



**Youth Association for Academics Athletics
& Character Education (YAAACE)**

Reliable Disruption Information (RDI)

Open-Source

Information Report Volume #4

“Ontario’s Lost Boys”

Special Black History Month Edition

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“Missing Black Boys”

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Purpose

This report provides Violence Disruption Workers (VDW), community partners, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders with actionable analytical information regarding the growing phenomenon of “Missing Black Boys” across Ontario. It focuses specifically on the **Out of Town (OT) Pipeline**, a criminal recruitment model in which Black youth, often under 18, are exploited by organized crime networks and relocated to Northern Ontario communities to traffic drugs. The report was developed by the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE) and Footsteps 2 Success, operating out of Scarborough. It relies upon publicly available sources and community information to support short term disruption efforts and inform long-term prevention strategies. It also serves as a foundation for program development, legislative advocacy, and coordinated community action.

This information in its current integrated form is a creation of YAAACE the originating agency. As a Special Black History Month Edition it may be copied, shared, and distributed to any interested party. This report contains seventeen (17) pages including the title page. Information contained in this report is from open publicly accessible sources and are provided for reference. Data and location information is currently reliable for appropriate community response action. Any allegation information pertaining to reported offences have not been challenged in court and should not be relied upon for individual decision making. Action and program related considerations must include other reliable source information to best inform any individual or group initiative(s).

Authors

The authors have more than seventy years (70) of combined professional experience working directly and indirectly with Black young people in social, educational, and criminal justice settings. They are respected community program innovators and collaborators working in Toronto. They understand systemic racism and have access to intimate knowledge of the challenges facing young Black people living in dynamic urban environments.

- **David Mitchell:** Is the Senior Director of Operations at YAAACE, a retired Assistant Deputy Minister of Youth Justice Ontario, and the founding President of the Association of Black Law Enforcers (A.B.L.E.). Above all, he is a father dedicated to the safety of young Black men.
- **Andre Fullerton:** Is the Executive Director at Footsteps 2 Success Community Services and former Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Senior Human Rights Advisor. He brings extensive experience in educational advocacy and youth safety. Like Mr. Mitchell, he too is a father driven by a mission to protect the next generation from systemic exploitation.

Terminology & Urban Street Nomenclature

To effectively disrupt cycles of “OT” *and* violent crime; teachers, youth workers, parents, and interested parties must understand “road” language and the terms developed to address gun violence. The following terms and concepts may appear in this report:

OT (Out of Town) - The act of youth leaving Toronto/GTA to travel to Northern Ontario (e.g., Thunder Bay, Sudbury) to sell drugs.

Missing - Unaccounted for; a state where a youth has ceased communication with parents/guardians, causing an immediate safety concern.

Abducted - Kidnapped; often occurring as a result of “taxing” or debt bondage within the OT circuit.

Trap House - A residential location in Northern Ontario used as a hub for drug distribution.

Trapping - The act of selling drugs.

Plug: The source or supplier of narcotics or firearms.

Band - \$1,000 CAD in cash.

Gas - The drugs being sold (typically fentanyl or crack cocaine).

On Roads - The physical journey or commute to Northern Ontario.

OPPs - Opposition; enemies or rival gang members.

Strap/Stick – Firearm (gun)

Digital Violence Accelerant (DVA)- A social media post or other form of digital content, containing explicit or implicit threats, insults, and challenges directed towards rival groups (colloquially known as “OP’s,” meaning opposition). As part of the “acceleration” process explicit or “coded” retaliatory commentary can be observed in the response/like/comment section of a content thread. These posts routinely lead to cycles of retaliatory gun violence.

Prevention - Is specific long term or “upstream” strategies and initiatives, actions, and activity that are focused on stopping gun violence before it occurs. Our prevention activity is facilitated by focusing on the root causes of violence.

Intervention - Is taking specific action where there are credible indicators or warnings that gun violence will imminently occur.

Disruption - Is about stopping violence that is in progress or about to happen.

Reliable Disruption Information (RDI) - Is formally sourced, highly reliable open-source social media information that can be actioned for the purpose of disrupting or mitigating a violent incident.

Reliable Disruption Information has three (3) primary designations:

Imminent - Requires immediate disruptive action(s) without delay to stop a violent incident from occurring. This action may be intuitive and based on situational experiential wisdom.

Evolving - Indicates a developing or unfolding scenario that warrants attention. While it raises sufficient concern to necessitate action, the designation also indicates that the threat or issue is not yet immediate, allowing for the creation of a deliberate detailed plan.

Potential – Indicates a situation requiring monitoring and the inclusion of information that may not be readily available and allow for reasonable preventative measures.

YAAACE has also designated those who are impacted by, or the initiators of gun violence as:

Exposed (Low Risk) - Refers to individuals or groups who have witnessed or been made aware of acts of firearms related violence in their urban environment. The individual(s) has no meaningful ideation related to engaging in reciprocal violence and has low risk safety concerns as it relates to victimization based on their geography of residence. Finally, exposure can be direct or indirect with the individual(s) not having direct knowledge or connection to accessing firearms.

Affiliated (Medium Risk) - Affiliation implies a closer relationship to firearms activity than simple exposure. This potentially involves shared social circles, loyalty, or norms that condone or normalize firearms violence. This includes individuals or groups who have a direct social connection or association with those who perpetrate firearms violence or have been the victim(s) of firearms incidents. Family ties, friendships, formal or informal membership in groups where firearm violence is part of the group's activities and reputation are also elements of affiliation. This individual(s) is a casual participant in community social polarization and may have medium risk safety concerns while having indirect peer related access to firearms.

Involved – (High Risk) Refers to individuals or groups who are directly connected to acts of firearms violence, either as perpetrators or victim(s). This involvement can range from being physically assaulted with a firearm to actively shooting at someone as a “Violence Producer.” This individual(s) is an active participant and promoter of community social polarization with high-risk personal safety concerns, while possessing or having direct access to firearms.

Executive Summary

Overview

This report serves as a critical strategic resource for VDW, policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders. It addresses the "Missing Black Boys" issue in Ontario, specifically examining the Out of Town (OT) Pipeline. This pipeline is a predatory criminal model where organized crime networks recruit Black youth, often minors, from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and relocate them to Northern Ontario for the purpose of drug trafficking. "Trapping" is the only employment opportunity for young people where they do not need a resume to apply, require experience to be competitive, are asked to attend an interview, and are always the "successful candidate."

Developed by YAAACE (Jane and Finch) and Footsteps 2 Success (Scarborough), this document synthesizes over 70 years of professional experience in youth justice, educational advocacy, and community safety.

Recruitment and Exploitation

The OT pipeline is defined by the trans-local expansion of Toronto-based criminal groups into Northern Ontario markets such as Thunder Bay, Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins, and Sault Ste. Marie.

Key Drivers

- **Economic Disparity:** Drugs that retail for \$20 in Toronto can command over \$100 in remote Northern communities.
- **Youth Vulnerability:** High unemployment and systemic marginalization in Northwest Toronto make "quick money" an effective lure.
- **Insulation Strategy:** "Upper Echelons" (ages 21–30) use minors (ages 13–18) to handle high-risk "trapping" (selling). If a "trap house" is raided, the youth face criminal charges while the leadership remains insulated from prosecution.

Common Recruitment Tactics

1. **The Advanced Incentive Hook:** Recruiters provide a "Band" (\$1,000) for luxury goods. Once the money is spent, they demand immediate repayment, forcing the youth into debt bondage to work off the "loan" in the North.
2. **Empty Cheque Scam:** Youth are coerced into providing bank cards for fraudulent deposits, leaving them with massive debt they must "trap" to repay.
3. **Digital Glorification:** Social media platforms (TikTok/Instagram) are used to flaunt luxury lifestyles to glamorize high-risk criminal activity.

Socio-Economic Context

The recruitment focus is primarily linked to the economic landscape of Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Secondary recruitment efforts are focused on the "905" area around Toronto that is home to many suburban vulnerable youth.

Barriers to Legitimate Employment:

- **Transportation:** High costs and long commute times to job clusters near Pearson Airport or Downtown (even with the recent opening of the Finch West LRT).
- **Credential Inflation:** Entry-level roles increasingly require "applied experience" that many marginalized youth cannot access.
- **Neighbourhood Stigma:** Systematic "hiring bias" against applicants from specific postal codes, particularly affecting young Black men.

Understanding the "Road" Language

Effective disruption requires stakeholders to understand the nomenclature of the OT circuit:

- **OT (Out of Town):** Traveling to Northern Ontario to sell drugs.
- **Trap House:** A residential base in the North used for distribution, often seized from vulnerable residents.
- **Plug:** The source or supplier of drugs or firearms.
- **Band** - \$1,000 CAD in cash.

Parental Intervention

Parents are encouraged to foster "Safe Spaces" through active listening and techniques like "Drive-and-Talk" to bypass the pressure of direct eye contact.

Warning Signs of OT Involvement:

- **Unexplained Wealth:** Possession of status items without a known source of income.
- **Behavioral Shifts:** Withdrawal from long-time friends, increased secrecy regarding social media, and sudden changes in sleep patterns.
- **Safety Concerns:** Expressing a sudden need for protection or using gang-linked hand signs and slang.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Immediate Disruption & Intervention

- **Financial Advocacy:** Prioritize assessments for youth with frozen bank accounts to identify the "Empty Cheque Scam" early.
- **DVA Monitoring:** Increase surveillance of social media "favour missions" where recruiters solicit bank accounts.
- **RDI Sharing:** Continue multi-agency collaboration (Probation, TCHC, School Boards) to share data on recruitment trends.

2. Support & Education

- **Restorative Banking:** Partner with the Canadian Bankers Association to create "Restorative Banking" pathways for youth exploited by fraud.
- **Parental Coaching:** Establish non-judgmental programs to help parents recognize signs of recruitment and support children who return from "OT."
- **Financial Immunization:** Implement Gen Z-specific literacy programs focusing on the long-term consequences of banking fraud.

3. Legislative Advocacy

- **New Statutes:** Advocate for legislation similar to Pennsylvania's "Corruption of Minors" statute (18 Pa. C.S. § 6301). This would make it a standalone criminal offense for an adult to entice or encourage a minor to commit a crime, focusing on the adult's role in "corrupting morals" regardless of the minor's conviction.
- **Closing Legal Grey Zones:** Address the limitations of current Human Trafficking and Criminal Organization laws that often fail to meet the evidentiary thresholds required in OT pipeline criminal cases.

Conclusion

The "Missing Black Boys" phenomenon is not merely a series of individual choices but a systemic predatory cycle. Addressing it requires a dual-track approach: immediate disruption of the OT pipeline and long-term prevention through labor market intervention and legislative reform.

Missing Black Boys

In January of 2026 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Investigative Reports show the "Fifth Estate" presented an episode entitled "Missing Black Boys." This episode featured a focus on the recent phenomenon of social media reports of Black boys going missing. There have been many theories articulated about what has been happening to them. They investigated who or what has been luring these boys to remote communities. Young Black boys and men who for one reason or the other find themselves unaccounted for; or have ceased communication with parents/guardians, causing an immediate safety concern are considered missing. The "OT" pipeline represents a trans-local criminal expansion where Toronto-based organized crime groups exploit the higher profit margins available in Northern Ontario's drug markets. The drivers for this activity are:

- **Financial:** Drugs that sell for \$20 in Toronto can command \$100+ in remote northern communities.
- **Social:** Economic marginalization in Northwest Toronto makes the lure of "quick money" highly effective. An eighteen-year-old (18) first year college student recently remarked to Mr. Mitchell after circulating in excess of forty (40) resumes for part time employment. *"I now understand why youth go OT. Trapping is the only job where I don't need a resume or experience, there is no interview and you are always hired."*

The other element of this criminal phenomenon is that "Upper Echelons" (ages 21–30) recruit and use youth (ages 13–18) to perform the high-risk/high exposure drug trafficking. This creates a layer(s) of insulation; if a "trap house" is raided, the involved youth face the charges while the leadership remains safe. This structure provides insulation for the gang leaders while exposing youth to severe criminal charges and jail. This trend calls out for quick Disruptive Action and long-term Prevention strategies.

Socio-Economic Context

In the Jane and Finch community, youth unemployment remains significantly higher than both the provincial and city-wide averages. As of late 2025, while Ontario's youth unemployment rate sat at approximately 15.3%, the rate for youth in the City of Toronto has reached nearly 20%, with historically higher localized spikes in "Neighbourhood Improvement Areas" like Jane and Finch. The youth unemployment rate (ages 15–24) in Toronto was recorded at 19.7% in October 2025.

The Youth Unemployment Rate

While specific, real-time neighborhood-level data is often bundled into broader municipal reports, the following benchmarks define the current landscape for Jane and Finch youth:

- **Jane and Finch Specifics:** The City of Toronto has historically noted that unemployment in this area is consistently higher than the city-wide average (which is currently 8.4% to 9%).
- **Broader Context (2025):** The youth unemployment rate (ages 15–24) in Toronto was recorded at 19.7% in October 2025 (Source: City of Toronto Economic Development Report).
- **Demographic Disparities:** National data from May 2025 highlights that Black youth unemployment (a significant demographic in Jane and Finch) sits at 22%, nearly 8 points higher than the national average (Source: Statistics Canada/City of Toronto).

Four (4) Drivers for Youth (Un)Employment

The following factors are some of the "drivers" or barriers influencing whether youth in the Jane and Finch community can secure and maintain employment.

Geographic & Transportation Barriers

Many entry-level jobs (specifically in retail and warehousing) are clustered in the downtown core or near Pearson Airport. For youth in Jane and Finch, the cost of transit and the time required for commuting act as major deterrents (the recently opened LRT may serve to mitigate this issue.)

- **Specific Insight:** Research from the *United Way Greater Toronto* indicates that transportation costs often consume a disproportionate amount of a youth's potential earnings, making distant jobs financially unviable.

Post-Pandemic "Credential Inflation" & Experience Gaps

There is a growing "mismatch" between the skills youth possess and what employers are demanding.

- **The Driver:** Employers increasingly require "applied experience" or co-ops even for entry-level roles.
- **Local Impact:** Organizations like *JVS Toronto (Jane Finch Mall)* note that many local youth lack the professional networks (social capital) to bypass "hidden" job markets, making them more dependent on high-competition online applications where they are often filtered out due to a lack of prior experience (Source: JVS Toronto/RBC Youth Outlook).

Systemic Discrimination and Neighborhood Stigma

Youth from Jane and Finch report that the "stigma" of their postal code and racial profiling act as invisible barriers during the hiring process.

- **Specific Insight:** The *YouthRex "Jane-Finch Youth Speak Out" report* details how negative perceptions of the community lead to "hiring bias," where employers may view applicants from the area through a lens of risk rather than potential. This is especially prevalent for young Black men in the community.

Precarity and Holistic Barriers

Employment stability in Jane and Finch is heavily driven by "wraparound" needs—factors that happen outside of the workplace but dictate a youth's ability to work.

- **Key Factors:** High rates of housing precarity (overcrowded or unstable housing) and a lack of culturally sensitive mental health support are major drivers of job loss.
- **Source:** *The Jane/Finch Centre (The Spot)* emphasizes that "multi-barriered" youth cannot maintain employment if they are simultaneously navigating food insecurity or the justice system without community-led intervention (Source: Jane/Finch Centre/The Neighbourhood Group).

Key Community Resources

If you are looking for support or more granular data, these local organizations are the primary drivers of youth employment initiatives in the area:

- **JVS Toronto (Jane Finch Mall):** Provides one-on-one job coaching and "Better Jobs Ontario" navigation.
- **The Spot (Yorkgate Mall):** A youth-led space offering "The Youth—Our Future Initiative" (YOFI) and violence prevention programs.
- **Jane Finch Community Ministry:** Focuses on micro-loans for young entrepreneurs and advocacy for Black male youth.

The Recruitment Process in Brief

Youth are lured through various "traps" and incentives:

1. **The Advanced Incentive Hook:** A recruiter gives a youth a "Band" (\$1,000) for "food and clothes." Once spent, the recruiter demands it back. When the youth can't pay, they are "hooked" and forced to go "OT" to work off the debt.
2. **Empty Check Scam:** Youth are asked to provide their bank card to "deposit a check," only to find themselves responsible for thousands in fraudulent debt, which they must "trap" to repay.
3. **Digital Recruitment:** Use of TikTok and Instagram to flaunt luxury lifestyles, making the OT life look like a high-status adventure.

The “Trap House”

"Trap House" refers to a residential property used specifically for the illegal sale and distribution of drugs. The term “Trap House” comes from the idea that once you are in, it is difficult to get out, both for the "employees" and the customers. Criminal organizations typically recruit young people from larger urban centers and transport them to Northern Ontario to remove them from their support systems (family, friends, and local police). They are increasingly transported by rental cars or private vehicles to avoid increasing police surveillance of local bus terminals or airports.

A "Trap House" functions as a high-turnover retail style hub for the sale of drugs. Its operation is designed to be discreet but highly accessible to local buyers with knowledge of its existence. To avoid police detection, gangs often operate in a house for a few days or weeks before moving to a new location. A common tactic for establishing a Trap house is where gang members take over the home of a vulnerable person (such as someone struggling with mental health or addiction) to use it as their base of operation. A young person placed in a “Trap” is responsible for "sitting on the pack" (guarding the drugs), answering the door, or managing the cash. Where there are “Traps” there are guns.

Gangs target Northern Ontario municipalities such as:

- **Thunder Bay** – One of the most significant hubs in the North. It serves as a clearinghouse for drugs destined for remote fly-in Indigenous communities.
- **Greater Sudbury** - Its size and position along Highway 69 and Highway 17 establish it a major operational base for southern gangs.
- **North Bay** – Is known as the "Gateway to the North," and is often the first stop for gangs moving north from the GTA via Highway 11.
- **Sault Ste. Marie** – Is a key location for distribution along the Highway 17 corridor toward Western Canada.
- **Timmins** – Is a major regional hub where high demand and relative isolation lead to high profit margins for trap house operators.

What Parents Should Know: Signs and Indicators

Parents in our community continue to achieve high levels of success with the raising of children. This rewarding and complex obligation is performed without the advantage of a manual while relying on experiential wisdom and pure instinct. Recognizing this we also know that navigating your child’s teenage years can be a challenging journey, and creating a safe (emotionally), non-judgmental space at home can be one of the most powerful ways to support your child’s emotional health.

Building open lines of communication often starts with "active listening," giving them your full attention without immediately jumping to correction or "life lessons," which allows them to feel heard rather than managed.

It is suggested that we acknowledge the unique social pressures our young people face, some of which we did not face based on current access to technology. They face additional issues specific to being Black. They need their feelings validated as they process their identity and place in the world.

By checking in regularly on their emotional well-being, not just their grades or chores, and approaching sensitive topics with curiosity rather than suspicion, you reinforce that you are "there" for them and a safe place to share.

This foundation of trust makes it far more likely they will turn to you when they encounter difficult situations or outside influences. To facilitate "safe" and open connection we provide two potentially helpful techniques:

- *"Drive-and-Talk" (If you have a car) - Use time in the car for heavy conversations; the lack of direct eye contact often makes teens feel less "under the microscope."*
- *Validation First - Before offering advice, try saying, "That sounds really tough, I can see why you feel that way. I am happy you chose me to share it with."*

Parents should also consciously monitor for the presence of one or more of the listed signs or indicators of "OT" involvement. They will usually exceed your child's known income. They include but are not limited to:

- Sudden possession of "status" items. Having extra cash, new clothes, phones, or items they cannot explain.
- Asking for money more often or the absence of asking for money

High-End Indicators & Approximate Costs

- Moose Knuckles / Canada Goose Parka: \$1,000 – \$1,500
- Air Jordans / Balenciaga Sneakers: \$300 – \$1,200
- Nike Tech Fleece Suit: \$250 – \$400
- iPhone 16/17 Pro: \$1,500 – \$2,000
- Apple AirPods Max: \$700

Social & Behavioral Changes

- Withdrawal from family, long-time friends, or usual activities
- Spending much more time on social media, especially being secretive about accounts, new followers, or private messaging

- Sudden new friends with little explanation of who they are or where they met (online, at school, in the neighborhood)
- Avoiding questions or becoming defensive when asked about friends or plans.
- Changes in attitude: more aggressive, anxious, or emotionally flat

School & Routine

- Drop in grades or loss of interest in school.
- Increased skipping class or unexplained absences from school
- Staying out later than usual or lying about where they have been.
- Sudden changes in sleep patterns

Appearance & Symbols

- Wearing specific colours, logos, or clothing styles consistently
- New tattoos, drawings, or graffiti-style writing in notebooks or on belongings.
- Using hand signs, slang, or nicknames linked to gangs.

Online Warning Signs

- Following or interacting with accounts linked to gang culture, weapons, or violence.
- Posting images or captions referencing loyalty, respect, territory, or retaliation
- Being contacted by older youth or adults online offering “protection,” “family,” or “opportunities”

Emotional & Safety Indicators

- Talking about needing protection or feeling unsafe
- Expressing admiration for gang members or criminal lifestyles
- Increased secrecy, paranoia, or fear of being seen in certain areas.

Recommendations

- Appropriate distribution of this report for education and relevant informed direct/indirect mitigation activity.
- Just-in-Time Financial Advocacy: When a VDW identifies a youth with "frozen" bank accounts, prioritize an immediate assessment to determine if they are in the Discovery phase of the Empty Cheque Scam.
- Parental and YAAACE VDW DVA monitoring: Increase surveillance for DVA where individuals solicit bank accounts for "quick moves" or "favour missions."

- Financial Immunization Workshops: Development and implementation of Gen Z relevant financial literacy sessions focusing on the "Banking is a Privilege" reality.
- Alternative Economic Pathways: Direct youth toward legitimate "Labour Market Interventions" (YAAACE) to replace the allure of fraudulent "quick money" with sustainable, high-wage employment and training.
- Continue collaborating with Community Safety Partners such as Probation, TCHC, TPS, TDSB, TCDSB, and other Community Agencies to share RDI on youth recruitment trends in Northwest Toronto.
- Train educators to recognize recruitment language in schools.
- Banking Outreach, work with the Canadian Banking Association (CBA) and Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (FCAC) to create a "Restorative Banking" pathway for youth who were unknowingly exploited.
- The development of parental support and information programs that provide knowledge about signs that a child has been recruited and may go OT.
- Parental Coaching, non-judgmental spaces for parents to discuss signs of OT without the fear of being labeled a "bad parent." Information on how to appropriately talk to children about this issue and maintain the lines of communication.
- The development and delivery of parenting support programs for how to support your child and speak with them when/if they go OT and return home. This includes culturally appropriate trauma counselling.
- Advocacy for legislative change or introduction that specifically addresses the issue of adults recruiting children under 18 to commit violent crimes and traffic drugs. This is distinct and separate from Human Trafficking provisions that do not adequately address the nature of OT. Pennsylvania has one of the most direct and frequently cited "Corruption of Morals" statutes in the U.S. for addressing the issue of adults recruiting children to commit crime. This statute can be used as a model for a similar Ontario or Canadian statute.

Statute - 18 Pa. C.S. § 6301 (Corruption of Minors). The key provision under this law is any person age 18 or older commits a crime if they *"by any act corrupt or tend to corrupt the morals of any minor less than 18 years of age, or who aids, abets, entices or encourages any such minor in the commission of any crime."* The statute is specifically designed to target adults who recruit children for criminal gangs, use them as lookouts, or involve them in drug trafficking. It treats the act of undermining a child's moral development for criminal gain as a standalone offense, regardless of whether the minor is actually convicted of any underlying crime.

Summary of Relevant Laws & Programs

- **Human/Labour Trafficking** - Under the Criminal Code, recruiting youth for OT work may not meet the threshold of labour trafficking, as youth may be reluctant to testify as a witness to the offense.
- **Section 467.11 CCC** - Participation in activities of a criminal organization. This includes the recruitment of minors. Legal identification of the criminal organization has to be established.
- **Ontario Missing Persons Act** - Allows police to access records (phone, bank) faster when a person is missing, even if no crime is yet proven.
- **Amber Alert System** - Specifically for abducted children where there is a belief of imminent danger.
- **Privacy & Police:** Police may be restricted from sharing a minor's location if the youth is "located and safe" but refuses to go home, creating a "grey zone" for parents.

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