

# **Children's Aid Society of Toronto**

## **So(ul) Journ(ey) II**

**2008**



### **EVALUATION REPORT**

**For:** So(ul) Journ(ey) Committee

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## **1.0 Background**

On July 20, 2008, 36 youth and 12 chaperones from the Greater Toronto area embarked on a cultural pilgrimage to Halifax, Nova Scotia. "Soul Journey" II 2008 encapsulated seven days of cultural learning and activities aimed at gaining a better understanding of the ancestry of African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian heritages.

So(ul) Journ(ey) II evolved out of a mentoring initiative geared towards providing youth of African descent, receiving support from CAS of Toronto, with an interactive educational component. This education was specifically targeted towards these youth having a better understanding of African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian history. This trip helped young people and their chaperones have a better understanding of the cultural, spiritual experiences of their ancestors. It is believed that this experience has had a beneficial impact on these young people's self esteem and will be a positive memory from their involvement with our Agency.

The 31 youth involved in the Soul Journey II sojourn were Crown Wards, Society wards or adolescents receiving services from the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAS of Toronto). The trip was designed to include youth from many different cultural backgrounds and not just those exclusively of African-Canadian or Caribbean-Canadian backgrounds. Accompanying these adolescents were chaperones, which included foster parents and staff volunteers from the CAS of Toronto community.

The Soul Journey agenda included visits to cultural and spiritual landmarks coordinated to raise CAS of Toronto's youth awareness of their Caribbean and African ancestral heritages. Included in the itinerary were festivities celebrating culture, religious observances, and tours of African-Canadian settlement sites. Examples of activities included a Baptist United Church observation and site visits to the Maritime Museum, a local Black Cultural Centre, Africville, and a tour of the freedom schooner, Amistad. These activities served as cultural touchstones and helped the youth and their chaperones understand the trials and tribulations of an enslaved people. Interspersed throughout the week were picnics, musical entertainment, and whale watching. The group was housed in university dormitory dwellings.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Sample and Measurement**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach that included quantitative and qualitative data derived from questionnaires and telephone or focus group follow-up interviews. In July 2008, 31 of the 36 youth (86 %) completed an evaluation

form designed to gather their overall perceptions, immediately preceding the trip. A separate evaluation form designed for chaperones was completed by 11 of the 12 caregivers (91%). The questionnaire tools were designed utilizing open and closed-ended question format.

Six months after the trip follow-up feedback was obtained from eight youth through telephone interviews. As well, eight chaperones participated in either telephone interviews or a focus group conducted February 5, 2009 at CAS of Toronto. Follow-up data comprised of four questions that specifically posed questions regarding the longer-term impact of Soul Journey and any specific changes that may have improved the excursion.

<i>Youth Evaluation</i>	(n=31)	See Appendix A
<i>Chaperone Evaluation</i>	(n=11)	See Appendix B
<i>Follow-Up Questions</i>	(n=8 youth); (n=8 chaperones)	See Appendix C

The Youth and Chaperone Evaluation tools consisted of satisfaction and outcome questions, either in the form of a quantitative, Likert-type scale or a qualitative narrative format. Youth forms consisted of 18 questions and completion of chaperone forms comprised 20. Questions were categorized into areas designed to gather participant's satisfaction with trip content, cultural knowledge obtained, and how that information may be applied to respondents' personal lives. Information was also sought regarding the importance of chaperones to Soul Journey, recommendations to others, and ratings regarding overall evaluation. Additional questions specific to chaperone form asked questions pertaining to their experiences in preparation for the trip.

Follow-Up data collection comprised of four narrative questions, similar for both youth and adults. These questions asked:

- Q1 How Soul Journey had made a difference in that individual's life?
- Q2 How the respondent applied Soul Journey to their personal lives?
- Q3 Changes that may improve Soul Journey?
- Q4 Interest in participation in an ongoing Soul Journey group?

## **2.2 Data Analysis**

Data derived from these evaluation tools was analyzed either through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (15<sup>th</sup> version) or qualitative thematic analysis matrices. Quantitative analysis utilized univariate tests (e.g. mean, frequency). All raw data derived was assigned a non-identifying code. Follow-up information from telephone interviews and focus group were recorded verbatim into a table format and analyzed thematically for content. Any names or other personal information was removed.

### 3.0 Results

*Table 1 – Summary of Study Findings for Chaperones*

Table 1	Study Questions	Outcome	Evidence n=11		Source
			% Agree	"Strongly Agree" & "Agree"	
<b>Trip Content</b>	Responsibilities clear	Yes	91%	"Strongly Agree" (55%) "Agree" (36%)	Self-Report
	Trip content clear	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree" (73%) "Agree" (27%)	Self-Report
	Trip goals understood	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree" (91%) "Agree" (9%)	Self-Report
	Attractions relevant to trip goals	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree"(100%)	Self-Report
<b>Knowledge Gained regarding African Canadian history/ culture</b>	Increased knowledge re- heritage African-Cdn descendents of the slave experience	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree" (91%) "Agree" (9%)	Self-Report
	Increased appreciation of systemic biases in N. America today	Yes	91%	"Strongly Agree" (82%) "Agree" (9%)	Self-Report
	Increased understanding- individual cultural heritage	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree"(100%)	Self-Report
	Increased esteem re- individual cultural heritage	Yes	100%	"Strongly Agree" (80%) "Agree" (20%)	Self-Report
<b>Overall Evaluation</b>	Importance of chaperones	Yes	100%	"Yes" (100%)	Self-Report
	Recommend Soul Journey to others	Yes	100%	"Yes" (100%)	Self-Report
	Overall satisfaction with Soul Journey	Yes	100%	"Excellent" (70%) "Good" (30%)	Self-Report

*Table 2 – Summary of Study Findings for Youth*

Table 2:	Study Question	Outcome	Evidence n=31		Source
			% Agree	"Strongly Agree" & "Agree"	
<b>Trip Content</b>	Goals of trip understood	Yes	90%	"Strongly Agree" (48%) "Agree" (42%)	Self-Report
	Attractions relevant to trip goals	Yes	90%	"Strongly Agree" (55%) "Agree" (35%)	Self-Report
	Attractions stimulated learning- African/Canadian history/culture	Yes	86%	"Strongly Agree" (57%) "Agree" (29%)	Self-Report
<b>Knowledge Gained Regarding African-Canadian history/ culture</b>	Increased knowledge re- heritage of African-Cdn descendents of slave experience	Yes	86%	"Strongly Agree" (54%) "Agree" (32%)	Self-Report
	Increased appreciation of systemic biases in N. America today	Yes	80%	"Strongly Agree" (50%) "Agree" (30%)	Self-Report
	Increased understanding- individual cultural heritage	Yes	93%	"Strongly Agree" (58%) "Agree" (35%)	Self-Report
<b>Overall Evaluation</b>	Chaperones important to trip	Yes	82%	"Yes" (82%) "Undecided" (18%)	Self-Report
	Recommend Soul Journey to Others	Yes	93%	"Yes" (93%)	Self-Report
	Overall satisfaction with Soul Journey	Yes	93%	"Excellent" (74%) "Good" (19%)	Self-Report

### 3.1 Analysis of Youth Results

#### 3.1.1 Youth: Quantitative Self-Report Data

Thirty-one of the thirty-six youth (86.1% participation rate) on the trip participated in the Youth Self-Report evaluation. Overwhelmingly, nine-out-of-ten (90%) of the teens either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that goals of Soul Journey were understood with similar findings that attractions were relevant to trip objectives; 86% of youth either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that attractions stimulated Afro-Canadian culture (although 14% were “neutral” in that response); 86% of youth either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the trip increased their knowledge of Afro-Canadian heritage; 80% of youth reported either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to increased appreciation of systemic biases as a result of Soul Journey; 92% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the trip led to an increased understanding of their cultural heritage; 84% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they feel better about their heritage because of the trip; interestingly, while 82% indicated the chaperones were important to the success of the Soul Journey 2008 trip, 18% (nearly one-in-five) were “undecided”. Finally, 93% of youth respondents would recommend Soul Journey to others and 93% indicated “good” to “excellent” satisfaction with the overall trip. See Table 3.

Table 3: Youth Results of Self-Report Survey

Table 3: Youth Results		# Youth n=31	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	I understood the goals for the trip	31	48%	42%	3.2%	3.2%
2	The attractions were relevant to the goals of the trip	31	55%	35%	9.7%	
3	The attractions stimulated my learning about African Canadian history/culture	28	57%	29%	14%	
6	My knowledge increased regarding the heritage of African Canadian/Americans who are descendents of the slave experience in North America	28	54%	32%	14%	
7	I am more appreciative of the systemic biases that African Canadian/Americans still face in North America today	30	50%	30%	10%	10%
9	Due to Soul Journey my understanding of my cultural heritage increased	26	58%	35%	7%	
13	The chaperones were important to the success of the trip	28	Yes		Not Decided	No
			82%		18%	~
14	I would recommend Soul Journey to other youth in care	28	Yes		Not Decided	No
			93%		4%	3%
15	My overall satisfaction with the quality of the Soul Journey trip	27	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
			74%%	19%	7%	~

### 3.1.2 Youth: Qualitative Self-Report Data

#### KEY YOUTH THEME: **EMPOWERMENT**

The overall theme of the Soul Journey youth feedback is *empowerment*. It was evident during the analysis that the youth learned a great deal about African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian history and how these people overcame significant adversities to achieve success. Youth appeared to internalize this message, writing poignant, bold, emotional responses regarding their perceptions of the trip. Three sub themes were identified: *history*, *cultural identity*, and *motivation*.

##### **Sub Theme: History**

*Amistad appeared to have the greatest impact on the youth participants. More than one third of the youth identified Amistad as the attraction that had the most significant importance to them. An additional one-in-six stated the most relevant attraction was a combination of Amistad and meeting the Chief of Ghana. The magnitude of the Amistad was primarily learning about its history. Prior to the trip the youth were unaware of the significant history of Amistad and other attractions. Soul Journey clearly provided them with a greater understanding what was endured during that time.*

- Y23 "Amistad gave me a chance to experience what really happened "  
Y14 "I had not previously known struggles of the Black people"  
Y10 "The Chief of Ghana made me realize kids are the future and we must lead in a positive way"

##### **Sub Theme: Cultural Identity**

*Along with learning about the history of the various attractions, youth came to appreciate and understand their ancestry and cultural links to the past. It was clear from comments that youth were impressed with understanding the strength and perseverance required of those fighting to survive. Through raising cultural awareness youth appear to have internalized elements of the trip into their own individual and collective sense of identities.*

- Y1 "We should live in honour of our ancestors and do right by them"  
Y23 "I will apply Chief's advice to my life"  
Y26 "I understand what my ancestors went through which makes us the people we are today"  
Y9 "We are all mixed up and every much the same. We all share the motherland Africa together"

##### **Sub Theme: Motivation**

*Many youth commented on how understanding the triumphs and tribulations experienced by African Canadian ancestors provides a tangible example of overcoming adversity and rising to life's challenges.*

- Y1 "To take everything learned and use it as my guidance in life"  
Y6 "That you came to be happy and things guide you through your troubles"  
Y10 "In my mind, I will always feel 'go big or go home' that I can do what I want, be who I want to be"  
Y15 "Entire trip was culturally strengthening and empowered me as a young African Canadian woman"

Y8 "To be a better person emotionally and mentally"

**KEY YOUTH THEME:  
COMMUNICATION**

It was clear that for the youth communication played a major role during the entire Soul Journey experience. This theme was woven through the itinerary of activities that utilized an active learning style and engaging dialogue of oral history. Youth spoke often and passionately about the value of participating in such activities as Amistad and talking to the Chief of Ghana.

Two sub-themes emerged from the content and thematic analysis: Youth wanting to *transfer their Soul Journey knowledge to others* and the unintended benefit of the trip helping in their more global *social development need*.

**Sub Theme: Transferring Soul Journey Knowledge to Others**

*Youth appeared enthusiastic to share their Soul Journey experiences with others. Soul Journey imparted knowledge that youth desire to teach others.*

Y31 "I will talk to my grandfather"

Y 26 "I will tell people what I have learned"

Y 21 "...useful in school"

Y11 "I will tell my family; the memory of Soul Journey will be in my heart"

**Sub Theme: Social Development**

*A final sub-theme that arose was the social development that evolved for youth participating on this trip. Many youth had no previous knowledge of their chaperones or peers that were selected as roommates, which required considerable flexibility and adaptability to change. The majority of youth appeared to rise to the occasion and utilized Soul Journey as a social learning experience in addition to the more overt cultural education that could be observed. Youth also appeared to recognize the patterns of disorganization that arose within the small minority of adolescents that caused behavioural disruptions. Soul Journey can also be viewed as an opportunity for personal growth and social development.*

Y9 "I've met people, learned something new, and had fun"

Y25 "Friendship, love, teamwork"

Y26 "I would improve my attitude and try my best to try new stuff"

Y1 "Really appreciative of what was done. You really did change me and make me a better person. I will never forget the friends and people met on this trip"

Y5 "I do appreciate all the staff; everyone was so understanding, respectful, and considerate"

Y4 "Improve youth attitude"

### 3.1.3 Youth: Recommendations

*One-quarter of youth said “no” – none noted and another quarter “did not respond” to the question.*

*However, the remaining half gave various suggestions for improvements, with the majority desiring a better screening process for trip participants as well as recommendations regarding increased trip organization.*

- Y1 “Change age to include older youth.”
- Y2 “The people chosen to come.”
- Y2 “That the chaperones would be willing to work with different kids.”
- Y9 “There should have been a bit more trust with the youth.”

### 3.1.4 Youth: Additional Comments

*Overall, it appears the trip was transforming for many of the youth.*

- Y3 “Soul Journey should be opened to the community. ”
- Y10 “I can’t wait until the next trip and hope I can go.”
- Y9 “A stepping stone.”
- Y10 “Life changing.”
- Y 14 “Inspiring”
- Y4, Y5 & Y27 “Awesome.”
- Y29 “Soul”lified”

## 3.2 Analysis of Chaperone Results

### 3.2.1 Chaperone: Quantitative Self-Report Data

Eleven of the twelve chaperones participated in the Chaperone Self-Report Evaluation. A little over half (57%) had a foster parent relationship to one of the youth on the trip; the other 43% did not have a specified relationship. Of the chaperones, three-quarters (75%) were first-time attendants and the remainder had attended the Soul Journey I trip in 2006.

As is evident in Table 1 –Summary of results, the chaperones were very positive regarding the trip preparation, experience and its outcomes.

Regarding “*Trip Preparation*” 91% either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they received clear direction on chaperone responsibilities; 100% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” to receiving clear content agenda, that trip goals were understood; that site attractions were relevant to trip goals, and the trip stimulated their interest in Afro-Canadian culture; 80% “strongly agreed” the resources provided were helpful in the trip preparation.

With “*Trip Experience*” and “*Trip Outcomes*” all 11 chaperones noted the Soul Journey experience increased their knowledge base of African-Canadian heritage; 92% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” to an increased appreciation of systemic biases that currently confront Afro-Canadians; for the chaperones with an African lineage, all indicated the trip advanced their understanding of cultural heritage increased; and 88% felt better about their cultural heritage as a result of Soul Journey.

All eleven felt chaperones were important to the trip’s success, would recommend a subsequent trip to others, and all were satisfied with the Soul Journey trip. See Table 4.

Table 4: Chaperone Results		# Chaperones	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
1	My responsibilities as a chaperone were clear to me prior to the trip	n=11	55%	36%	9%	
2	The Soul Journey trip content was clear	n=11	73%	27%		
3	Resource material/training was helpful in preparing me for my trip duties/responsibilities	n=10	80%			10%
4	I understood the goals for the trip	n=11	91%	9%		
5	The attractions were relevant to Trip goals	n=11	100%			
6	The attractions stimulated my learning about African Canadian history/culture	n=11	100%			
9	My knowledge increased re- heritage of African Cdn/Americans who are descendents of the slave experience in North America	n=11	91%	9%		
10	I am more appreciative of the systemic biases that African Cdn/Americans still face in North America today	n=11	82%	9%	9%	
12	Due to Soul Journey my understanding of my cultural heritage increased	n=10	100%			
13	Due to Soul Journey I feel better about my cultural heritage	n=10	80%	20%		
16	The chaperones were important to the success of the trip	n=11	Yes		Not Decided	No
			100%		~	~
17	I would recommend Soul Journey to other youth in care	n=11	Yes		Not decided	No
			100%			
18	My overall satisfaction with the quality of the Soul Journey trip	n=10	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
			70%	30%	~	~

### 3.2.2 Chaperone: Qualitative Self-Report Data

#### KEY CHAPERONE THEME: **EDUCATION**

Analysis of the chaperones comments found one key or overall theme when asked about the Soul Journey experience and impact, it was: “education”. It was evident that from their own personal perspective, the chaperones learned a great deal about the African people’s history in Canada, their struggles, and their achievements. Sub themes were: *history, motivation and connections* - elements that both resonated with the participants and what the chaperones indicated they acquired from the attractions on the trip.

##### Sub Theme: **History**

*The attraction that had the greatest impact on the chaperones: Amistad. Almost half of the participants noted that Amistad had significant importance to them above all other attractions. The magnitude of the Amistad learning was primarily about the history of the early African-Canadian’s. Many chaperones were unaware of the significant historical story of what the people endured at Amistad and other attractions.*

- C4 “Amistad/Africville, I was not aware of their history so it was very enlightening.”
- C8 “Touring the Amistad because it brought up close and personal with what took place in the past.”
- C1 “Amistad, the history, the African museum.”

##### Sub Theme: **Motivation**

*Along with learning about the history of the various attractions, came the realization of what people of African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian heritage had endured and their subsequent victories over these struggles. It was clear from the comments that much of the learning on Soul Journey understood the strength and perseverance required of those fighting to survive.*

- C5 “Africville – I feel they were pushed out of their environment but still made such an improvement on their lives with such a great celebration.”
- C7 “No one can destroy a will to survive!”

##### Sub Theme: **Connections**

*Many participants discovered their connectedness with themselves, with others, with others whom they would never have thought about. It is this awareness that created a collective feeling.*

- C5 “It is so great to see how we are connected, so much in common.”
- C3 “Significance of Black history here in Nova Scotia and the link between Black people no matter where we originate...So happy to feel the oneness.”
- C8 “How connected I am to others in far away places.”

KEY CHAPERONE THEME:  
**COMMUNICATION**

It was clear “communication” was an essential element and a major theme in the trip’s experience. Communication took on many layers: Communication of the past to the present, from the present to the future and across generations. The chaperones relayed that the preponderance of their learning came from narratives told by historians and meeting those with stories of rich history, such as the Chief of Ghana or Bill Pinckney. It is through these channels of communication that the desire arose to continue dialogs about their experiences – today and in the future. Three sub-themes emerged from their data: *understanding roots, sharing history and education.*

**Sub Theme: Understanding Roots**

*Understanding one’s roots, informs one’s growth and links to other branches. This metaphor resonated with participants and gave them both the reason and desire to disseminate the stories of struggles and successes of their ancestors.*

- C4 “Knowing that my roots also extended to Canada, Jamaican’s and the Jamaica maroons are part of the Africville and Nova Scotia history.”
- C5 “The friendliness of the Nova Scotians and to learn about my roots.”
- C1 “Knowing more about my roots.”

**Sub Theme: Sharing History**

*After learning about their respective histories, the desire to share information intensified. Almost three quarters of the chaperone respondents expressed the aspiration to impart what they have learned and experienced about their heritage and the struggles people went through in the hopes of inspiring others.*

- C2 “To help others to know more about their Black heritage.”
- C3 “Explore more and to pass on to my family.”
- C4 “Share this new knowledge and experiences with my family and friends.”
- C5 “I will be able to tell others or correct them about the truth of slavery.”
- C7 “Keep the stories alive by sharing it.”

**Sub Theme: Educate**

*Many of the chaperones indicated they wanted to share their history after the trip’s conclusion; and the reason for this sharing - to educate others. The chaperone’s want to educate people from “within” and “outside” of their community in the hopes that a new language can be used, that a greater appreciation for what their ancestors went through will occur, that a change can happen regarding the current oppressive ways of thinking within society.*

- C8 “I will educate others to the best of my ability.”
- C9 “Educate future youth that I come in contact with.”
- C10 “Relay teachings to others, integrate new language.”

### 3.2.3 Chaperones' Recommendations

Two areas were identified by the chaperones as recommended changes:

❖ *Enhanced preparation prior to the voyage.*

Chaperones thought that workshops and opportunities for relationship building prior to the trip might be beneficial for both the youth and chaperone.

❖ *Pre-screen youth*

Chaperones suggested introducing a pre-screen process for youth to ensure there is an understanding on the goals of the trip and agreement on outcomes. Because the experience is so unique and distinctive the selection team must make certain the youth's ambitions correspond to those of Soul Journey.

- C3 "Workshops and preparation for youth and chaperones before attending."
- C10 "Discipline was problematic."
- C7 "More background information on those youth with whom you may not be familiar."
- C4 "Selection process. Better prepare youth for the trip."

### 3.2.4 Chaperones: Additional Comments

- C1 "The experience on this trip was so great it is something I will remember for a lifetime."
- C5 "With this experience I would like to learn more on future trips. I do appreciate all of the staff...you are to be commended for the great leadership. Everyone was so understanding, respectful and considerate. I will embrace this experience. For all of us this is a great GIFT."
- C7 "I loved it. New lessons, new people, new sights, new experience."
- C8 "This trip was the best experience I have had as it relates to my cultural background."

## 4.0 Follow-Up Data

### 4.1 Youth: Follow Up Interviews

Poor response rates limited the analysis of the follow-up data for those youth participating in Soul Journey. Telephone contact was attempted with 25 of the 31 youth, for which eight were successful. The period of follow-up data collection occurred during the months of February and March 2009, which allowed youth seven to eight months' reflection after the July 2008 trip.

Findings suggest that Soul Journey has had a long-term impact on the personal lives of youth participants.

YOUTH THEME:

**Soul Journey - Inspirational and Motivating**

- Y-F4 "I got really inspired and have started to make a difference in our society. I am making my own organization called "Making Actual Difference" which is helping youth to stay on the positive side – not taking drugs, concentrating on studies."
- Y-F7 "It made me have a different view on life. I'm thankful that slavery isn't in Canada or the U.S. To think that there are some people that come from Canada and were slaves is really astonishing."
- Y-F8 "Soul Journey made me a calmer person. It made me a lot happier because before I went on the trip I wasn't doing so well. It really meant a lot to me to know that out of the kids at Toronto CAS I got picked. I think it is best thing that CAS has ever done for me and I am so grateful."

YOUTH THEME:

**Soul Journey - Social Development**

A sub-theme that carried over from initial post-trip findings for youth was their reflection on *social development* integrated within the *educational component* of the excursion.

Soul Journey appears to have indirectly provided a learning opportunity in-group dynamics, which seems to have provided a forum to strengthen youths' interactions with others. Youth respondents reported that a small minority of their peers caused the biggest disruption; they expanded on their previous comments noted in the evaluation forms, regarding the "pros and cons" of the social aspects of the trip, especially when spending extended periods of time with people unfamiliar to you.

- Y-F3 "Usually foster kids don't interact that well with other foster kids when other kids have their own families they don't have the same understanding. It was good to interact with other foster kids... it made the trip go smoothly."
- Y-F8 "Being around so many different kids in foster care made me much more appreciative and calm. It was the best week of my life so far."
- Y-F5 "Some of the kids were fooling around and stuff. If the whole trip was like the second half it would be a whole lot better. The second half was perfect in context and information."

## 4.2 Chaperones: Follow-Up Interviews

Chaperones were also contacted seven to eight months after the July 2008 trip. Follow-up data were gathered from eight of the eleven chaperones through either a telephone interview or through participation in a focus group (February 5, 2009). The chaperone's confirmed the findings from the self-report analysis as well as provided further clarification for improvements to Soul Journey.

An additional theme emerged from the chaperones - the impact Soul Journey has had on their outlook on fostering youth from different cultures and parenting youth in general.

### *CHAPERONE THEME:*

#### ***Connecting Children to Their Culture, Being a Better Foster Parent***

- C-F7 "Since Soul Journey I really make a point of connecting kids with their culture. Deep down inside the children I care for are missing their own culture. I find out all the holidays, and the traditions they celebrate when children come into my home now. "
- C-F3 "It continues to evoke household conversations with foster sons about topics of race, tolerance for people's differences and the importance of knowing where we come from. "
- C-F4 "Since Soul Journey I encourage young people to achieve their dreams and emphasize the importance of education. "
- C-F8 "I have learned to listen more."

### *CHAPERONE THEME:*

#### ***Cultural Pride***

Soul Journey appears to have had a long-term impact on the chaperones desire, understanding and belief in the importance in strengthening cultural pride through a deeper understanding of ancestry and heritage. Even those caregivers that were not of African-Canadian descent commented on the inspirational messages of trip activities to confront challenges, overcome adversity, and tolerance for diversity that could applied to all racial/ethnic origins.

- C1 "I have increased pride for my heritage."
- C5 "I wear my Soul Journey t-shirt with pride and everywhere I go I am eager to discuss my Soul Journey trip with others."
- C6 "I bought a book that had a quote that really made an impression - "People without history is like a tree without roots." Culture is who we are. If they (foster children) don't know [theirs] they won't be able to grow."
- C2 "I can share with my adopted Black daughter Soul Journey memories. I attempt to locate stories for my children on themes of resilience, courage, racial differences and tolerances."

### 4.3 Youth and Chaperones: Additional Recommendations

The youth and the chaperones had joint recommendations:

- ❖ A better screening process - select only those youth emotionally mature to manage a weeklong trip.
- ❖ Additional trip opportunities –almost all of the follow-up respondents wanted to participate in another Soul Journey excursion.
- ❖ Pre-Group “Getting to know you” opportunities - to allow youth and chaperones opportunities to get to know each other prior to the trip.
- ❖ Key Lead Essential to Success - many youth and chaperones said Michael Bowe was integral to the success of the trip, his vision, his expert leadership, his conflict-resolution abilities, and his organizational skills contributed to the success of the trip. All subsequent trips will require such expertise.

#### Youth specific recommendations:

- ❖ Healthier menu options
- ❖ Allow more youth in common area in dorms
- ❖ More “youth” time (without chaperones)

#### Chaperone specific recommendations:

- ❖ More personal space
- ❖ More “chaperone” time (without youth)

### 5.0 Interpretation of Findings

Soul Journey 2008 was a successful endeavour as defined through the achievement of its intended outcomes:

- √ Building and enhancing awareness of Black cultural history in Canada
- √ Advancing knowledge, appreciation and understanding of Africian-Canadian heritage

Soul Journey positively impacted its participants well beyond the cultural learning goal; its benefits grow and extend far beyond the trip’s return date. The experience appears to have empowered participants on an individual, a group, and a collective level. For example, for the chaperones, Soul Journey seems to have changed many of their perspectives on fostering youth with diverse backgrounds; the experience of the trip has enhanced their appreciation of the developmental AND cultural needs of youth in care.

For the youth, Soul Journey provided a socio-cultural awakening and inspirational influence that may resonate throughout their lifetime. The Soul

Journey experience promoted youth self-esteem and built resilience. The influence of Soul Journey in this context should not be underestimated given the disadvantaged and marginalized youth population, which CAS of Toronto serves. This experience was especially beneficial to youth living in foster care, who themselves confront loss of family and disconnect with generational history. Soul Journey, for them, appears to have provided a shared link for which they can relate to a common ancestral heritage and build upon their future personal identity.

Youth and chaperones alike reported a small number of adolescents (two to three) who caused a significant disruption of the Soul Journey activities. A large majority of chaperones reported significant stress in supervising and managing the oppositional behaviours of these youth. Youth also expressed a desire to see older, more emotionally mature adolescents selected. Chaperones thought that younger children might more directly benefit from Soul Journey experiences. Despite this aspect being the major stressor for the chaperones and youth, **one hundred percent of all participants reported great satisfaction with the Soul Journey trip; all want to repeat the excursion.**

Michael Bowe, Soul Journey coordinator, received commendation from youth and chaperones alike for his organization and behaviour management skills; he was especially applauded for his contingency planning and leadership abilities.

## 6.0 Recommendations

- 1 Continue to offer the Soul Journey experience to CAS of Toronto youth. Given the trip's ability to connect diverse youth with their heritage and the considerable educational and personal growth that occurs, it is an intervention of importance in its effectiveness as a cultural-meaning; cultural outreach strategy.
- 2 Create an ongoing Soul Journey program or group to address improvement needs and build upon the achieved outcomes. Examples of areas to improve are:
  - a) *Pre-group meetings*: Chaperones/youth become acquainted prior to beginning the trip to allow for more suitable matching for accommodation and supervision.
  - b) *Develop a screening process*: Build it into the program.
  - c) *Ongoing post-group*: Develop an ongoing group to foster messages of youth empowerment, resiliency, social justice, creative problem solving, group decision making.
  - d) *Fundraising*: Assist with ongoing fundraising
  - e) *New Opportunities*: Soul Journey participants provide consultation to CAS of Toronto re- further opportunities to embrace diversity, real-life challenges, and overcoming systemic barriers.
- 3 Examine the feasibility of collaborating with community partners regarding the importance of Soul Journey; it can be duplicated within the community at large.
- 4 Explore funding sources from community and agency stakeholders that can guarantee continuation and sustainability of future Soul Journey trips.