

April 2024

Peace Core New Narrative

Year 1 Progress Report

Blueprint



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Executive Summary

About Peace Core New Narrative

Since 2007, the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE) has been working to provide culturally reflective programs and services to mitigate the systemic barriers and lack of equitable opportunities that racialized and under-resourced members of the Humber River-Black Creek community face. Recognizing that the community has been disproportionately impacted by increasing rates of gun violence, YAAACE sought funding through Public Safety Canada's Crime Prevention Action Fund to disrupt the cycle of violence.

In 2022, YAAACE launched Peace Core New Narrative (PCNN), a multi-sectoral, multi-year strategy aimed at preventing and interrupting gun and gang violence in the Humber River-Black Creek community. PCNN uses a public health approach to violence prevention to identify and address key risk factors that contribute to violence and focuses on supporting youth ages 6 to 29 and their families.



The PCNN Strategy is Structured Around Three Main Pillars:

1. Providing culturally reflective support to prevent and intervene in gun and gang violence

The majority of the programs and services that are part of PCNN focus on upstream prevention by addressing root causes of violence. PCNN also includes one stream of programming that focuses specifically on intervening in the community to avoid, de-escalate or mitigate the causes and effects of violence. Programs and services offered through PCNN are clustered in the following streams:



Learning and Education:

Comprehensive, culturally reflective supports to close educational achievement gaps, enhance literacy and numeracy skills and provide access to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) programming amongst Black students.



Expanded Opportunities and Athletics:

Recreational programs and experiential opportunities to develop soft and technical skills of Black children living in low-income households.



Employment and Training: Training on career pathways, mentorship and apprenticeship placements for Black youth, including those who have been involved in crime and violence.



Family Support:

Increasing Black families' awareness of and access to culturally reflective services, with a focus on increasing their capacity to advocate for themselves.



Case Management and Public Safety:

Wrap-around support to youth who have been involved in crime and violence, as well as direct intervention in the community to interrupt the emergence and escalation of gun and gang violence.



Advocacy through Knowledge Development:

Building awareness among diverse audiences about systemic issues faced by residents living in Humber River-Black Creek, in formats accessible to the community.

2. Assessing PCNN's implementation and effectiveness

Data will be collected throughout the implementation of PCNN to assess its effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement. By collecting this data, YAAACE also has an opportunity to contribute to building a more robust body of evidence on gun violence prevention in the Canadian context (recognizing that much of the existing literature is based in the United States).

3. Knowledge mobilization

PCNN includes a dedicated stream for advocacy through knowledge development and mobilization. Under this stream, YAAACE leverages the evidence generated throughout the implementation of the PCNN strategy to promote continuous learning and widespread adoption of the model across Canada.

In early 2023, YAAACE engaged Blueprint to co-design and implement an evaluation of PCNN. In this report, we provide an introduction to PCNN and to the evaluation framework and discuss preliminary results achieved between May 2023 and March 2024.

Highlights From Year 1 and Next Steps

Based on data collected and reported by YAAACE, PCNN programs and services have reached a significant number of community members in the past year. YAAACE also indicated that important progress has been made in hiring and training staff with lived experience and community connections, as well as in establishing partnerships to support the implementation of PCNN (see Appendix 3).

During our first year working together, Blueprint collaborated with YAAACE to clarify the logic underpinning the PCNN strategy and co-design an evaluation framework to assess its short- and medium-term outcomes. In the coming year, YAAACE plans to streamline their data collection tools at intake and exit to understand the initial impact the different streams are having on the populations served.

YAAACE has also achieved milestones related to advocacy through knowledge development, including the creation of a documentary film and several scholarly publications. In 2024, they plan to launch the Centre for Community Safety and Roots of Violence, a thinktank that will generate and share evidence about violence prevention and intervention strategies, as well as a podcast on the various programs and services offered through PCNN.



About This Report

In response to recent trends in community violence in northwest Toronto, the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE) developed Peace Core New Narrative (PCNN), a multi-sectoral and multi-year strategy aimed at preventing and interrupting gun and gang violence in the Humber River-Black Creek community. PCNN is funded through Public Safety Canada's Crime Prevention Action Fund from 2022 to 2027.

The PCNN strategy includes a blend of culturally reflective social programming to prevent the emergence of gun and gang violence and direct interventions in the community to interrupt the cycle of violence. PCNN also includes activities related to measuring the strategy's effectiveness in the short, medium and long terms, as well as to raising awareness and mobilizing knowledge about promising practices and emerging evidence.

TABLE 1 | Overview of the PCNN model

Intervening at the community level	
Culturally reflective supports for Black children, youth and their families, including those who have been impacted by community violence.	
Assessing effectiveness Assessing implementation and effectiveness of the strategy by regularly collecting data and applying learnings to inform program improvement.	Knowledge mobilization Staying abreast of the latest trends at the community, academic and policy levels through stakeholder networks and producing original content to share learnings in formats that are accessible to the community.

In early 2023, YAAACE engaged Blueprint to co-design and implement an evaluation of PCNN. During our first year working together, we focused on clarifying the logic underpinning the PCNN strategy and on developing an evaluation framework to assess its short- and medium-term outcomes. This report includes an introduction to PCNN and to the evaluation framework, as well as preliminary results achieved between May 2023 and March 2024.

The report is organized into five sections:

1. **Project context:** Provides an overview of YAAACE and situates PCNN within the Humber River-Black Creek community.
2. **About PCNN:** Describes the strategy's overarching logic, as well as the rationale for each of its program streams.
3. **Evaluation approach:** Presents the questions that will drive the multi-year evaluation.
4. **Implementation and outputs:** Shares key implementation milestones and outputs achieved between May 2023 and March 2024.
5. **The road ahead:** Outlines next steps for the implementation and evaluation of PCNN.

Project Context

About YAAACE

YAAACE is a Black-led, Black-focused and Black-serving organization. Founded in 2007, YAAACE works to mitigate the systemic barriers and lack of equitable opportunities that racialized members of the Humber River-Black Creek community face, with an emphasis on providing access to structured programming to address the intergenerational polarization between the north and south sides of Finch. YAAACE centers its culturally reflective programs and services around the lived experiences of Black children, youth and their families to provide a response tailored to their needs that acknowledges the systemic barriers they face.

Vision: Dynamic communities with positive life outcomes for all.

Mission: Cultivate safer and thriving communities for Black and equity-denied groups through advocacy and access to strength-based programs and services.

Priority Areas for YAAACE Include:

- Challenging stereotypes and biased narratives about Black families and communities;
- Mitigating the opportunity gap for racialized and under-resourced communities;
- Addressing the risk factors that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline;
- Advocating for innovative solutions to address the roots of violence; and
- Creating and promoting best practices to ensure institutional accountability and transparency in the social service sector.

YAAACE is well-positioned to lead the design and delivery of PCNN because of its history and reputation of working to support its community. In addition, its hub is located in an area perceived as neutral, between the north and south sides of Jane and Finch. Building on these assets, YAAACE expects to play a strategic role in bringing together different community members and, in the long term, working to reduce gun violence in the area.

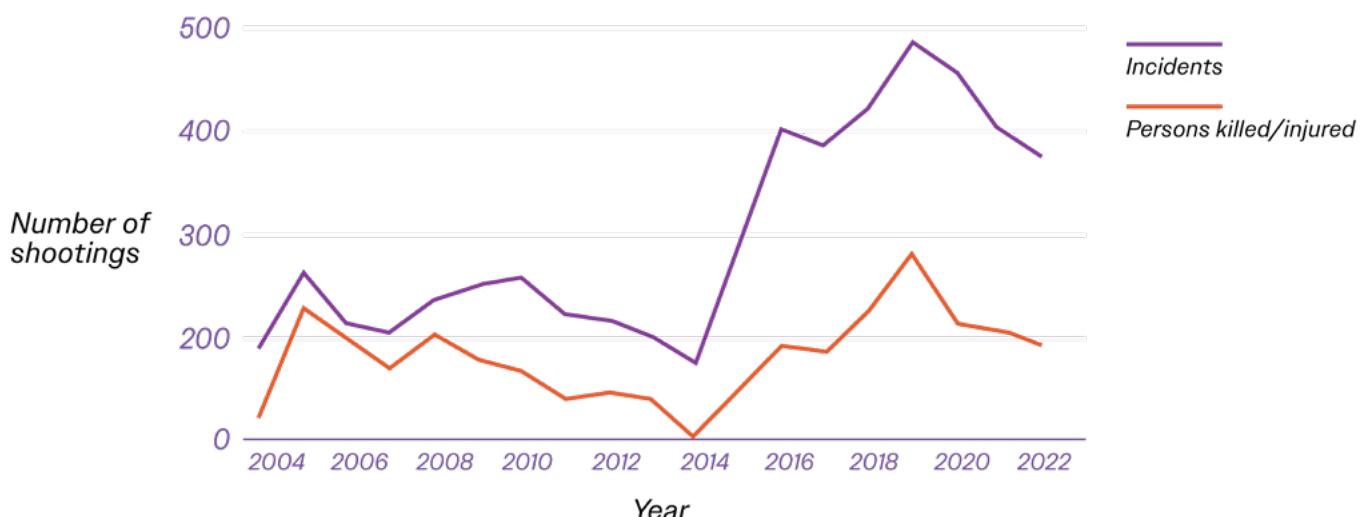


The Context in Which YAAACE Works

Increased prevalence and complexity of community violence in Toronto

During the past decade, community violence, particularly gun violence, has become an increasingly pressing issue in Toronto. Toronto Police Service (TPS) data on the annual number of shooting incidents reveals a substantial increase between 2014 and 2020, with 462 incidents taking place in 2020 compared to 177 incidents in 2014 (TPS Public Safety Data Portal). Although the number of shooting incidents has since begun to decline, the annual total is still significantly higher than pre-2014 levels.

FIGURE 1 | Shooting incidents in Toronto, 2004 to 2022 (TPS Public Safety Data Portal)



The factors that contribute to the increase in gun violence in Toronto are multiple and complex, and many are inextricably linked to structural discrimination, including a history of underinvestment across certain neighbourhoods and lack of access to economic opportunity.

These factors include:

- **Limited access to critical supports and services**, including culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services (particularly mental health services), life stabilization supports, safe and affordable housing, emergency transfer services for families impacted by community violence and programming to support youth as they re-integrate into the community following incarceration (Parsaud, 2021).
- **Limited capacity of service providers**, including precarious funding for community agencies, which impedes their ability to reach and provide high-quality supports for young people who may be involved in and/or impacted by community violence (Pereira et al., 2020; Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2004).
- **Public health trends**, including increased rates of complex mental health challenges among youth, increased substance use and heightened toxicity in substances used (City of Toronto, 2020; Toronto Foundation, 2021).
- **Changing nature of community violence**, including involvement of increasingly younger youth, changes in street-level organizations and the contribution of social media to retaliatory violence (City of Toronto, 2019; Parsaud, 2021).

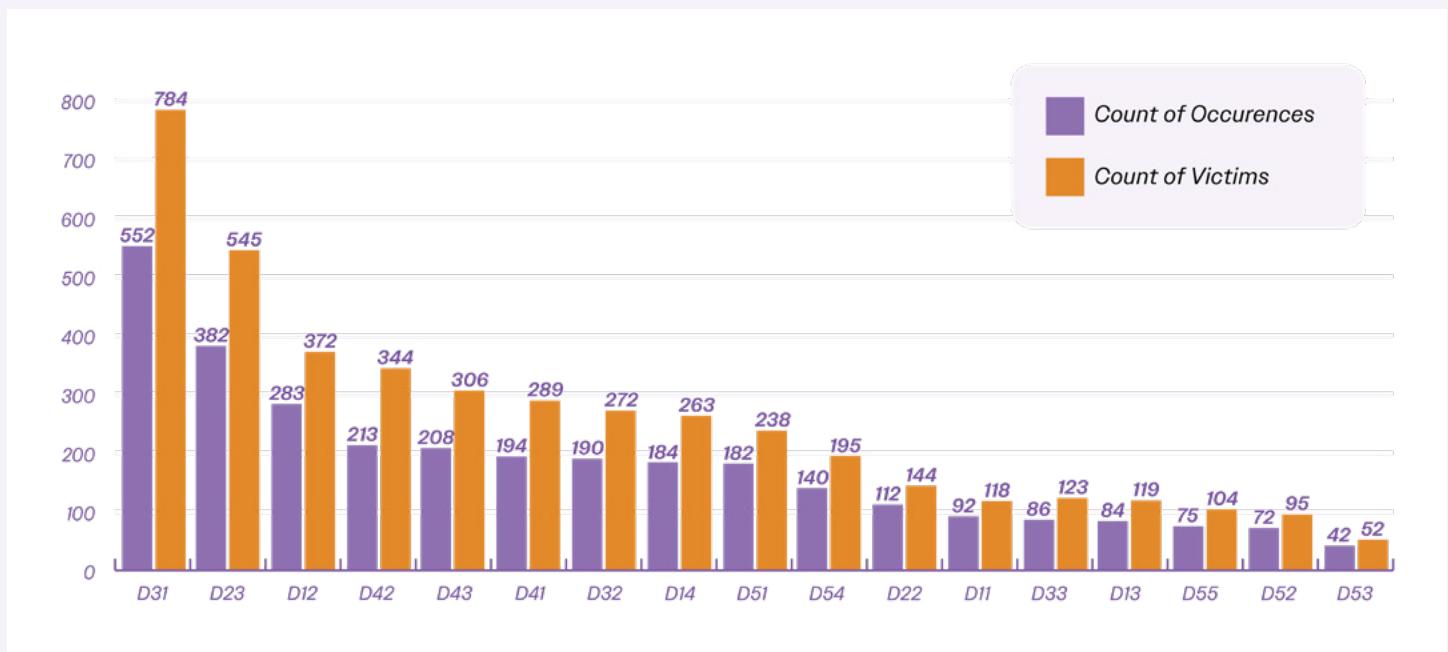
These factors are consistent with the findings of the Roots of Youth Violence Report, which identifies challenges related to poverty, racism, education, the criminal legal system, community design, family dynamics, health and lack of youth voice as conditions that produce risk factors for youth violence in Ontario (McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

Community stakeholders have also expressed concern about the retaliatory nature and increasing rates of gun violence in the city. This cycle of retaliatory violence has been associated with street-level organizations and ongoing conflict between groups, individuals or neighbourhoods. There is also heightened attention on the role that social media appears to play in fueling retaliatory violence through online feuds or disagreements (Howorun, 2021). Stakeholders maintain that although social media is not the cause of these conflicts, it may exacerbate them (REVIVE, 2020).

Concentration of violent incidents in specific Toronto neighbourhoods

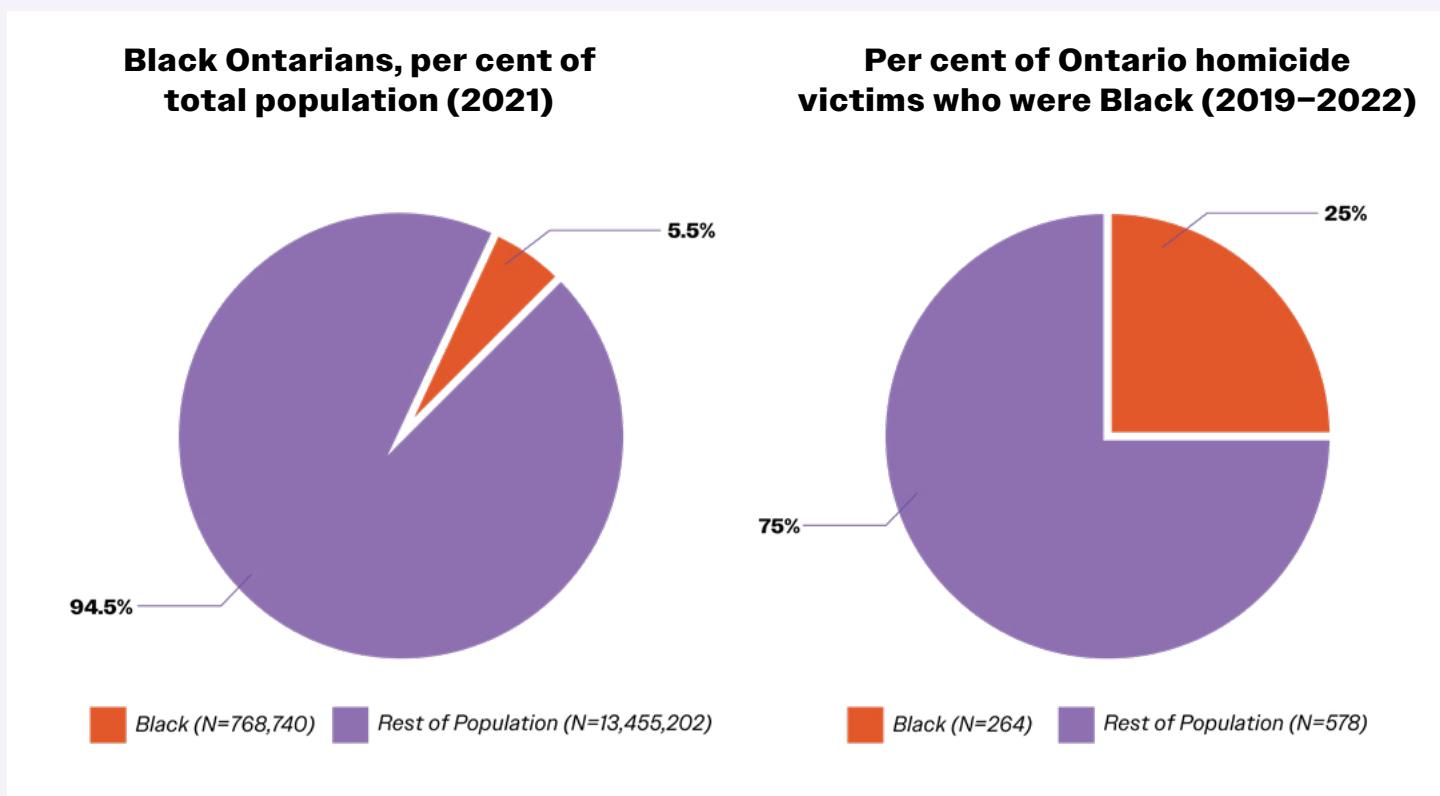
Shooting incidents in Toronto are also becoming increasingly concentrated in specific neighbourhoods. Over the last 15 years, TPS 31 Division (which includes the Humber River-Black Creek community) has consistently had the most shooting occurrences, as well as the highest number of victims. Between 2012 to 2017, over 26 per cent of Toronto's homicides by shootings occurred in the northwest neighbourhoods of Toronto (TPS, 2017). Of the 302 shooting incidents that took place across Toronto from January 1st to September 30th, 2021, the highest number (38) was in Humber River-Black Creek.

FIGURE 2 | Number of shootings and victims by TPS Division, 2008–2021 (TPS Crime Statistics)



Data collected by Statistics Canada (2023a) shows that racialized people are disproportionately impacted by violence. Between 2019 and 2022, racialized people accounted for 46 per cent (or 487 out of 1065) of homicide victims in Ontario. During the same time period, Black people accounted for 25 per cent of all homicide victims and 54 per cent of racialized victims, despite representing only 5.5 per cent of the total population in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2023b).

FIGURE 3 | Over-representation of Black populations among Ontario homicide victims, 2019–2022 (Statistics Canada)



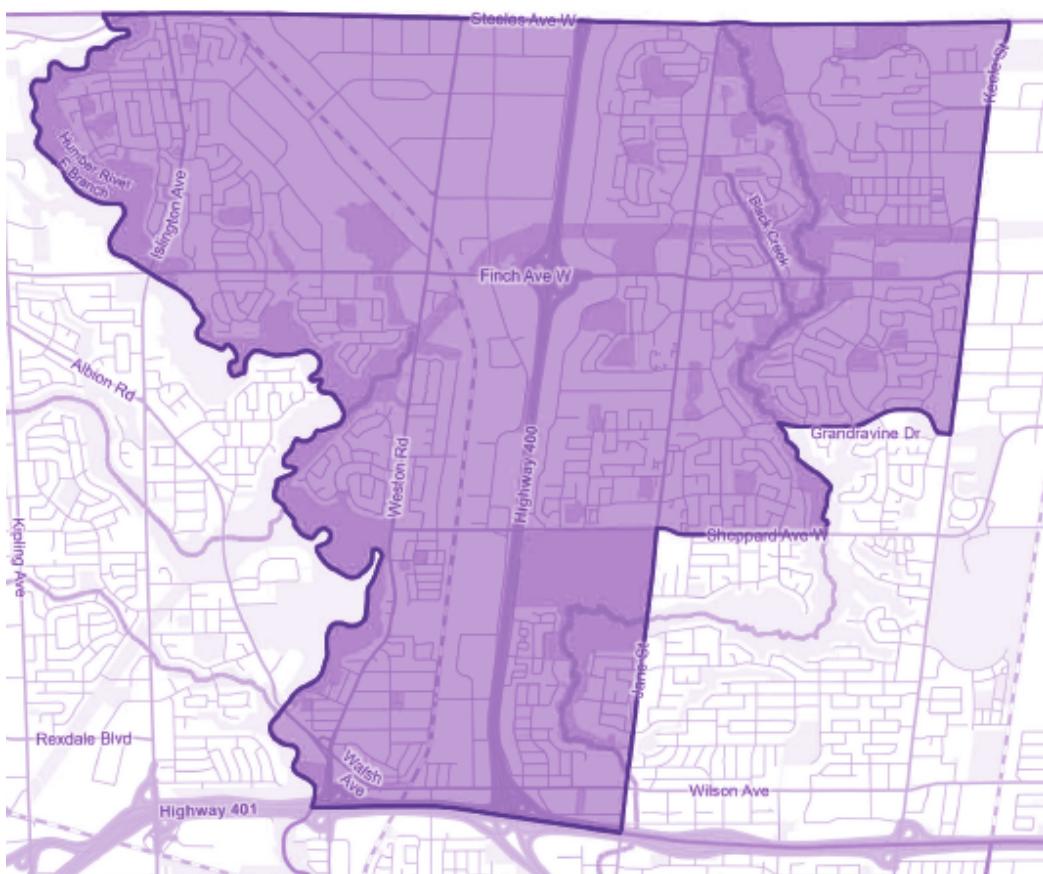
The communities in Toronto's northwest experience structural and systemic disparities that contribute to poorer social determinants of health in comparison with the rest of the city (Yang et al., 2021). The majority of Toronto's designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas are also in the northwest (City of Toronto, n.d.). This designation refers to neighbourhoods whose residents face unnecessary, unfair and unjust differences in five key areas: economic opportunities, social development, healthy lives, participation in decision-making and physical surroundings (City of Toronto, 2014).

The Humber River-Black Creek community

YAAACE is situated within the City of Toronto's Ward 7: Humber River-Black Creek, which includes several communities in and around Jane and Finch and is home to a total population of 111,200 people (Statistics Canada Census Profile, 2021).

FIGURE 4 | Humber River-Black Creek neighbourhood boundaries

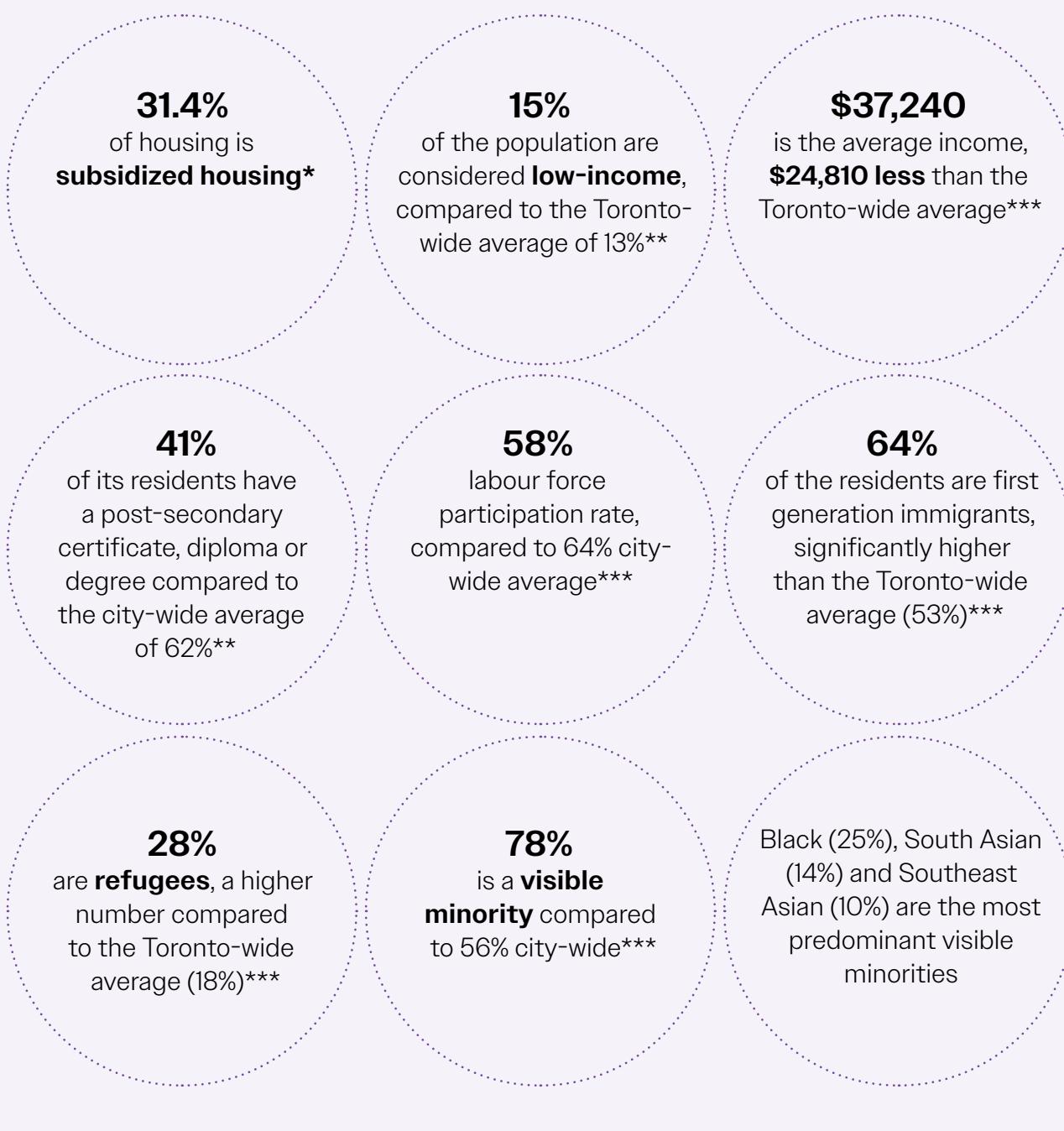
(City of Toronto Ward Profile, 2023)



Humber River-Black Creek is a vibrant community characterized by a citizen-driven activism related to better youth development opportunities, affordable housing, food security and accessible education (MacNevin, 2023; Black Creek Food Justice Network, 2012; Black Creek Community Collaborative, n.d.; Youth Unlimited Jane and Finch, n.d.). There is also a long history of community advocacy to prevent and address gun violence, and some residents have turned to creative outlets such as art and music to speak about their experience living in the community (MacNevin, 2023; Rankin, 2020).

At the same time, Humber River-Black Creek has experienced a long history of disinvestment in social supports and services. Beginning in the 1960s to 70s, there was rapid construction of affordable and community housing, most of which was in the form of high-rise apartments. This rapid development was not accompanied by the social infrastructure—such as schools, transit and recreation—required to support and sustain the influx of residents, many of whom were new immigrants. The lack of economic and social opportunities for low-income and immigrant families contributed to increasing rates of poverty in the area.

FIGURE 5 | Socio-economic indicators, Humber River-Black Creek



*Statistics Canada Census Profile, 2016

** City of Toronto Ward Profile, 2020, based on after-tax low-income measure

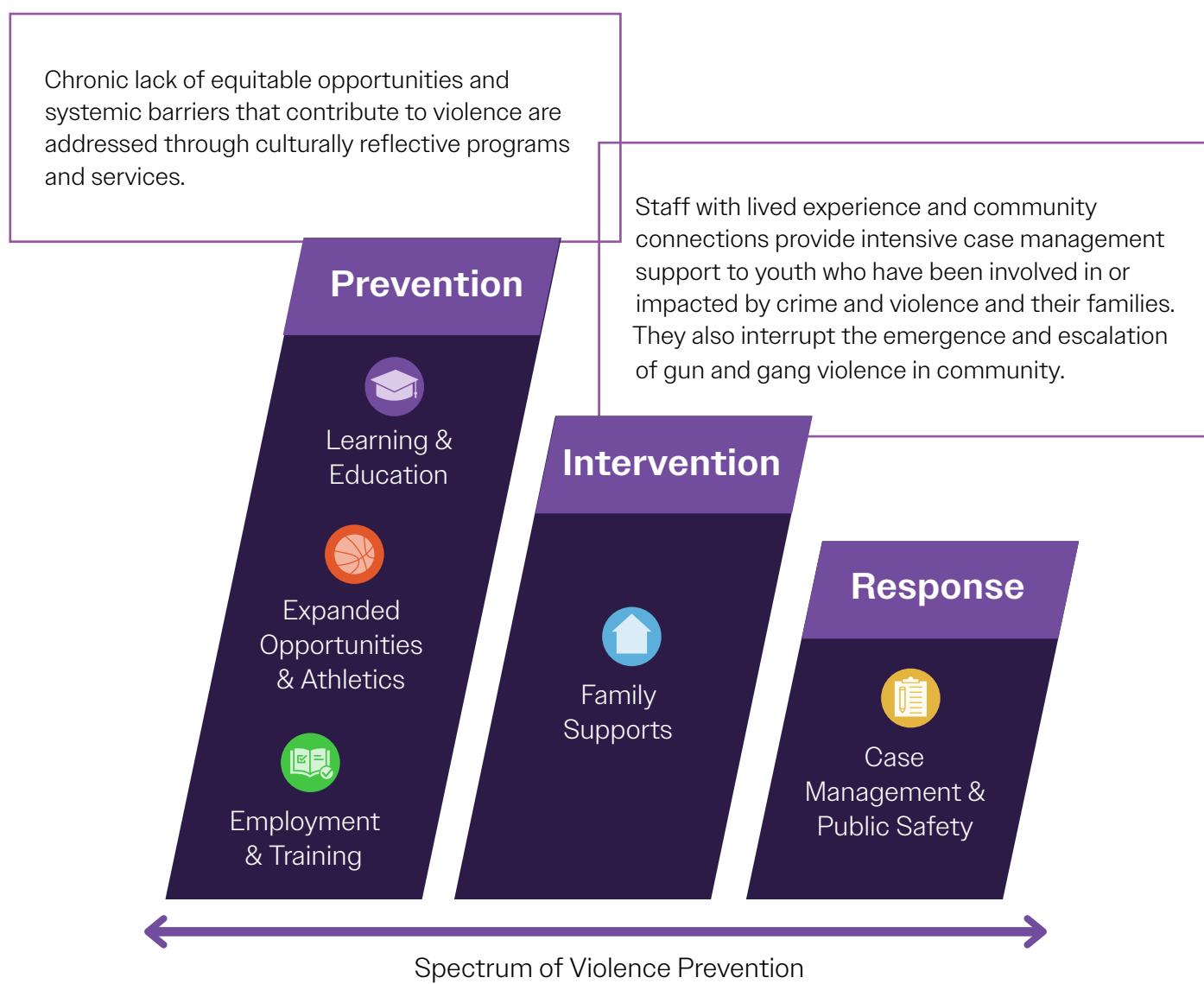
***Statistics Canada Census Profile, 2021

About PCNN

PCNN is a multi-sectoral and multi-year strategy aimed at preventing and interrupting gun and gang violence in the Humber River-Black Creek community. It combines social programming to prevent the emergence of gun and gang violence with direct interventions to interrupt the cycle of violence in the community. PCNN focuses on supporting youth ages 6 to 29 and their families. By implementing PCNN, YAAACE is working to not only promote community safety, but also to counter persistent stigmatizing narratives about the community.

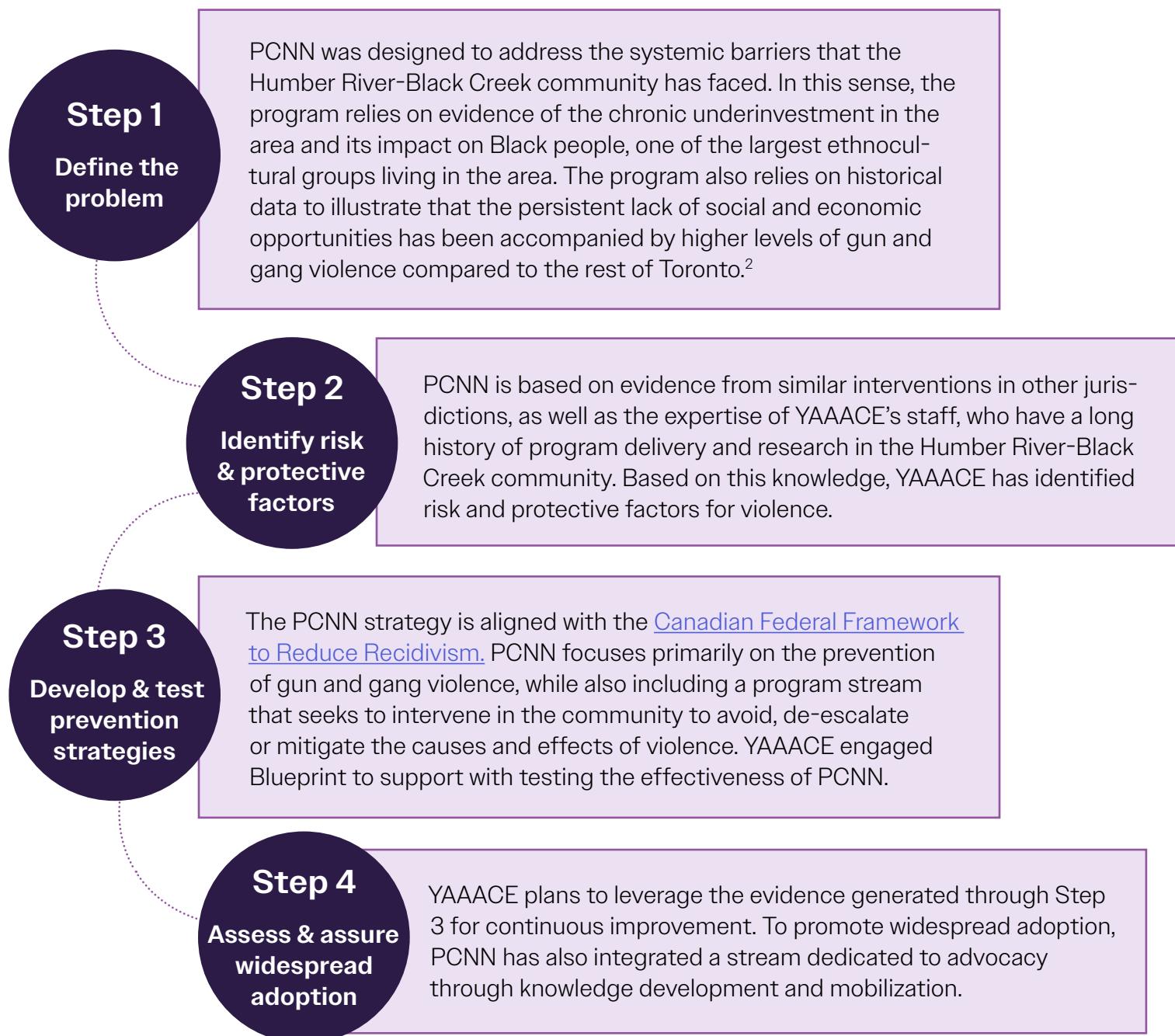
PCNN builds upon YAAACE's work in the community, which began in 2007. It is also informed by evidence of what has worked in similar interventions in other jurisdictions using a public health approach. Given that much of this research is based in the United States, there is an important opportunity for YAAACE to generate evidence about their experience of implementing PCNN in the local Canadian context. Figure 6 outlines the logic underpinning PCNN and the types of programs and services it provides.

FIGURE 6 | Overview of PCNN strategy to prevent and interrupt gun and gang violence



PCNN uses a **public health approach to violence prevention**¹ to identify and address the root causes of violence in northwest Toronto. The program relies on a multi-step process, bringing together evidence and solutions from multiple disciplines, as outlined in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7 | How PCNN applies a public health approach to violence prevention



¹ To learn more about the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention, [click here](#).

² These trends are presented in the Project Context section of this report.

PCNN Program Streams

PCNN includes six program streams that aim to prevent and address community violence in Humber River-Black Creek and generate and disseminate evidence of the strategy's effectiveness. These streams are outlined in Figure 8 below. Evidence underpinning the logic for each of these streams is discussed in Appendix 1.

FIGURE 8 | PCNN program streams

1. Learning and Education



Comprehensive, culturally reflective supports to close educational achievement gaps, enhance literacy and numeracy skills and provide access to STEAM programming amongst Black students.

2. Expanded Opportunities and Athletics



Recreational programs and experiential opportunities to develop soft and technical skills of Black children living in low-income households.

3. Employment and Training



Training on career pathways, mentorship and apprenticeship placements for Black youth, including those who have been involved in crime and violence.

4. Family Support



Increasing Black families' awareness of and access to culturally reflective services, with a focus on increasing their capacity to advocate for themselves.

5. Case Management and Public Safety



Wrap-around support to youth who have been involved with crime or violence, led by staff with lived experience and community connections, as well as direct intervention in the community to interrupt the emergence and escalation of gun and gang violence.

6. Advocacy Through Knowledge Development



Building awareness among diverse audiences about systemic issues faced by residents living in Humber River-Black Creek, in formats accessible to the community.

PCNN Logic Framework

PCNN's logic framework (see Figure 9, on the following page) draws on PCNN program documentation and three in-person workshops facilitated by Blueprint to elicit the logic underlying the strategy's design. While the framework aligns with the current state of the strategy as of March 2024, YAAACE expects the strategy to evolve as more information about its implementation and evidence of its effectiveness becomes available.

FIGURE 9 | PCNN logic framework (*continued on the following page*)

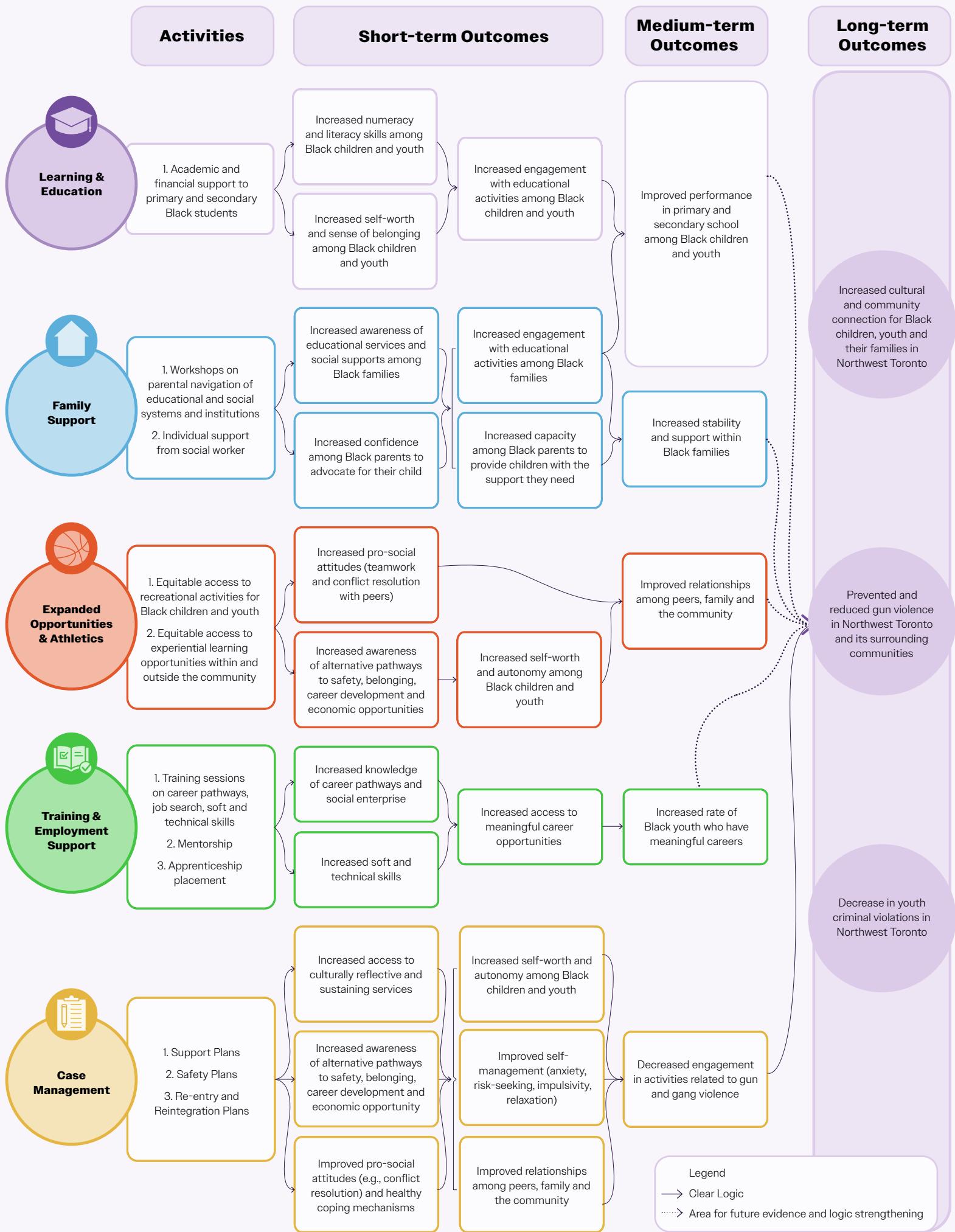
Main Assumptions

1. Improving Black children's educational attainment and access to recreational activities will lead to violence prevention and reduction.
2. Parents have the time and skills to influence their children's attendance at school.
3. Institutions and corporations will assign resources to engage with vulnerable populations.
4. Apprenticeship opportunities are meaningful and provide sufficient economic incentives.
5. PCNN staff have been trained to engage with youth with experience with crime and violence, and intervene at the community level.

Enablers

1. Core partnerships are in place to provide the service in time.
2. Social programs are available, culturally sustaining, trauma-informed and meet families' needs.





PCNN Staffing Model

The PCNN team comprises 27 staff members and volunteers who are responsible for implementing and monitoring PCNN's activities. Team members represent a range of professions, including social work and education, and leverage their connections to the Humber River-Black Creek community to provide culturally reflective programs and services.

FIGURE 10 | PCNN staffing model

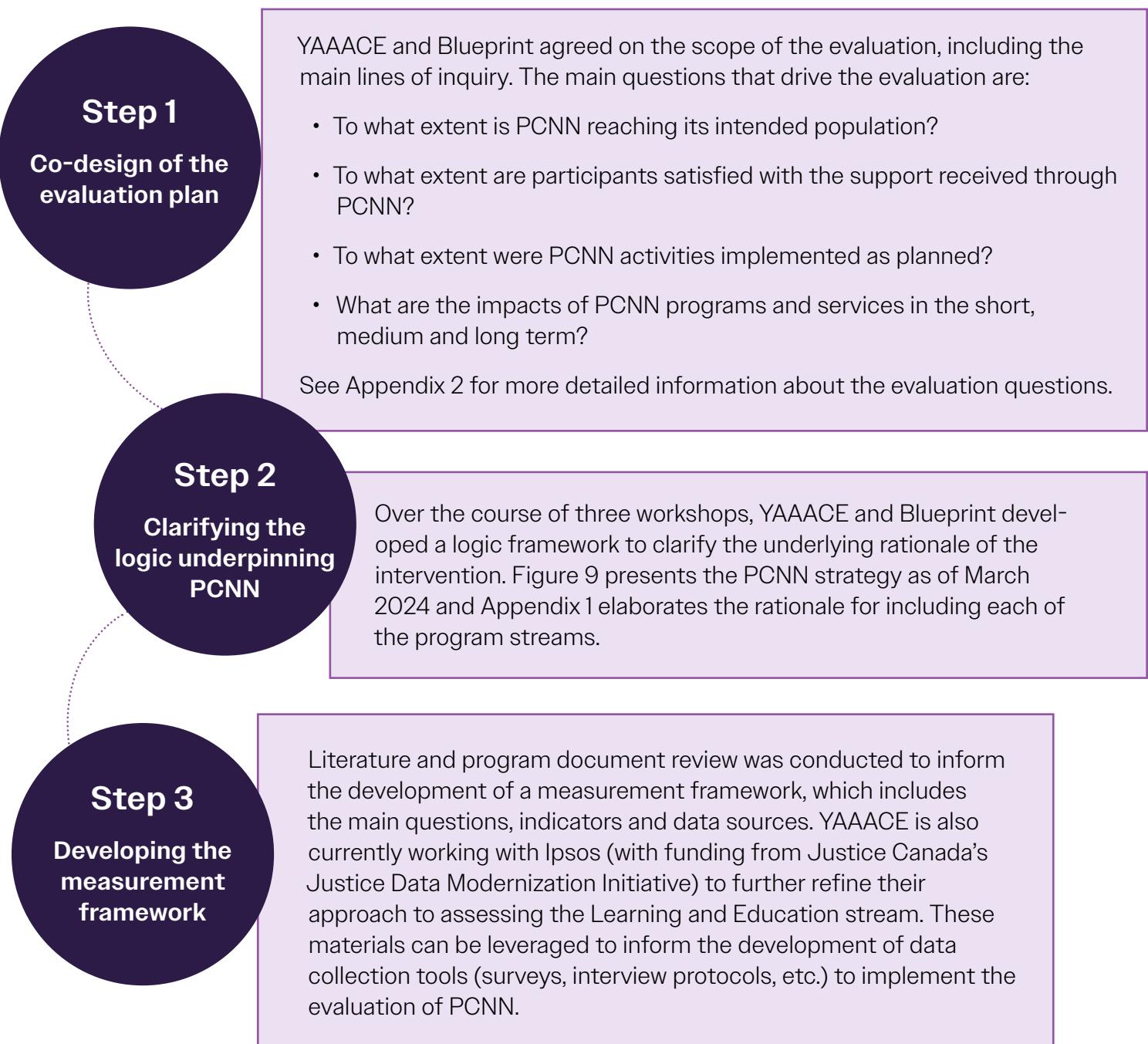


Evaluation Approach

Measuring Outcomes Achieved Through PCNN

In Blueprint's first year of working with YAAACE, we focused on co-designing an evaluation framework together, including a proposed data collection strategy and tools. Building on this foundation for the evaluation, YAAACE is positioned in Year 2 to generate evidence about how PCNN's program streams work and the outcomes that they achieve. Figure 11 outlines the steps that were taken to design the evaluation framework.

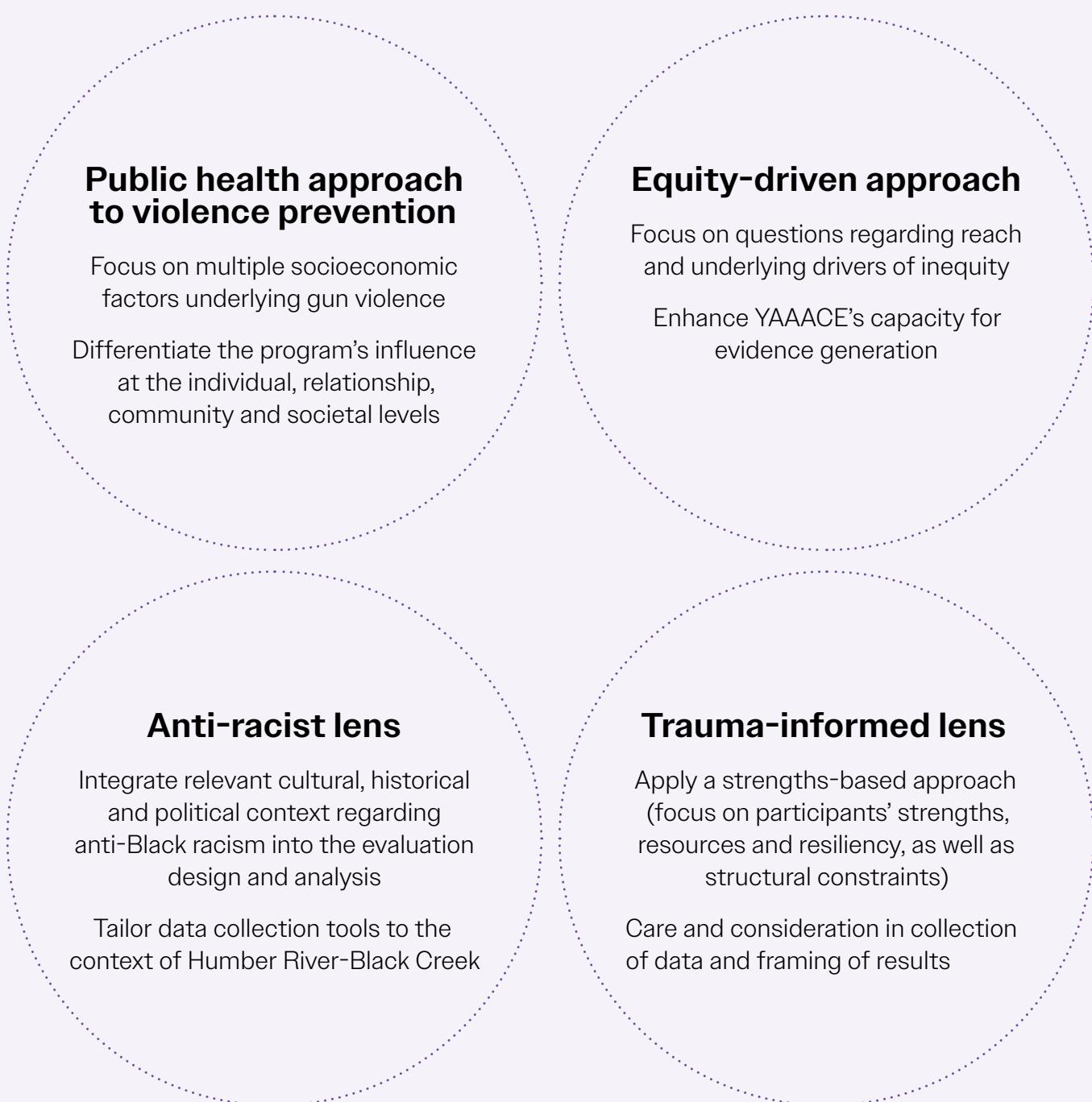
FIGURE 11 | Laying the foundation for evidence generation



Guiding Principles for the Evaluation

The evaluation integrates four guiding principles as described in Figure 12 below.

FIGURE 12 | Guiding principles for assessing PCNN



Implementation and Outputs

In this section, we highlight key activities and associated outputs for each of PCNN's program streams between January and December 2023.

TABLE 2 | PCNN programming in 2023

Program stream	Key activities in 2023
Learning and Education 	<p>The Community School Initiative (CSI) is a structured supplementary education program offered outside school hours. It aims to close the achievement/opportunity gap by ensuring students are at or above the provincial standard. The program conducts student assessments at the start and end of the program to track the academic and socio-emotional progress of students. Additionally, the CSI identifies the most vulnerable students within the cohort and refers them to the case management stream described below. The CSI includes the following components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">The March Break Camp enhances students' literacy and numeracy capacity and provides them with expanded opportunities in STEAM using culturally reflective services.The Summer Institute is a seven-week structured program to mitigate learning loss that occurs during the summer months.Numeracy and Literacy Enrichment (NALE) offers free tutoring for TDSB and TCDSB students in Grades 1 through 12. This program follows curriculum-based lessons and supports students with homework and school assignments.Pinball Clemons Foundation Bursary Program provides bursaries covering tuition, books and mentorship to a cohort of up to 20 students as they pursue post-secondary education and careers
Expanded Opportunities and Athletics 	<ol style="list-style-type: none">High Performance develops advanced skills and performance in basketball for children and youth aiming for elite levels of competition, which could lead to post-secondary scholarships.Small Ball & D League provides recreational basketball for children and character education through involvement in structured sports.Robotics provides 32 weeks of technology-based coding and tech construction. This program is delivered in partnership with #Engage416 and taught by TPS Integrated Gun & Gang Task Force and First Robotics Canada.Dance Sport provides break dance training and lessons to children living mostly in low-income families.

TABLE 2 | PCNN programming in 2023

Program stream	Key activities in 2023
Employment and Training 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training sessions and mentorship to develop soft and technical skills. Tailored support is also provided to youth who are currently incarcerated or in the process of reintegrating into the community. 2. Apprenticeship placements and job opportunities provide practical work experiences to enhance youth's skills and knowledge in specific fields. Like with the training sessions, dedicated support is provided to youth who have experienced crime and violence.
Family Supports 	<p>Wrap-around support is provided to family members, including a wide array of services described below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing: Support with writing applications for housing, housing searches, safety priority transfers (TCHC), transitions (moving) and connections to shelters for clients with unstable housing. • Financial: Financial literacy, budgeting and money management and support with applications for Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). • Education: Support with enrolling children in school, access to tutoring and registering for Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) and adult night school programs. • Employment: Support with resume development, job searches, securing employment, skills development courses and mentorship. • Food Security: Support accessing food banks, food basket deliveries and grocery cards. • Counselling/therapy: Family mediation to address strained dynamics and counselling for grief, trauma and/or loss. • System Navigation: Support navigating the health care system (wound care, etc.) and the legal system (e.g., for youth with court cases). • Legal: Court attendance and securing lawyer/legal aid.

TABLE 2 | PCNN programming in 2023

Program stream	Key activities in 2023
Case Management and Public Safety 	<p>The supports provided through this stream are tailored to youth who have been involved and/or impacted by gun and gang violence. They receive case management, which may include supports related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing: Transitions (moving) and connections to shelters/safe beds and other youth facilities. • Education: Advocacy and support plan for transition back into school after expulsion/suspension. • Counseling/Therapy: Art therapy and care coordination. • Legal: Access to the Fresh Start youth diversion program in partnership with Kids of Incarcerated Parents (KIP), support with bail release plans and development of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments.
Advocacy Through Knowledge Development 	<p>YAAACE conducts a wide array of activities to raise awareness amongst community members, partners and decision-makers. Different approaches are used, including research papers, participation in conferences, on-site visits and a range of communications in the digital space.</p>



PCNN Outputs

YAAACE set annual targets for the PCNN streams to guide their programming. For most program streams, these targets relate specifically to program reach. YAAACE collected participant data through intake and registration, as well as through their case management data system, to track their progress against these targets. Table 3 presents select program data that was collected, stored and shared by YAAACE between January to December 2023.³ It is important to note that individual participants may have been counted more than once if they registered for multiple PCNN activities.

TABLE 3 | PCNN reach per stream of intervention

Learning and Education	
What's the annual target? 300 Black students receive academic and financial support through various educational programs	How many people did the programs reach? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 73 students from Grades 3 to 9⁴ registered in the March Break Camp• 140 students from Grades 3 to 8⁵ registered in the Summer Institute• 132 students from Grades 1 to 12 registered⁶ in the NALE program
Who was reached? YAAACE collected more granular data about participants in the NALE program: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 51% self-identify as African or Caribbean• 40% of the students are female• 52% of the students live in a single-income household• 78% of the households make less than \$60,000 a year, of which 39% make less than \$40,000 a year and 16% have no regular income	

³ Note that at this stage, Blueprint has not conducted any data collection or data analysis for PCNN.

⁴ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023 March Break Registration]

⁵ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023 Summer Institute]

⁶ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023 Fall Free Registration]. Note that the data available does not differentiate registration from those who actually completed the program between September and December 2023.



Expanded Opportunities and Athletics

What's the annual target?

300 Black children gain access to recreational programs and opportunities to improve their technical and soft skills

How many people did the programs reach?

- 210 youth registered in the High Performance program
- 168 children and youth from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 9 registered⁷ in the Small Ball and D League Program
- 18 students from Grades 1 to 12 registered⁸ in Robotics
- 7 children⁹ from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 5 were trained under the program Dance Sport

Who was reached?

- Participants in the Robotics program were predominantly Black boys who live in low-income households.
- 50% self-identify as African or Caribbean
- 72% of participants are boys
- 84% of the students live in a single-income household
- 100% of the households make less than CAD \$60,000 per year, of which 67% make less than \$40,000 per year

⁷ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023-2024 Developmental Basketball Programming]. Data reflects registration from May to December 2023.

⁸ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023 Fall Free Registration]. Note that the data available does not differentiate registration from those who actually completed the program between September and December 2023.

⁹ Based on YAAACE's registration data set [2023 Fall Free Registration]. Note that the data available does not differentiate registration from those who actually completed in December 2023.



Employment and Training

What's the annual target?

75 Black youth gain access to training, mentorship and job placements in highly skilled sectors

How many people did the programs reach?

- 50 youth were hired to support the rollout of the Summer Institute. They received training on professionalism, setting goals, conflict resolution and communication
- 27 students enrolled in post-secondary education with tuition and program costs covered
- 30 community residents in need of employment¹⁰ were referred to SpotWork, which provides employment opportunities for people with criminal records

Who was reached?

100% of the youth hired to support the Summer Institute identified as visible minorities—predominantly as Black—and 72% were attending high school.



Family Support

What's the annual target?

50 Black families gain access to one-on-one support

How many people did the programs reach?

60 Black families got support to access a wide array of services (supports related to housing, finances, employment, food security, system navigation, legal, education, counselling/therapy and obtaining identification).

¹⁰ Based on YAAACE's Tielt Case Management System.



Case Management and Public Safety

What's the annual target?

60 individuals at high risk or previously involved in violence receive personalized support reflected in a customized plan, safety plan and/or re-entry and reintegration plan.

How many people did the programs reach?

60 individuals received support to access a wide array of services (supports related to housing, employment, food security, system navigation, legal, education, counselling/therapy, transportation, goal setting, safety planning, mentorship and care coordination).



Advocacy Through Knowledge Development

What's the annual target?

No annual targets were defined for this stream

What are the main accomplishments during 2023?

Documentary *Our Reality: Streets of the 6ix:* The film focuses on the impact of violence on families and communities, including positive and innovative solutions led by the community.

Scholarly publications and advocacy:

Five articles related to overcoming structural barriers and combating anti-Black racism in the education and justice systems were published between 2022 and 2023.



The Road Ahead

Moving forward, YAAACE will refine their implementation of the PCNN strategy and gain a better understanding of its effectiveness. YAAACE will focus its efforts on two main areas in the coming year:

Assessing early impact: YAAACE will streamline the data collection process at intake and exit for their various programs and services. Data collection tools will be developed and fielded to understand the initial impact that the different streams are having on the populations served. This work will integrate the analysis and recommendations provided by Ipsos, as well as the work conducted by Blueprint thus far.

Launching the Centre for Community Safety and Roots of Violence: YAAACE is developing a thinktank that will focus on generating and sharing evidence about violence prevention and intervention strategies. Research will focus on systemic barriers that reproduce conditions that contribute to involvement in various forms of violence, with an emphasis on gun violence and its impact on Black communities. In addition, PCNN will release a podcast called “Safer Communities Canada,” which will bring awareness to the various programs and services offered through PCNN.





Appendix 1: Evidence Informing PCNN

The PCNN program streams were selected based on evidence about their potential role in contributing to the prevention and reduction of violence. A selection of this evidence is outlined below. Given the limited Canadian evidence base on violence prevention and response and given that YAAACE is a leader in the space, some of this evidence has been produced by YAAACE staff themselves (see references to sources authored by YAAACE and by YAAACE Executive Director, Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad).



1. Learning and Education

Having access to tutoring and academic support outside of schools is particularly important as evidence shows that Black students face systemic barriers to entering and navigating the education system, including a lack of culturally reflective educational programs and curricula. Many schools in Humber River-Black Creek are under-resourced relative to the number of students and the needs in the community (TDSB, 2024). At the same time, many schools in the area perform poorly on provincial standardized tests (Eizadirad et al., 2022).

- Streaming Black students into non-academic pathways has been a recurrent practice in Ontario, reflecting teachers' assumption that these students will not perform well academically (James, 2020). Between 2006 and 2011, TDSB data shows that compared to their peers, Black students were more than twice as likely to be enrolled in the Applied program (39% compared to 16% of white students and 18% of other racialized students) and three times as likely to be in the Essentials program (9% versus 3% of white and other racialized students) (James & Turner, 2017). As a result, Ontario is now undergoing a de-streaming process.
- Historically, Black students in TDSB are disproportionately suspended (accounting for approximately 33% of the suspensions for 2016-2017 school year) in relation to their representation within the larger student population (11%) (TDSB, 2022).
- The curriculum often does not reflect the culture and lived experiences of Black children and youth, making it harder to relate to the content and, therefore, impacting their academic experience (YAAACE, 2013).



2. Expanded Opportunities and Athletics

The expanded opportunities and athletics stream removes financial barriers to accessing quality recreational programs for racialized communities. Evidence shows that access to extracurricular programs, when associated with educational programs, provides an opportunity to develop social and academic competencies and can help mitigate the impact of learning loss (Eizadirad et al., 2022). In addition, access to these services within the community has proven to be effective in mitigating the systemic barriers that produce gaps in academic achievement among children and youth living in equity-deserving areas, such as Humber River-Black Creek. In one study, Black students reported that their involvement in extracurricular activities improved their confidence and attitudes toward mathematics and STEM (Eizadirad et al., 2022).

Beyond Toronto, there is preliminary evidence for the role of sports programming in violence prevention, though primarily as part of upstream social development rather than prevention of criminal activity in the short term. One United Nations evidence review found that many sports-based programs that are provided for the purpose of prevention pair sports with education, vocational or mentoring opportunities and other wraparound supports (UNODC, 2018). This research found that sports-based programs can support strengthening life skills such as confidence, self-esteem, self-control and teamwork and challenging cultural stereotypes, which are transferrable to conflict prevention and management. However, the review concluded that there is insufficient evidence for their effectiveness in these areas. PCNN is well-positioned to build evidence regarding the effectiveness expanded opportunities and athletics and contribute to a better understanding of these types of interventions.





3. Employment and Training

There is robust evidence from the United States that demonstrates that youth employment programs can be effective at reducing violence and criminality. Nonetheless, there is a lack of evidence on this topic in the Canadian context. This is another area where the evidence generated about the outcomes achieved through PCNN could fill existing gaps in the literature.

Research demonstrates the importance of addressing the roots of violence in social and economic inequalities, which disproportionately impact racialized communities (Education Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 2020; Bieler et al., 2016). Addressing these inequalities includes providing equitable access to economic opportunities (Bilchik, 1999) and social development programming (Hausman et al., 2000), among other solutions.

There is also evidence demonstrating a linkage between unemployment and gun violence. A 2017 American study found that there is a significant correlation between periods of increased shooting rates and of increased unemployment rates, and that multiple indicators of economic distress correlate with increases in the rate of gun violence among youth (Pah et al., 2017). Additional research shows that gun violence tends to increase in summer months when school is not in session. For example, in Baltimore from 2017 to 2021, 38 per cent of shootings took place between May and August (Baltimore City Open Data, 2022). Similarly, TPS (2021) data indicates that shooting incidents tend to occur more often in July and August.

Research on a youth summer employment program in Chicago, called One Summer Chicago Plus, found notable positive outcomes related to violence reduction. One randomized control trial found that in the program's first year, crime arrests dropped by 45 per cent (Heller & Pollack, 2017). This decrease was not maintained at the same rate in the following year; however, the study concluded that the intervention was likely effective for violence reduction.

Another American randomized control trial also found that youth employment programs can be effective in violence reduction. The study focused on a Boston summer youth employment program, finding that participants had fewer charges for violent crimes and property crimes after the intervention. The program demonstrated improvements in skills, attitudes and aspirations and social and emotional skills (Modestino, 2017).

A study of New York City's summer youth employment program found that the probability of participant incarceration declined by 10 per cent and participants were 20 per cent less likely to die at least four years post-program completion (Gelber et al., 2015).



4. Family Support

Research indicates that investing in equitable access to social development supports and opportunities—including family and parenting programs—is effective in preventing violence from happening in the first place and can lead to significant cost savings (Prevention Institute, n.d.; American Psychological Association, 2013).

The World Health Organization has conducted research on this topic and found that interventions that encourage safe, stable and nurturing relationships between caregivers and children (such as parenting programs, parent and child programs and

social support groups) can reduce childhood aggression and prevent the development of violent behaviour (WHO, n.d.).

There is also a body of research on the “dual-generation approach,” which provides complementary programming for youth and their families (e.g., workforce development and training programs for parents offered alongside education programs for youth). Studies have found that these types of programs can lead to cost savings and reduce arrests among youth some years after programming has ended (Karoly et al., 1998; Miller, 2013; Manning et al., 2013).



5. Case Management and Public Safety

A great deal of research has been done on violence reduction and intervention through one-on-one supports such as case management, goal setting and tracking, coaching, cognitive behavioral therapy and other therapeutic approaches. Often, a combination of these supports as well as group-based programming, wraparound supports and other interventions are provided as a multi-dimensional approach to violence reduction and intervention (e.g., Advance Peace and Cure Violence).

There is broad variation within the category of “case management” which makes establishing an evidence base complicated and nuanced. An American study by the Urban Institute (Matei et al., 2022) on the efficacy of youth violence reduction strategies found that case management was one of a few activities that effective programs most frequently used (along with enhanced surveillance, outreach workers and public perception campaigns). They found that case management was used in six interventions that had positive results and mentioned in 19 literature reviews on youth violence reduction.

Considering one-on-one supports overall, one study found that supports that focus on building emotional self-management, interpersonal skills and social problem-solving show mainly positive effects with a reasonably high degree of reliability in terms of their ability to address aggression and personal violence (McGuire, 2008).

There is evidence to support the effectiveness of hospital-based case management and one-on-one peer coaching for violence interruption and injury recidivism (Chong et al., 2015; Mikhail & Nemeth, 2016).

Research has also been done on intensive case management (a higher-dosage and more specific form of case management involving smaller case loads, wraparound supports and 24-hour availability of case managers), finding that it is effective in reducing future community violence among clients (Dvoskin & Steadman, 1994).

Appendix 2: Evaluation Questions

The following table outlines key evaluation questions related to the implementation of PCNN and the outcomes achieved. These questions were identified through our evaluation

co-design workshops.	Satisfaction	Outputs
Reach		
To what extent is PCNN reaching its intended population?	To what extent are participants satisfied with the support received through PCNN? What are their suggestions for improvement?	To what extent were PCNN activities implemented as planned?
Are some outreach and recruitment pathways working better than others? Why?	Do participants feel welcome and safe engaging with PCNN staff and partners?	What changes occurred along the way? What project activities and contextual factors influenced those changes?
Are there any barriers to accessing the supports and services offered through PCNN?	To what extent do participants feel that the services and supports provided through PCNN are culturally-relevant and trauma-informed?	How do PCNN staff and their partners experience the project?
		What worked well? Looking ahead to the next 12 months, what can be improved?

Outcomes		
Short-term (1–6 months)	Medium-term (7–36 months)	Long-term (37–60 months)
To what extent do participants have increased access to the supports and services they want and need?	To what extent does PCNN meet the needs of participants who are at high risk of being involved in or affected by gang and/or gun violence?	To what extent does PCNN reduce community violence in Northwest Toronto?
Are there any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes in the short term?	To what extent does PCNN influence positive changes in risk and protective factors among program participants, their families and the community?	Are there any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes in the long term?
To what extent does PCNN meet the needs of participants who are at high risk of being involved in or affected by gang and/or gun violence?	Are there any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes in the medium term?	
To what extent does PCNN influence positive changes in risk and protective factors among participants?		



Appendix 3: PCNN Partnerships

YAAACE reported that they have established the following partnerships to support with the implementation of the PCNN program streams.

Date of partnership	Name of the partner	Purpose of the partnership	Which streams does this partner contribute to?				
			EL	EO	ET	FS	CM
2022	Amadeusz	Providing academic support inside correctional institutions for those incarcerated. YAAACE has a two-way referral agreement.	X				X
2023	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services –Youth Justice Division	Supporting youth at RMYC facility.	X			X	X
2023	Ministry of the Solicitor General	In discussion to pilot the dynamic custody model.	X	X	X		X
2023	Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB)	Partnership to host social work placement students and do advocacy work for Black communities impacted by homicides and exposure to violence. YAAACE is also working with them to co-publish articles as part of knowledge mobilization and advocacy through the Centre for Community Safety & Roots of Violence.	X		X	X	
2023	Kids of Incarcerated Parents	Provide FRESH Start as a youth diversion program.	X	X			X
2023	Parents of Black Children	Connect with families who need advocates for system navigation experiencing anti-Black racism within schools.	X			X	
2023	White Board Collective and Pinball Clemons Foundation	Capacity building and mentorship with job readiness, placement and exposure to various sectors in the public and corporate sector.	X	X	X		

Date of partnership	Name of the partner	Purpose of the partnership	Which streams does this partner contribute to?				
			EL	EO	ET	FS	CM
2023	Toronto Community Benefits Network	Referrals and job readiness soft skills training.	X	X	X		
2023	Dream Legacy Foundation	Referrals and job readiness soft skills training.	X		X		
2021	Toronto District School Board	Supporting students in vulnerable circumstances who previously have charges, and/or incarcerated and facing suspensions and/or expulsion.	X	X			X
2021	Toronto Catholic District School Board	Referrals to support students in vulnerable circumstances who previously have charges, and/or incarcerated and facing suspensions and/or expulsion.	X	X			X
2022	Television Ontario – TVO	Partnership with access to Ministry of Education approved courses and tutoring supports through their Mathify program.	X	X			
2023	Oaks Revitalization	Employment and job placements for people with criminal records and previously incarcerated.	X		X		
2023	Probation and Parole	Supporting reintegration of clients who live within Humber River-Black Creek. This includes their education, employment and other needs.	X		X		X
2023	The Carpenters Union	Providing employment and training for clients (Construction Union).			X		
2021	Brothers Who Care	Partnership to provide financial literacy and expanded opportunities to youth.	X	X			
2021	Hammer Heads	Providing employment and training for clients in the construction sector.			X		
2022	Toronto Police Service- 31 Division	Referrals to support youth and families in the Humber River-Black Creek community.	X			X	X

Glossary

The following acronyms are used throughout this report:

- **PCNN:** Peace Core New Narrative
- **PSC:** Public Safety Canada
- **TCDSB:** Toronto Catholic District School Board
- **TDSB:** Toronto District School Board

- **TPS:** Toronto Police Service
- **YAAACE:** Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education

We also use the following terms throughout the report, which we define below:

- **Shooting event:** Any incident in which a projectile is discharged from a firearm (as defined under the Criminal Code of Canada) and injures a person. This excludes events such as suicide and police-involved firearm discharges (TPS, Public Safety Data Portal).
- **Firearm discharge:** Any incident where evidence exists that a projectile was discharged from a firearm (as defined under the Criminal Code of Canada) including accidental discharge (non-police), celebratory fire, drive-by, etc. (TPS, Public Safety Data Portal).
- **Community violence:** Intentional acts of interpersonal violence often committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Common types of community violence include individual or group conflicts such as fights among gangs and other groups, use of weapons and shootings in public areas (City of Toronto, 2021).

- **Public health approach (to community violence):** A public health approach focuses on improving the social determinants of health—the economic and social conditions that influence individual and community differences in health status — as a means of preventing community violence (City of Toronto, 2021).
- **Racialized identity group:** According to Statistics Canada, there is currently no universal definition or standard for “racialized groups.” As such, the data that they collect pertaining to “racialized groups” follow the Employment Equity Act’s definition of “visible minority” groups. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese (Statistics Canada, 2023).



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