TCHC Youth Tenant Advisory Committee
September 13, 2025
1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Location: Committee Room 2
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, 2nd Floor

Meeting Minutes

Organization	Participants
YTAC Members	**Present In-Person:** Umu Barrie, Jaheim Green, Fatma Karem, Mishika Khurana, Aiman Sajjad, Sami Shash, Arithka Venukumar, Ilahn Yusuf Samia, Feven Zewdu Present online: Subere Houssein, Vaishali Kaverimanian, Samreen Khan Regrets: **Not Present**: Ilyas Ibrahim, Treasure Lyons
TCHC Staff	Present In-Person: Pablo Vivanco, Director, Tenant Engagement Christine Aina, Manager, Data and Impact Tania Reid, Acting Manager, Tenant Engagement Alejandra Marulanda, Tenant Participation Coordinator Sanitra Henderson, Program Coordinator Libin Ali, Program Coordinator Melissa Rodrigues, Business Planner Chezlie Alexander, Director, Center for the Advancement of Black People
City of Toronto Staff	Present In-Person: Natalie Wythe, Housing Consultant (A), Housing Secretariat Earl Phillips, Programs Coordinator, Housing Secretariat

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Welcome, Introductions, Land, and African Ancestral Acknowledgments

- Meeting Chair, Christine Aina (TCHC's Manager, Data and Impact) welcomed Youth Tenant Advisory Committee members (YTAC) and TCHC staff. The meeting commenced with the reading of the Land and African Ancestral Acknowledgements.

Review of the TCHC Youth Tenant Advisory Committee's Agenda, Minutes, and Action Items:

- Christine introduced the TCHC Staff, followed by introductions of City of Toronto staff and YTAC members.
- Sanitra Henderson (Program Coordinator) facilitated workshop with YTAC members about goal setting. YTAC members proposed the following goals for the group:
    - To become more engaged in their community and show the youth a more positive/fun way of life instead of the negativity going on in the world.
    - Create an opportunity for all TCHC youth to engage/interact by having a youth forum so they can express what is important to them and ways we can meet their needs.
    - Improve youth accessibility to programming, community spaces, and opportunities.
    - Launch a focus group in each of the participants' communities to understand the needs of the youth.
    - Create a crisis solution model within TCHC that can be used for youth across the city of Toronto.
    - Have a tangible "product" or one piece of work that they can showcase to TCHC communities that can connect with everyone.
    - Create a feedback system for youth through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and implement community workshops based on the feedback.

Centre for the Advancement of Black People **(Discussion)**

- Chezlie Alexander (Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Black People) led the discussion on what does (or what would) it look like when young people living in TCHC communities are thriving?
- Participants were asked to share their thoughts and insights on: What does it look like when young people living in your community/neighbourhood are supported in thriving? Imagine thriving,

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imagine living well. Think about whether you've seen other examples of thriving, or whether you just know intrinsically what it means to thrive.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: People should be able to have positive ways to hustle (earn income)
- **YTAC MEMBER**: Resources, and most importantly, knowledge of those resources, and food distribution. Another point is economic opportunities within the community for youth and adults. An example is getting paid to take care of a community garden, and then that garden's produce can go towards distribution and food sharing within the community.
- **YTAC MEMBER**: Accessibility to community spaces, opportunities for work and play, and the presence of community organizations.

- **Chezlie:** What type of community are we looking at? As a young person, whether it's you or how you see others, like peers living in your neighbourhood. If there was a type of service that a community organization should deliver in your community, what service would that be, or what support would that be?

- **YTAC MEMBER**: I think I want a youth-led organization, somewhere you can gather, create your own initiatives and have the chance to lead.

- **Chezlie:** If I put these two bookends together and talk about the opportunities you want, your notion of a thriving community is to gather young people to organize, and lead in driving change, right? These are organizations that support you all, whether to fund you, whether to help facilitate, or whether to build your capacity. Is that fair?

- **YTAC MEMBER**: Thriving is feeling safe in your communities, e.g. communities not controlled by gun violence.
- **YTAC MEMBER**: It is common.
- **YTAC MEMBER**: I was going to the doctor's office, straight from my building, and they had memorial signs for a little boy. It's sad because you see kids walking after school, and they're looking at a picture of another child. To me, these things happen so much, and you hear sirens every day because someone's house got broken into. Even if it's not in housing, there is always something going on.

- **Chezlie:** What role can we as individuals play? I know this is hard. This is a big, heavy thing. What role can we play, whether it's individual, or is there something else we can do? Is this something worth putting our minds to? Where do we fit into this solution?

- **YTAC MEMBER**: Majority of offenders are young people. Young people typically have no other options, have free time, and they don't have other responsibilities or a sense of belonging within a community. I don't know of any Toronto Community Housing after-school programs. Youth will go in the wrong direction because of that lack of responsibility, so we can take the initiative to create programming for youth that is accessible.

- **Chezlie**: I'm hearing beyond spaces for young people to gather safely and resources for young people, engaging with one another in building safe communities. TCHC must be more proactive in engaging youth from early on, right? We have a lot of program spaces. We should program and activate these spaces to provide opportunities for young people who need to be a part of something. The other job is to find out where they fit in. If we don't facilitate fitting in, someone else will facilitate them fitting in. So, what I'm hearing is that there's space to lead some of this and it needs to be supported and invested in. Otherwise, youth will land in a less positive place.

- **Chezlie:** I want you to think of two or three ways of what that would look like. Paint a picture for me. Give me two sentences as to what that looks like, and then we'll circle back and speak.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: There were two things, the lack of community spaces. I think a lot of times you should know your neighbours by name, it's important.

- **Chezlie:** I'm hearing two things, maybe three things. One, just around role model for mentorship, but more than mentorship we need sponsorship. I don't know all communities, but black communities have this way of forming. Gathering is important.
- It's important to see each other, and to your point, to be able to have communities where we can meet in the park or in an intergenerational playground. It's important for folks to be able to facilitate events

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beyond a barbecue. Several different opportunities are important so that they can get to know each other.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: I like mentorship opportunities, where you see people in these different fields of life. I think you must believe in yourself and say I can do this. Consistent mentorship should start early.

- **Chezlie:** Consistent mentorship starts early on. What is local leadership? How do we cultivate local leadership? Everybody is a leader. You can create an impact on your own. So how do we prepare? How do we prepare our young people, knowing the ball's going to be in their hands, to do something, and start? Sometimes, they're going to have the ball in their hand and hold it for too long, leading to bad shots. How can we use that so that negative personal energy can be rechanneled? I imagine some of it is finding opportunities for the leaders. Focusing on 14-year-olds as leaders to younger ones like 12-year-olds. 12-year-olds as leaders to 10-year-olds etc. That is something that we need to be doing and cascading up.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: How you said that was great. I work in a program for students and science. Their goal basically is to provide mentorship, but it starts with youth. It's cool to see the closeness in age, and it makes sense.

- **Chezlie:** I was at Visions of Science, who had an event at Daniel's Spectrum. What's interesting is that we talked about cascading up. We also talked about different programs and services in the community. Now beyond this notion, we have examples of organizations that do some of this like Visions of Science, and Boys, and Girls clubs. So, we should be making space for more of those types of organizations to come in and support our own people. That sounds like a good idea.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: I'm listening to everyone's comments, and something that really stood out was resources. I know when we talk about resources, we talk about numbers and budgeting. I think the big question comes down to how much the budget is. I think applying for grants and learning that process will help communities gain more

resources. The second question was thriving. I think thriving happens when you build spaces; and we need to build. TCHC should have more spaces. While there are some spaces with standard hours, and we do need AODA regulations and a lot of other things, we also need to go past the minimum requirements. So, build spaces where youth feel happy and proud. Opportunities, education, inspiration and clarity, are needed because youth are going through so many things simultaneously in their lives.

- **Chezlie:** What gets in the way? What are the policies, programs, and practices that undermine us thriving? When I say thriving here, we're not just talking about thriving as a random abstract notion. We mean thriving as a destination, not thriving as an emotion, but thriving as a real space. I say that because I go through spaces and I see black people thrive, queer people thrive. I see women thrive in these different spaces because they've created a space. When I was a young kid, there was a significant challenge around unplanned pregnancies, particularly black girls. Not exclusively, but there was a particular narrative. There was intentional or not, a wraparound sort of effort. Black girls right now are attending university and post grad at higher rates than any other demographic. In Canada and the US, more black girls are graduating with master's degrees than anybody else. That didn't happen back in my time. We set a destination and said we're going to move towards that. Yes, things get in the way, and we know those things. However, position yourselves as you look to advance to be an impact maker. Set and define the impact. Don't define the problem, define the impact. It's hard for us to clean our communities where we see so many challenges, but we can build something to do.

- **YTAC MEMBER**: I was reminded of this event that I attended at my church, and it really helped me. A lot of kids don't know where to go because they don't even understand where they can go. They don't know all the resources. Having Toronto Community Housing explain why they're in school, what particular careers look like, and having panels with a broad range of different courses would be helpful. Then they can choose which resonates the most with them and break out into groups. They can choose who they would like to speak with and ask questions. This goes back to your first question on local leadership. I think that this is a good option.

- **Chezlie:** When challenges arise in your communities, do we know who we can turn to? Does TCHC do something? Are we doing something specific within communities? Do we need CSU maybe? How do we know where we can get support when something turns into a crisis or even before?

- **YTAC MEMBER**: I think more support with mental health. Mental health can be taboo for some, and is very sensitive and personal. You want to keep it and protect it and hold it to yourself, which is due diligence, and I think that makes sense. Find a place to sit with your friends and talk because we heal each other naturally. We're tribal in nature and we're a community. I think when we sit with each other and have conversations, we can create warmer spaces. We also need more access to spaces. Conversations save lives and there are so many ways to heal. Having healthy banter and mental health awareness in more spaces is needed. Maybe we need more basketball spots and gyms in our buildings etc.

- **Chezlie:** You guys are real. I know this is your first meeting, and you guys are just getting through this process. Anything that I can do to support or if there's something that I can help you with, just reach out. More importantly, as a collective, if there are things that you all are trying to do that need hands to help move it along, or funds, we may be able to support. Each year we have Center dollars called Center Funds, e.g. $50,000 for the future. We also have microgrants up to $5,000 for local community leaders. I appreciate you guys and I'm excited for this group; I'll reach out and come back!

Closing Remarks, Action Items
- Closing remarks from chair Christine Aina
- As part of the meeting, YTAC members participated in a professional development activity of headshot photography sessions throughout the meeting

Action Items
- Explore youth-led chairing opportunities for YTAC young adults
- Plan next meeting - December or January

- Continue building momentum through quarterly meetings, with potential for other smaller meetings and mentorship opportunities in between
- Identify best location/ time and space to meet
- Work on developing terms of reference