

# FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE VISION



## 2025 BSSSLP MAGAZINE

REFLECTIONS  
FROM  
PLACEMENT

MENTOR  
MOMENTS

EDITION 2



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Sydney presents her YPAR research from last summer to peers and staff, standing confidently at the front of the room. Behind her, Veronica, a BSSLP staff mentor, offers support as Sydney shares her work.

## FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE VISION: LEADING IN ACTION

By Tanitiã Munroe

### Research Coordinator

This second edition of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) magazine highlights what happens when leadership is not only taught—but lived.

As Junior Leaders step into workplaces, post-secondary spaces, and grassroots organizations across the city, they are turning knowledge into practice and vision into action. Whether it's presenting original research, collaborating with mentors, or showing up as leaders in their communities, these students are demonstrating what Black excellence looks like in real time.

This summer, the BSSLP is made up of two powerful cohorts: students completing 35-hour paid experiential learning placements, and a group of Junior Leaders participating in professional development and mentorship to prepare for future transitions into leadership spaces. Across both streams, students are developing critical research skills through Afrocentric Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), deepening their personal and professional growth, and showing us all what is possible when Black youth are trusted to lead. From hospital wings to media studios, legal offices to construction sites, this issue documents the stories, reflections, and relationships that shape our program. Because leadership doesn't begin in a boardroom—it begins in community. And our community is powerful, brilliant, and ready.

***Welcome to Leading in Action.***



BSSLP Junior Leader Jada shares her thoughts with peers during a workshop session.



BSSLP Junior Leader Lily speaks passionately during a peer discussion session.

# #BSSLPInAction: Capturing the Journey Through Photos



Peer Mentor Sophia introduces a guest speaker during a BSSLP workshop session.



System Superintendent Karen Murray joins a conversation with BSSLP Junior Leaders during a workshop session.



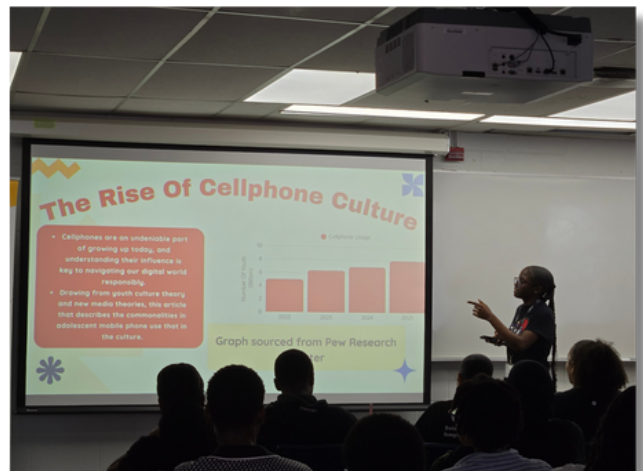
BSSLP Junior Leader Diamond introduces guests during a fireside chat session.



Research Associate Nordiah Newell supports returning BSSLP Junior Leaders with their research project.



New BSSLP Junior Leader Abigail and returning Junior Leader Lennika Andrews share a moment together during the program.



BSSLP Junior Leader Mickayla shares her presentation during a workshop on cell phone usage among young people.



# FROM PILOT TO POWERHOUSE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BLACK STUDENT SUMMER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

By Sahra Mohamud

**Peer Mentor Staff Lead**

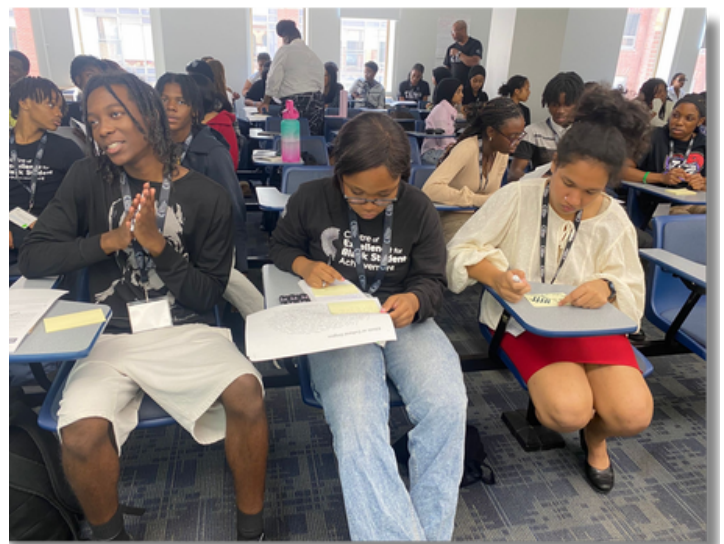
Since its launch in 2019, the Toronto District School Board's Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) has grown from a small pilot into a transformative, city-wide initiative that centers Black student voice, leadership, and excellence.

Originally called the Black Student Summer Leadership Institute, the program began with ten Black secondary students and four youth mentors, developed in partnership with the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora at York University. Led by Student Equity Program Advisors (SEPA's), its early focus was to cultivate leadership and advocacy skills to challenge anti-Black racism in schools and communities.

Now housed under the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, BSSLP has evolved into a multi-week summer program for Grade 10 to 12 students. It blends Afrocentric Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), leadership development, and career exploration across sectors where Black communities remain historically underrepresented.



BSSLP Junior Leaders engage in collaborative discussion during a workshop session.



BSSLP Junior Leaders taking notes during a workshop session.

A cornerstone of BSSLP is its paid 35-hour experiential learning placement, made possible through Focus on Youth (FOY). These placements—hosted by community agencies, post-secondary institutions, cultural hubs, and industry partners—go beyond summer jobs. They serve as career-launching opportunities aligned with students' interests and aspirations, offering real-world experiences that build networks and confidence.

In 2025, the program includes two distinct cohorts to better meet the diverse needs of student leaders:

**BSSLP Cohort:** Students engage in experiential placements three days a week and spend Mondays and Fridays immersed in YPAR, critical inquiry, and leadership workshops. The program culminates in a Summer Research Symposium, where students present original research and creative work rooted in their lived experiences.

**CEBSA-FOYT Junior Leader Cohort:** Designed as an entry point for younger students, this cohort works four days a week in paid placements and participates in one day of tailored professional development. The structure provides scaffolded support to build the skills and confidence needed for future participation in the full BSSLP program.

Now in its sixth year, the 2025 BSSLP is already underway. Junior Leaders have officially begun their placements, stepping into new environments—from media production and education to healthcare and environmental stewardship. They are forming meaningful relationships with mentors, exploring career paths, and applying their leadership in ways that challenge systems and reimagine futures.

Each placement site becomes a space of mutual learning and transformation—not only for students, but for the organizations that host them. Through this work, BSSLP continues to affirm what is possible when Black students are seen, supported, and empowered to lead with purpose.



# REFLECTIONS FROM THE PLACEMENT: LESSONS, LAUGHTER, AND LEADERSHIP

By Donielle Francis  
**Peer Mentor**

## Blackhurst Cultural Center

Blackhurst Cultural Center (BCC) - The People's Residence is an organization centered around the preservation of Black culture and history. It highlights underrepresented stories and achievements while celebrating Canadians of African and Caribbean ancestry. Students placed there are fully surrounded in all the ways they shine and create meaningful connections to themselves and their community. One Junior Leader, Isra, commented this when asked what they've learned about at their placement;



BSSLP Junior Leaders Isra (left) and Ano (right) working on their computers at Blackhurst Cultural Centre.



BSSLP Junior Leaders Isra and Ano share a smile for the camera.

*"We're basically preserving history which I think is so cool. And we're learning about ourselves too. I think it's really amazing to have a focus on Black Canadians because a lot of history captures the stories of Black Americans. To me, it's so important because when we learn about Black people in school, you hear about all these great Black Americans, but none of our own Black Canadians. It's so refreshing at Blackhurst to see the whole focus and see how Black Canadians impacted Canadian history and it's important to understand the full story. I think this opportunity is really special."*

*To learn more about this organization, please [click here](#).*



BSSLP Junior Leaders Neriah (left) and Samia (right) pose together at Youthlink.

## Youthlink

Youthlink is a multi-service agency which offers counseling, support, shelter, educational programs, and so much more to youth and families living in the Scarborough area. Their mission is to provide guidance and opportunities through the community and become a safe space for teens. Students placed there are given the chance to explore the city, host workshops promoting wellness, and hone their skills to do great things. A leader placed there, Neriah, had this to say about what she learned at her placement;

*"I've learned how to navigate excel, and the importance of diversity through training."*

To learn more about this organization, please click [here](#).

## University Health Network

University Health Network (UHN) is Canada's largest hospital network; their four hospitals and seven research sites are recognized for their excellence. Their partnership with the BSSLP is to give students a taste of potential career pathways as they conduct summer research, attend educational sessions, and learn crucial professional skills. Nyla is one of the Junior Leaders placed there and she had this to say about what she's looking forward to at her placement this summer;

*"More patient engagement and learning about different clinical strategies".*



BSSLP Junior Leader Nyla poses with her supervisor during her placement at UHN.

To learn more about this organization, please [click here](#).



## TVO Media Education Group

TVO Media Education Group is a non-profit social impact charity centred around equitable education. Most notable contributions include the television channel, which provides learning content to all age groups. They have been a proud partner of the summer program since 2021 and provided students with valuable work experiences that allow them to thrive afterwards. Malcolm had this to say about his favourite memory at his placement so far;



BSSLP Junior Leader Malcolm smiles for the camera near the TVO welcome sign.

*"My favourite memory has to be visiting the Recording Studio. I had the chance to participate in many aspects of broadcasting, from operating the camera to adjusting the audio and eventually being the host".*

To learn more about this organization, please click [here](#).



BSSLP Junior Leaders completing their placement at Interac pose with big smiles and two thumbs up.

## Interac Corporation

Interac Corporation is a leading provider of payment solutions and digital information exchange, best known for its Interac Debit and Interac E-Transfer services. They offer opportunities for students to bridge the gaps between academic knowledge and career experience by working in a fast-paced and challenging environment filled with hands-on experiences that contribute to their success. Aman, a student leader, shared his favourite memory from his placement when asked about it.

*"Getting to know other interns, becoming friends, and connecting with them".*

To learn more about this organization, please click [here](#)

## BOLT



(From left to right): Anne-Marie Thomas, BSSLP Staff Mentor and Social Worker; Solomon, BSSLP Junior Leader; and BOLT staff members Norbert Costa and Rhiannon Wicks.

BOLT is a Charitable Foundation with the goal, "to inspire a new generation of industry professionals" by providing a multitude of opportunities including education, training, scholarships, and employment. They have partnered with CEBSA as an experiential learning placement for our Junior Leaders where they embrace the construction life with events like Speak Outs and Job Shadowing. Solomon had this to say regarding what he's learned at his placement;

*"First and foremost was adaptability; at BOLT, I do many different tasks around the office and it is crucial that I try my best to do them as well and as efficiently as possible - whether it's designing slideshows on Canva, organizing names in a spreadsheet (Excel) or filling swag bags with golf balls. Another skill applicable to the workplace that I learned is taking breaks. As it can get very busy in the office, it is important that I am making sure that I am giving myself the hour break that I am entitled to."*

To learn more about this organization, please click [here](#)

## Black Excellence At Experiential Placements

As the program progresses, Junior Leaders will continue to showcase their brilliance at their experiential placements. Whether it be shadowing professionals or completing projects, Junior Leaders are applying leadership skills in the workforce.



BSSLP Junior Leader Damian stands proudly beside his welcome sign at his placement at Proof Experience.



# EQUIPPED TO LEAD: INSIDE THE WORKSHOPS TRANSFORMING BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP

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By Sophia Barnett  
**Peer Mentor**

Each week of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) brings new opportunities for growth—and this week was no exception. A series of transformative workshops gave Junior Leaders the chance to sharpen their leadership skills, expand their knowledge, and hear firsthand from inspiring professionals who are committed to uplifting the next generation.

## Your Voice, Your Policy: Students in the Driver's Seat

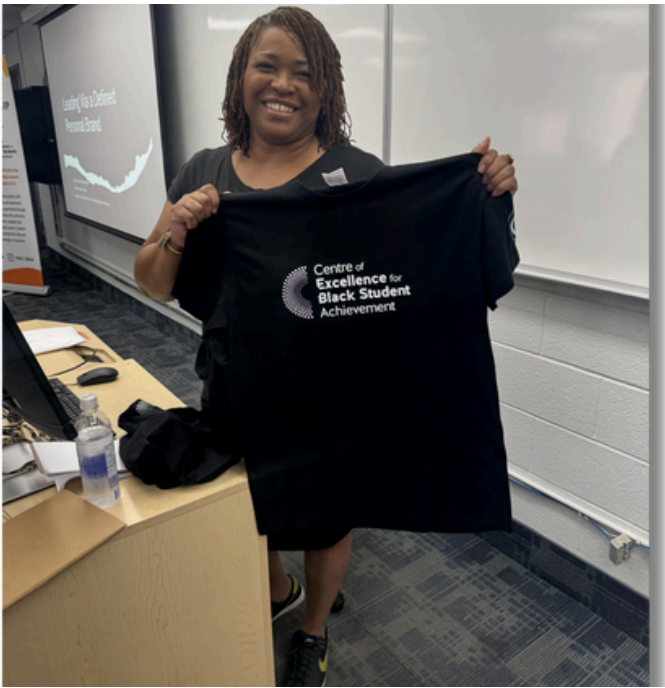
***Led by Amie Presley, Research Coordinator, TDSB Research & Development Department.***

What does it take to change a policy at the TDSB—and how can students be part of that process? On Friday afternoon, Amie Presley from the TDSB's Research & Development Department joined the research cohort for an engaging session on student voice in education policy. Junior Leaders learned how ideas move from the classroom to the boardroom, and explored ways to influence decisions—from surveys and focus groups to trustee meetings.



Amie listens attentively as a BSSLP Junior Leader shares their perspective during a policy discussion on student involvement in decision-making.

A focus on data governance encouraged critical thinking about how schools collect and use information, reminding students that change begins when they speak up, stay informed, and act together.



Angela Henry smiles while holding a Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement t-shirt.

## Personal Branding & Leadership

**With Angela Henry, Entrepreneur and Facilitator**

Junior Leaders were joined by Angela Henry, a dynamic entrepreneur and leadership facilitator with the Lifelong Leadership Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering leadership development and educational enrichment. Angela delivered a powerful workshop on personal branding, encouraging students to recognize the value of their voice, identity, and impact.

The session featured interactive group discussions, where Junior Leaders explored self-worth, confidence, and how to authentically show up in both personal and professional spaces. Through guided activities, students learned how to define and promote their own personal brand—centered on their passions, purpose, and goals.



Angela Henry smiles for the camera following the conclusion of her workshop session.

*"So whether or not you brand yourself or are specific about how you present yourself, you have a personal brand. So what we need to do is we need to be aware of how we're presenting ourselves in the world and just make sure that it aligns with not only our current values, but also our future goals".*

**Angela's message was clear: Lead with confidence, own your story, and let your brand speak before you even enter the room.**



# Data with Dignity: Reimagining Identity and Voice

***Led by Amie Presley and Janet O'Reilly, Research Coordinators with the TDSB Research & Development Department.***



Amie Presley (left) and Janet O'Reilly (right) engage in conversation with BSSLP Junior Leaders during a facilitated session on identity-based data.



Janet O'Reilly facilitates an interactive activity with BSSLP Junior Leaders during a session on identity-based data.

On a Wednesday afternoon, the CEBSA cohort was joined by Amie Presley and Janet O'Reilly from the TDSB's Research & Development Department for a facilitated session on identity-based data, equity, and student voice. Together, they explored the question: Can identity-based data reflect care, dignity, and community power?

Using the Student Census as a starting point, Junior Leaders examined how race-based and demographic data is collected in schools, and why it must be rooted in equity. Through small-group activities, they reimagined how ethnicity, culture, and lived experience could be more meaningfully reflected in the data that shapes decisions.

Rather than focusing on numbers alone, the session invited creativity and critical thinking: What stories should we be telling? Who defines identity? How can data become a tool for justice rather than a label?

Together, students envisioned a future where data isn't just collected—but co-created with care, purpose, and community leadership.



Danette Edwards, lawyer from Gold Family Law, engages with BSSLP Junior Leaders in a meaningful dialogue about law, advocacy, and wellness in the profession.

## Danette Edwards: Navigating Law, Rights & Representation

***With Danette Edwards, Lawyer***

Another standout session came from Danette Edwards, a respected family lawyer with a deep commitment to youth empowerment. Danette provided students with a broad overview of career pathways in the legal field while also engaging them in an important conversation about how to interact with law enforcement and navigate legal systems safely.

During her session, she broke down complex legal concepts, shared real-life scenarios, and equipped Junior Leaders with practical tools to recognize their rights and advocate for themselves. Later on, an interview was conducted by Esther and Sonia, two remarkable Junior Leaders in the Focus on Youth cohort. Esther will be entering her first year at the University of Guelph this fall to study Justice and Legal Studies, and Sonia will be entering her first year at Toronto Metropolitan University this fall to study Politics and Governance.

Esther and Sonia enjoyed the workshop and left the space with powerful insight and comments;

*"So my key takeaway was when she said, don't be afraid to fail. If you want to go for something, and you go for it, and you realize that's not what you particularly want, you can change. And you can always try something new. Don't be afraid of failure. If you fail, get back up and try something new". - Esther*



*I felt amazing. It was such an honor to interview a person who has made space for us black and African people in an environment that is not expected of us. She showed us that there are doors that may be closed, but we can still open them. And that was an inspiration. And I, as somebody who aspires to be a lawyer, it felt as if I was looking at a mirror, and I saw myself in her shoes".*

- Sonia



Esther (left) and Sonia (right) facilitate a fireside chat with Danette Edwards, lawyer from Gold Family Law.

Junior Leaders were inspired by Danette's presentation and her commitment to leadership and mentorship. When asked why she chose to speak to BSSLP students, Danette responded:

*"I love engaging with youth. I think that the youth are the future. And in this particular political climate, we need their voices."*

Danette emphasized that understanding the law is a key component of leadership—especially for Black youth:

*"It's really important that the kids growing up now understand that they don't live in a race-neutral or race-blind world, right? That's really important. And they need to understand how the systems operate and sometimes even engage with each other to exclude or criminalize them, and the sooner those connections are made, the better you're able to sort of figure out, okay, where do I go? How do I deal with this particular situation?"*

From building personal confidence to understanding institutional systems, this week's facilitators provided Junior Leaders with the tools to lead with clarity, purpose, and self-awareness. As the program continues, these lessons will serve as a lasting foundation for the students' leadership journeys—both in and beyond BSSLP.

# TRAINING FOR CHANGE: DEVELOPING CRITICAL RESEARCH SKILLS THROUGH YPAR

Led by the Research Team, Junior Leaders engaged in an interactive YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) development session designed to deepen their understanding of how to design and carry out community-rooted research projects.

Throughout the workshop, Junior Leaders participated in hands-on activities focused on key research components—including data collection techniques, analysis strategies, and mock interview exercises. These activities helped sharpen their critical thinking skills, build confidence, and enhance the overall quality of their emerging research projects.

Willis Opondo, a member of the Research Team supporting the Photovoice Pod, highlighted the importance of grounding youth-led research in Afrocentric perspectives and rigorous inquiry.



Research Associates Willis Opondo and Dr. Cynthia Kwakyewah smile for the camera during a YPAR training session.

By the end of the session, students not only practiced their research skills but also strengthened their capacity to ask critical questions and generate knowledge that reflects their lived experiences and community priorities.



Peer Mentors Sachiel and Donielle present a mock interview to support BSSLP Junior Leaders in preparing for data collection.

*"The mock interviews—or rather, the pilot activities we conducted—are part of a larger process," he shared. "It's a training journey that ensures our Junior Leaders are well prepared and equipped for meaningful data collection".*

# DESIGNING FUTURES: A CREATIVE CHALLENGE WITH SMITH + ANDERSEN

This summer, Junior Leaders were invited to participate in the “Design Your Dream School” Challenge, a dynamic and student-centered workshop led by engineering firm Smith + Andersen. In this interactive session, students worked collaboratively in small groups to reimagine school spaces with a focus on energy efficiency, accessibility, and smart technology.

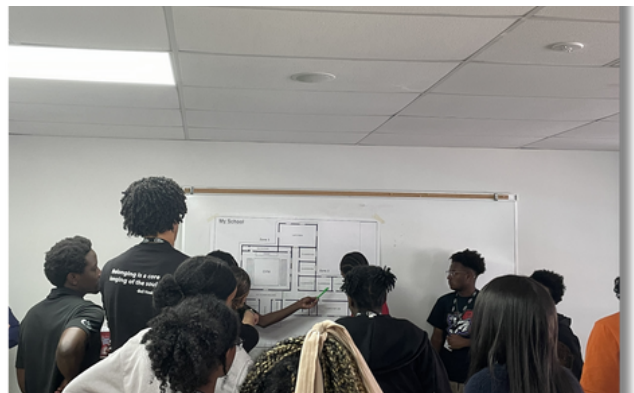
The challenge was not just an opportunity to brainstorm bold ideas—it was an engaging and accessible way to introduce real-world engineering concepts while centering student voice. Junior Leaders gained a behind-the-scenes look at what it takes to design safe, sustainable, and inclusive educational spaces. From understanding HVAC systems to learning about security infrastructure and lighting design, students walked away with a deeper appreciation for the technical expertise required in shaping the schools of the future.



Junior Leaders engage in group discussions as they reflect on the Smith + Anderson Design Challenge and begin mapping out their team-based solutions.



BSSLP Junior Leaders collaborate on designing their dream school, mapping out ideas on a floor plan during an interactive workshop.



BSSLP Junior Leaders examine a school floor plan in groups as they collaborate on the design challenge task.



Smith + Andersen is a trusted leader in engineering consulting across Canada, recognized for their multidisciplinary approach to designing healthy, efficient, and future-ready buildings. From hospitals to data centres, their work combines innovation with purpose—making them an ideal partner for a program like BSSLP that champions Black excellence and youth empowerment.



Junior leaders collaborate on floor plans during the Smith + Andersen Design Challenge, guided by the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

The session concluded with a powerful fireside chat, hosted by fellow Junior Leaders Teniola and Raheem, who interviewed two accomplished Black professionals from Smith + Andersen:

Together, Nicole and Vaughn shared candid reflections on their journeys in engineering, what it means to navigate the industry as Black professionals, and how mentorship and representation can open doors for the next generation. They also discussed Smith + Andersen's broader commitment to equity, inclusion, and sustainability in the built environment.



Smith + Andersen team members Vaughn and Nicole are interviewed by Raheem and Teniola during an engaging fireside chat.

Through this experience, Junior Leaders not only developed design-thinking and problem-solving skills, but also saw themselves reflected in an industry where Black voices are often underrepresented. It was a reminder that the future of design isn't just about buildings—it's about who gets to imagine them.

To learn more about this organization, please [click here](#)

# VOICES OF VISION: STUDENT INTERVIEWS ON LEADERSHIP AND PURPOSE

By Sachiel Andre  
**Peer Mentor**

Leadership among Black youth is not just about taking charge—it's about cultivating confidence, resilience, and purpose in the face of systemic barriers. For far too long, mainstream narratives have overlooked the brilliance and potential of Black students as leaders. The Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) seeks to change that. By providing opportunities for self-discovery, critical dialogue, and hands-on learning, the program equips Junior Leaders to define leadership on their own terms and apply it meaningfully within their schools, communities, and future careers.

## Leadership in Action

Leadership is in our name, and it stands at the heart of everything we do. Each day, our brilliant Junior Leaders demonstrate initiative, collaboration, and courage. Through experiential learning placements, workshops, and public speaking opportunities, the BSSLP supports students in navigating new and unfamiliar situations that sharpen their leadership capabilities and help them grow through problem-solving, reflection, and peer support.

Here's what a few of our Junior Leaders had to say about how their understanding of leadership has evolved during the program:



BSSLP Junior Leader Drusylla stands proud and assured during a program session.

"Of course, so I definitely think it's improved my leadership skills in the sense that like I got more confident in public speaking like in for example, I don't get that feeling in my throat to like answer a question or anything and if I'm wrong, then I don't feel like as bad about myself, necessarily As well as like just confident in my being, more confident in my ideas and sharing the little people I feel like that's really important as a leader."

**Drusylla Lloyd** - Grade 11  
student at Wexford Collegiate  
School for the Arts



BSSLP Junior Leader Abdulwahab presents confidently to his peers during a workshop session.

"This place makes me feel a lot more comfortable. When I'm comfortable, I can do whatever I want. It creates an inclusive space. I feel able to express myself knowing that every other person around me has similar backgrounds. So yeah, I've grown since I've been here—significantly."

**Abdulwahab Fatomide** - Grade 12 Student at Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute

"I would say, the BSSLP has improved my leadership skills because I'm being surrounded by a lot of like-minded people, and I see it as almost an opportunity that I should be taking initiative to put myself out there. It's helped me take leadership in trying to connect with more people. I feel like that's helped me be a leader, taking the initiative. Because I know that an opportunity like this might not come to me ever again"

**Jasleen Amina** - Incoming Psychology student at York University

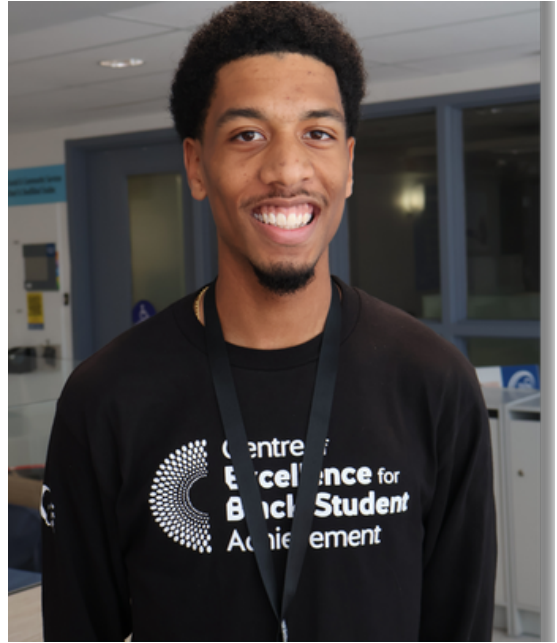


Graduating BSSLP Junior Leader Jasleen smiles brightly for the camera.





BSSLP Junior Leader Samia heads off to join her pod group for research work.



BSSLP Junior Leader Caleb smiles for the camera during a program session.

"I learned that a leader isn't born, a leader is made, and you don't need to be the loudest in the room to be a leader, you just need to listen to other people, hear other's ideas and be willing to represent the people that you care for. Even me, I'm a very anxious person, but I think at the BSSLP I learned that even with anxiety, I can still be a leader."

**Samia Mursal** - Grade 12 Student at Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute

"Being in the BSSLP has helped my leadership skills. It's in quite a few ways. It's helped me take the initiative... Be more confident in my communication skills. I've been more willing to communicate and make friends with other students here at the program. It's helped me network with other students".

**Caleb Bubb-Pestano** - Grade 12 student at Victoria Park Collegiate Institute

Whether through mentorship, collaborative projects, or moments of personal breakthrough, BSSLP provides a foundation for Black youth to lead boldly and authentically. Leadership isn't just about the future—it's about how students are showing up for themselves and their peers right now. Ultimately, the BSSLP is shaping leaders not only for the workforce but for the world. By grounding their leadership in the values and support of their village, these Junior Leaders are preparing to carry their vision into every space they enter—fearlessly and unapologetically.

# Mentor Moments: Guidance from the Village

By Akaiah Carter-Sam  
Peer Mentor

A core value of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) is the intentional uplifting of Black youth—and nowhere is this more evident than in the relationships nurtured with Staff Mentors. Junior Leaders are supported not only in their research and professional development but also in their personal growth. These mentorship moments leave lasting impressions that extend far beyond the summer.

One such example is Donielle Francis, who exemplified the power of mentorship when she supported Junior Leader Mickayla Clarke in preparing a presentation on The Pros and Cons of Cell Phone Usage for Cohort Two. Reflecting on the experience, Donielle shared:



Peer Mentor Donielle supports BSSLP Junior Leader Mickayla as she works on her presentation about cellphone usage and its impact on young people.

*"I think she's cool and I had a lot of fun working with her. I remember when I was starting my public speaking journey and wanted to empower her in this endeavor."*

With Donielle's encouragement, Mickayla delivered a confident and engaging session that explored the impact of technology on everyday life. Watching her shine, Donielle reflected:



Research Interns Avery McIntosh and Jordyn Van Vliet, along with Staff Mentor Mebruka Mohammed, supervise BSSLP Junior Leaders during a program session.

*"Seeing her delivery was just so fulfilling, and I'm really glad that we were able to work together, and I was able to support her in that capacity."*

Another key figure within the BSSLP team is Kai Gordon, BSSLP Coordinator and Graduation Coach for Black Students at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. Alongside Research Coordinator Tanitiã Munroe and Principals Jamaal Fyffe and Ahmed Omar, Kai helps ensure the program runs smoothly—from logistics to student support.

Kai oversees staff onboarding, medical and consent forms, and the collection of Vulnerable Sector Checks. But her role extends far beyond administration. She curates a welcoming, affirming space each day—often arriving early to prepare breakfast and snacks, setting the tone for a supportive and empowering environment.

Reflecting on her approach to mentorship, Kai shared:

“I also help by acknowledging that I might not always be the right person for a Junior Leader to connect with—and being able to link them to the right person so they feel informed and supported in their next steps.”

What brings her the most joy is witnessing student transformation:

“It’s fulfilling. The growth is what I enjoy most—the maturation, the way their questions evolve and get answered over the seven weeks together.”



BSSLP Coordinator Kai Gordon smiles for the camera during the program.



BSSLP Junior Leaders smile and flash peace signs for the camera, capturing a joyful moment during the program.



Another vital source of mentorship comes from the Research Associates and Pod Leaders, who work closely with Junior Leaders on their Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects. The research team guides Junior Leaders in conducting meaningful research through an Afrocentric lens. Reflecting on their mentorship role, Avery shared:

*"People didn't have interviews already set up so I helped go to different pods, and I had them say what their demographic was because some of them have a very specific demographic. So we were having a hard time finding people, but we did ultimately get there."*

*As Junior Leaders move toward the final phase of the program and prepare for the Summer Research Symposium, their "village" of support—Peer Mentors, Staff Coordinators, and Research Associates—continues to rally around them, ensuring their mental, physical, and academic well-being.*

When asked about the students' upcoming presentations, Avery McIntosh offered this reflection:

*"It makes me very, very proud, cause it wasn't even that long ago that I was in their position like I'm only 19. I was in high school only like 3 years ago. And it just feels good to know that, you know, the things that I have learned in my life can be helpful and they can help someone else."*

The mentorship embedded throughout the BSSLP is grounded in love, accountability, and community care. Whether offering guidance, sharing knowledge, or supporting students through new challenges, the mentors of CEBSA remain a steadfast source of strength. As presentation day nears, one thing is certain: this village will be there—cheering them on, holding them up, and reminding them of the brilliance they already carry.



Research Associate Ransford Tei (left), Research Coordinator Fisseha Gebremedhin (middle), and Research Associate Willis Opondo look on during a BSSLP workshop session. Staff Mentor and resident DJ Sheldon Dixon is pictured in the background.

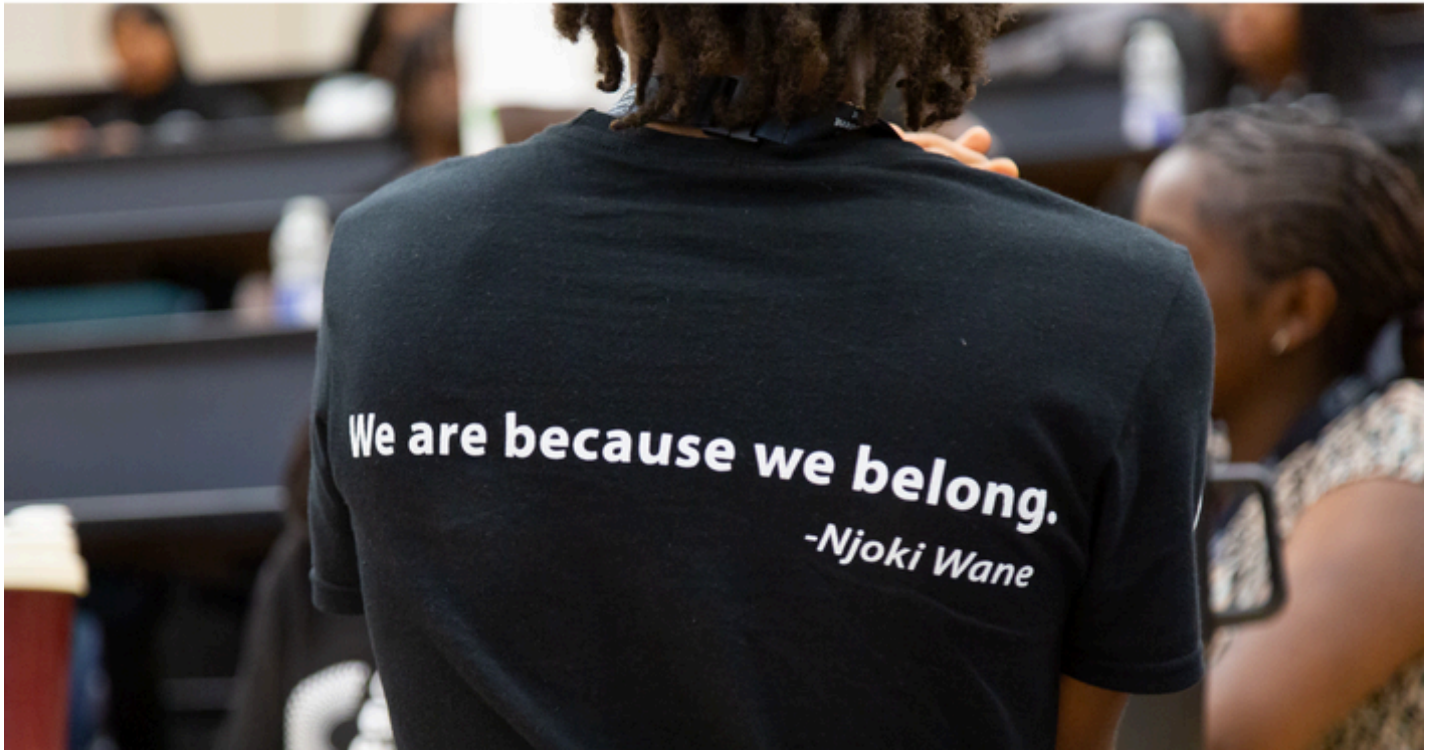


Research Interns Avery McIntosh and Jordyn Van Vliet take a moment to pose for the camera during YPAR training.

# GREETINGS FROM THE ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

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By Akaiah Carter-Sam  
**Peer Mentor**



The back of a Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement t-shirt featuring the quote, "We are because we belong" by Dr. Njoki Wane—professor and distinguished scholar in Black feminisms, African Indigenous knowledges, and spirituality.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement (CEBSA) continues to witness the remarkable journeys of its alumni—youth who have gone on to pursue post-secondary education, enter the workforce, launch their own initiatives, and lead within their communities. These students are living proof of what's possible when Black youth are equipped with meaningful opportunities, mentorship, and resources to thrive.

Here, we spotlight four alumni whose stories reflect the transformative power of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) and the broader ecosystem of support surrounding it.

## Blessed Martells

A 2024 BSSLP participant and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) graduate, Blessed Martells stands as a powerful advocate for the representation of Black women in the trades. Her Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project, presented at the Fall 2024 YPAR Conference, focused on challenging the underrepresentation of Black women in skilled trades and advancing awareness through advocacy.

Through her BSSLP experiential placement, Blessed connected with equity-focused companies such as BOLT and Tridel, which helped her further explore her passion for electrical work. This fall, she will begin her studies at George Brown College, pursuing her goal of becoming a certified electrical apprentice.

### **Blessed's advice to current Junior Leaders:**

*"Embrace your community, stay engaged in your work, take advantage of every networking opportunity—and have fun along the way!"*



Blessed, BSSLP alumni, poses proudly in her graduation photo.



Dante, BSSLP alumni, poses for the camera before his interview.

## Dante Ellis

Dante was a 2024 BSSLP participant who conducted his YPAR research on the Balance of sports and academic lifestyles for Black students in the TDSB. His placement was with Interact Corporation, where he was able to expand his resume and gain valuable career experience that he took with him to Queen's University, where he completed his first year of undergraduate studies in economics. This summer, he is working at CIBC as he does an 8-month co-op.

**Dante's words of wisdom to BSSLP students:** *"Do your best to collect as much skills and as much value from your placements as you can because you're only there for a short period of time".*

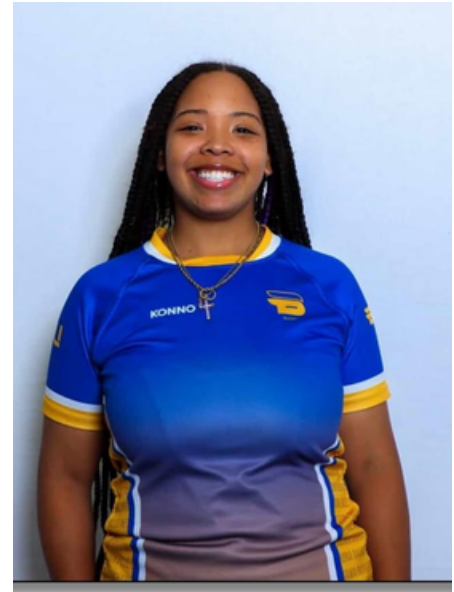


## Michelle Gordon

Michelle began her YPAR journey in 2023, where she explored access to the trades for Black youth. Her work was later showcased at the 2024 YPAR Conference. Michelle completed placements with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and Michael London Design, where she developed networking and technical skills that sparked her growing interest in architecture.

Beyond research and career exploration, BSSLP supported Michelle in strengthening her entrepreneurial skills and growing her small business. A student-athlete and scholarship recipient through the Jamaican Canadian Association and Toronto Inner-City Rugby Foundation (TIRF), Michelle will be entering her 2nd year as a student in the Architectural Science program at Toronto Metropolitan University—and currently works with TIRF.

**Michelle's advice to BSSLP students:** *"Pick a YPAR project that's personal to you and stay authentic to your voice."*



Michelle, BSSLP alumni, smiles proudly in her rugby uniform.

## Nebiyou Timotewos



Nebiyou, BSSLP alumni, pictured at a conference where he served as a speaker.

Nebiyou, affectionately known as "Neb," joined BSSLP in 2022, completing a placement at the Black Legal Action Centre. There, he honed skills in communication, organizational operations, and professional workplace conduct. Now a fourth-year student in Global Political Studies at York University, Neb is working toward certificates in Public Administration and Law, and Science and Business Biotechnology.

He is the founder of three global-impact initiatives—Brothers4Brothers, Communities Care, and The Kindness Loop—and serves as a youth representative for Canada on the Global Youth Impact Council. In recognition of his leadership and advocacy, he received the prestigious Princess Diana Award.

**Nebiyou's message for young leaders:** *"Recognize the power of kindness. Find the strength within your pain. Let your past fuel your future—and dare to dream."*

# CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT'S NEXT FOR OUR LEADERS?

By Tanitia Munroe  
**Senior Research Coordinator**

As we near the final stretch of the 2025 Black Student Summer Leadership Program, our Junior Leaders stand at the threshold of what's next—equipped not just with skills, but with vision, purpose, and the unwavering support of their village.



BSSLP Junior Leader engages in a brainstorming session on storytelling and representation during a data workshop with the research team.



Akyrah BSSLP Junior Leader, poses with her responses from the data workshop facilitated by the research team.

On **Tuesday, August 12th**, we will begin the first day of our annual **Summer Research Symposium**—a powerful three-day celebration of student-led inquiry. This event will highlight the bold questions, critical insights, and community-rooted solutions that have emerged through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

Beyond the symposium, students will continue to access scholarship and bursary support through the Centre's ongoing initiative. These financial pathways affirm what many of our students already know: they belong in every space they enter.

Additional offerings—such as fireside chats, mentorship connections, and fall check-ins—will extend the program's impact well beyond the summer, ensuring students remain connected, supported, and seen.

This edition's theme, *From the Village to the Vision: Leading in Action*, reminds us that leadership is not a solo pursuit. It is born in community, nurtured through mentorship, and sharpened through real-world experiences. Our Junior Leaders are not only imagining better futures—they are actively building them.

And as they continue this journey, one truth remains clear: the vision is already alive in each of them. The village simply helped them see it.



BSSLP Junior Leaders chat with a Staff Mentor. Also pictured is Crystal a returning Junior Leader.



BSSLP Junior Leaders Jaron (left), Tevron (centre), and Tahjay (right) pose in front of their work from the data workshop facilitated by the research team.



# THE FACES BEHIND THE 2025 BSSLP MAGAZINES



**From left to right:** Akaiah Carter-Sam (Incoming Student, McMaster University), Sophia Barnett (Incoming Student, Toronto Metropolitan University), Donielle Francis (Incoming Student, University of Toronto), and Sachiel Andre (Incoming Student, George Brown College).

**Not pictured:** Meron Bayu (Peer Mentor Lead and Second-Year Student, University of Toronto) and Sahra Mohamud (TDSB Educator and PhD Student at OISE).

*Pictured during an experiential learning site visit to the University of Toronto (Scarborough Campus) held for the Peer Mentors of the Toronto District School Board's Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP).*