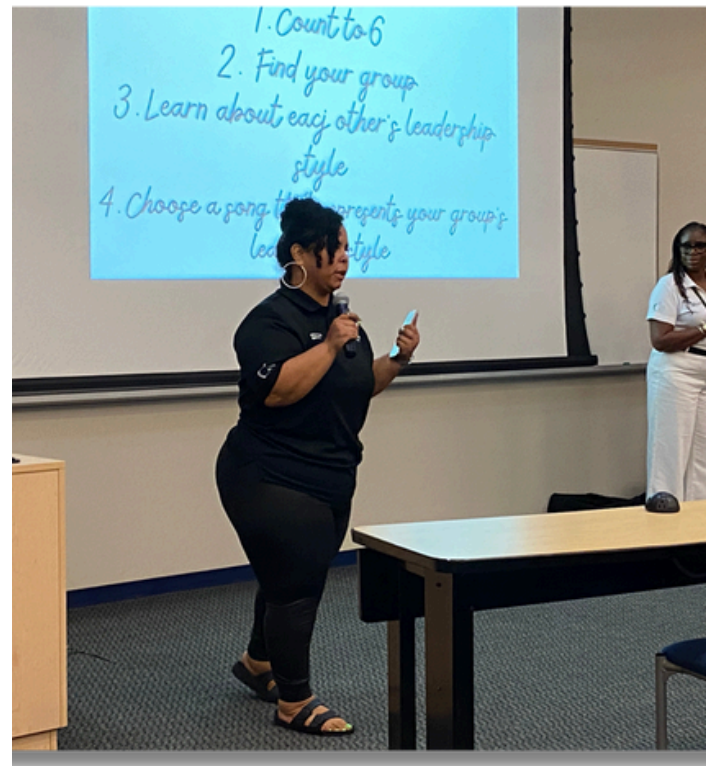


Photo Image: BSSLP Staff Mentor facilitating an interactive workshop with Junior Leaders.

In parallel, on Thursday, the Research Cohort officially began their summer Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) training. YPAR invites students to explore and analyze issues affecting their communities, while positioning themselves as knowledge holders and change agents. Through this process, student researchers will learn to design studies, conduct interviews, and advocate for systemic change—affirming that Black youth are not just the future, but also the present drivers of social transformation.



Photo Image: YPAR Research Associate poses in front of YPAR banner

Together, these sessions represent the heart of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program—equipping students with the tools to thrive in the workplace, lead with integrity, and create meaningful impact through research and action.

Strong Minds, Strong Careers: Mental Health at Work

BY AMONTAYE MULLINGS, BSSLP PEER MENTOR

To close out Orientation Week and prepare for their upcoming experiential learning placements, Junior Leaders participated in an impactful wellness workshop titled “Strong Minds, Strong Careers: Mental Health at Work.” Facilitated by Patricia Bailey Brown, a Registered Social Worker and Psychotherapist, the session encouraged students to reflect on the importance of setting emotional boundaries, recognizing stress, and practicing self-care during their internships.

Grounded in affirmation and real-life scenarios, the workshop equipped Junior Leaders with practical tools to prioritize their mental health while navigating new professional spaces. Sessions like this exemplify the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement’s commitment to nurturing not only career readiness—but the whole leader.



Photo Image: Patricia Bailey Brown doing a stretching exercise with Junior Leaders



Photo Image: Junior Leader sharing her thoughts about mental health and wellness.

The Class of 2025: Honouring Growth, Excellence, and New Beginnings

BY SACHIEL ANDRE, BSSLP PEER MENTOR

PHOTO IMAGE: GRADUATING JUNIOR LEADERS FROM THE 2025 BSSLP



Photo Image: Celebrating sixty-five BSSLP graduates—honouring their resilience, brilliance, and bold next steps.

This year, the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) proudly celebrates a powerful milestone: saying farewell to sixty-five Junior Leaders who are graduating and moving on to new chapters in their lives. As they cross the stage and into their futures, we congratulate them on their achievements, honour their resilience, and uplift the brilliance they have shared with us throughout their time in the program.

Representing schools across the Toronto District School Board, our graduating Junior Leaders celebrated their high school commencements this June—just weeks before returning for one final summer with BSSLP. Many received scholarships, awards, and bursaries that recognized not only their academic success, but also their leadership, advocacy, and service to their communities.

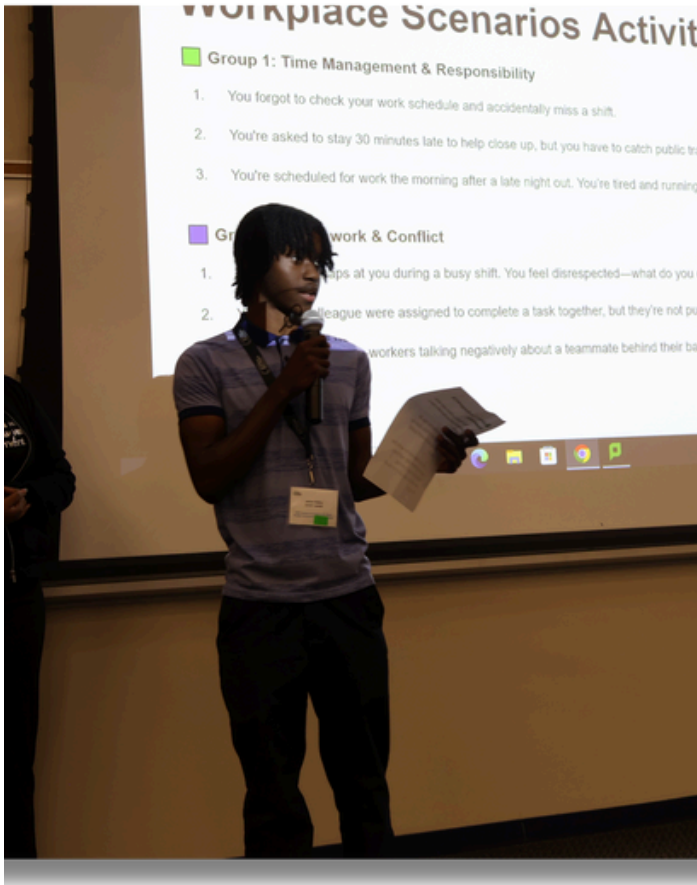


Photo Image: Graduating Junior Leader Javion addresses his peers with confidence and pride.

Javion, a graduating Junior Leader who has participated in the program for three years, shared this reflection:

“I WOULD SAY JUST BEING IN A COMMUNITY OR A SPACE FULL OF PEOPLE THAT LOOK LIKE ME, AND THEN STAFF THAT LOOK LIKE ME... I'M JUST EXCITED FOR THE LESSONS AND THE TEACHINGS THAT I WILL INHERIT AND TAKE INTO UNIVERSITY AND POST-SECONDARY.”



Photo Image: Graduating Junior Leader Ano shares a proud smile with the camera.

Ano, a first-time Junior Leader who is also graduating this year, shared:

“AS I'M GRADUATING, I'M REALLY EXCITED FOR THE NEXT STEP IN MY LIFE. BECAUSE YOU KNOW, FOUR YEARS INTO HIGH SCHOOL, IT'S BEEN REALLY DIFFICULT AND REALLY HARD — AND I FEEL LIKE WITH THE BSSLP PROGRAM, IT'S REALLY HELPED ME NAVIGATE WHAT I WANT TO DO, AND THE CAREER CHOICES THAT ARE ACTUALLY OUT THERE FOR ME.”

BLACK STUDENT SUMMER LEADERSHIP - YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

To the students who joined us this summer — thank you for allowing us to be part of your village. We are excited to continue supporting your journey, your growth, and your dreams.

As our graduates pursue new pathways and bold ambitions, we send them off with love, pride, and full hearts.

Congratulations, Class of 2025! Your brilliance is just beginning.



Photo Image: Junior Leader Damian shares his reflections during a workshop presentation.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders gathered in the lecture hall during Orientation Week.

Conclusion: From Promise to Purpose

BY TANITIA MUNROE, SENIOR RESEARCH COORDINATOR

As we reflect on the powerful beginning of this year's Black Student Summer Leadership Program, one thing is clear: our student leaders are already shaping the future with purpose, creativity, and courage. From envisioning new policies as future mayors to launching original research projects through YPAR, their voices ring with possibility.

The 2025 theme—From the Village to the Vision: Leadership Born of Community—is more than a guiding phrase. It is a daily practice. Through each workshop, mentorship moment, and reflection, we are reminded that Black youth leadership is sustained by love, wisdom, and a shared commitment to transformation.



Photo Image: Junior Leader in conversation with a Graduation Coach during a mentoring session.



Photo Image: Junior Leaders actively engaged in a collaborative group activity.

This newsletter captures only a glimpse of the brilliance, joy, and determination we've witnessed so far. As the summer unfolds, we look forward to amplifying more student voices, sharing their findings, and celebrating their leadership in action.

To our Junior Leaders: thank you for showing up, speaking out, and trusting in your village. The future is not only yours to inherit—it is yours to build.

With pride and purpose,

The 2025 Black Student Summer Leadership Program Writing Team

The Faces Behind The 2025 BSSLP Magazines



Front Row: Donielle Francis (Incoming First-Year Student, University of Toronto) and Sophia Barnett (Incoming Student, Toronto Metropolitan University)

Back Row: Meron Bayu (Peer Mentor Lead and Second-Year Student, University of Toronto), Akaiah Carter-Sam (Incoming Student, McMaster University), Sachiel Andre (Incoming Student, George Brown College), Amontaye Mullings (Incoming Grade 12 Student, TDSB), and Sahra Mohamud (TDSB Educator and PhD Student at OISE).

Pictured during Orientation Week of the Toronto District School Board's Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP), a paid experiential learning opportunity that celebrates Black excellence, student voice, and leadership in action