

Children's Aid Society of Toronto

So(ul) Journ(ey) V

WASHINGTON, DC ~ 2011



EVALUATION REPORT

For: So(ul) Journ(ey) Committee
CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF TORONTO

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1.0 Background

The Black Education Awareness Committee (BEAC) was established by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) to provide leadership within the agency and to promote learning about and celebration of Black History Month. The purpose of the BEAC is twofold:

- 1) To promote understanding amongst youth and staff regarding Black History;
- 2) To aid in empowering children and youth with Caribbean or African descent who are involved with the CAS, by increasing their self-esteem and knowledge about their history and roots through educational opportunities.

A key method used with the CAST Black children and youth in care to help them advance their knowledge of and connection to their cultural history has been the Soul Journey expeditions. The Soul Journey trips were developed through BEAC's mentoring initiatives which aim to provide educational, cultural and spiritual awareness learning opportunities for children and youth of Caribbean-Canadian or African-Canadian descent who are receiving support from CAS of Toronto. There have been five Soul Journey trips to date and they take place during the summer months. These specially planned trips with youth and CAST chaperones are to historical areas of importance related to the Black culture. Examples of excursions include trips to Nova Scotia, and specific to this report, Washington, DC. Previous evaluations of the Soul Journey experiences have found these trips to positively impact on the young people by improving their knowledge of roadblocks and oppression related to Black history, by aiding in raising the youths' self esteem, and by providing them with positive memories of their involvement with CAST.

The focus of this evaluation is the 2011 trip: Soul Journey V. This most recent summer excursion in August 2011 provided 35 CAST involved youth, ages of 14 and 17, and eight chaperones from the Greater Toronto Area, the opportunity to participate on a 5-day educational visit to Washington, D.C. The legal status of the youth included Crown Wards, Society wards and community-based teens who were receiving services from CAST. The adult chaperones on the trip were either foster parents or staff volunteers from the CAST community.

The Soul Journey V trip was organized to include visits to cultural and spiritual landmarks that aimed to increase for the youth their awareness of Caribbean and African ancestral heritages. The itinerary included visits to *The Lincoln Memorial, Capitol Hill, The White House, The National Mall, The Smithsonian Institute, Howard University, The African-American Art Museum, and the Civil War Museum.*



2.0 Evaluation Methodology

2.1 Sample and Measurement

The 2011 evaluation of the Soul Journey excursion involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from standardized youth and chaperone questionnaires. Both tools collected data on participants' perceptions and satisfaction with the trip immediately following the excursion.

- ❖ Youth Standardized Feedback Tool: 30 of 35 (86 %) completed the form.
- ❖ Chaperone Standardized Feedback Tool: 8 of 8 (100%) completed the survey.

The Youth and Chaperone Evaluation forms assessed participant satisfaction and opinions on trip content, cultural knowledge gained, and impact of knowledge gained from the trip, as well as overall satisfaction with the trip itself. Both youth and chaperones were asked for recommendations and aspects of Soul Journey V which could be improved.

2.2 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the evaluations were analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (v15.0). Qualitative data collected through the open ended, narrative-based questions were analyzed through thematic and content analysis. All respondents were assigned a non-identifying code, and any names and other personal information was removed.



3.0 Findings

3.1 Youth Evaluation Results

3.1.1 Youth: Quantitative Self-Report Data

Thirty of the 35 (86%) Soul Journey V youth completed the Youth Evaluation questionnaire. Percentage agreement on the responses is noted in Table 1; any responses of “agree”/“strongly agree” of 80% or more are bordered and bolded.

As noted below in Table 1, at least half or more of the youth “strongly agreed” (SA) and approximately one-third “agreed” (A) with all the statements regarding:

- ❖ Understood the goals for the trip: SA (56%) or A (44%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Attractions of the trip were relevant to goals: SA (55%) or A (35%) Total: 90%
- ❖ Attractions stimulated learning about African history: SA (57%) or A (29%) Total: 86%
- ❖ Knowledge increased regarding heritage: SA (54%) or A (32%) Total: 86%
- ❖ Were more appreciative of the systematic biases: SA (50%) or A (30%) Total: 80%
- ❖ Soul Journey increased my learning of cultural heritage: SA (58%) or A (35%) Total: 93%

Regarding whether they would “recommend Soul Journey to other youth?” ~ a total of 93% indicated they would. Finally, 93% of the 27 youth rated their overall experience with Soul Journey as “excellent” (74%) or “good” (37%). See Table 1.

Table 1: Youth Results of Self-Report Survey

Table 1: Youth Results	# n= 30	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
I understood the goals for the trip	27	56%	44%	0%	0%
The attractions were relevant to the goals of the trip	31	55%	35%	10%	~
The attractions stimulated my learning about African Canadian history/culture	28	57%	29%	14%	~
My knowledge increased regarding the heritage of African Canadian/Americans who are descendents of the slave experience in North America	28	54%	32%	14%	~
I am more appreciative of the systemic biases that African Canadian/Americans still face in North America today	30	50%	30%	10%	10%
Due to Soul Journey my understanding of my cultural heritage increased	26	58%	35%	7%	~
Chaperones were important to the trip success	28	Yes		Unsure	No
		82%		18%	~
I would recommend Soul Journey to other youth in care	28	Yes		Unsure	No
		93%		4%	3%
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

✦ HOPES AND DREAMS?

The youth were asked to share what their “*hopes and dreams*” were for the Soul Journey trip. Analysis of their responses identified three key themes: *Develop positive relationships, Education and Knowledge, and Share with Other Youth and Community.*

1st KEY THEME: *Develop Positive Relationships*

Repeatedly youth said they hoped one of the results of the Soul Journey trip will be developing positive relationships with their peers, and chaperones. The youth hope to foster new friendships that will last beyond the trip, and to share the learning experiences of Soul Journey with others who have similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds as themselves.

“To create new friendships, and to have a great relationship with everyone and share the learning opportunities”.

2nd KEY THEME: *Education and Knowledge*

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis was these teen’s desire to gain more knowledge and learn more about “Black History” and their culture. The youth want to learn more about their families and culture’s history; they want to learn from their ancestors’ past experiences in order to better themselves in the future.

“To further my knowledge about my culture and to be proud of where I came from to get better”

3rd KEY THEME: *Share with Other Youth and Community*

Lastly, many youth shared that they hoped that all youth in care with African or Caribbean American/Canadian backgrounds could attend a trip like this. They hoped that they could take what they learned from Soul Journey and their experiences and share them with their peers, other youth, and with their community. They hoped to spread the knowledge they gained from the experience itself.

“I hope every youth can go on a trip like this...and to share my memories with my family, pursue post-secondary education, and to continue to encourage change in my community”.



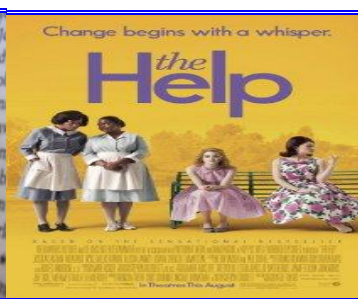
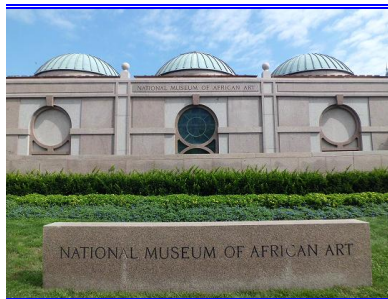
IMPACTFUL ATTRACTIONS?

The youth were asked to share what attraction they felt had the *most impact or relevance* to them, and which attraction had the *least impact or relevance* to them.

Most Impactful: Different attractions and experiences meant different things to different youth. No one attraction was dominant across all the youth. See Table 2 for the ones which the youth felt had the *most impact or relevance* to them:

Table 2: Most Impactful Attractions

The African Art Museum	The Civil War Memorial	Movie, "The Help"
<p>For some youth the <i>African Art Museum</i> had the most impact on them because of the many artifacts from African countries which youth had relations to. Youth felt that the museum was very interactive, educational and enjoyable.</p> <p><i>"The African art museum because art was beautiful and I loved learning about my African ancestors."</i></p>	<p>Many youth felt <i>The Civil War Memorial</i> was the most impactful attraction because it taught them the facts about the Civil War; of great importance, the youth learned that the African Americans freed themselves.</p> <p><i>"The Civil War Monument because I learned how we freed ourselves."</i></p>	<p>Quite a few of the youth said the movie, "<i>The Help</i>", was the most impactful attraction because it told the story of the suffering and injustice that many of their ancestors experienced not so long ago.</p> <p><i>"The movie, 'The Help', because it was very emotional and shows how hard it was back then to get a job and how the whites treated us."</i></p>



Least Impactful: While the majority of the youth answered "none" to this question, a few youth did mention *The Lincoln Memorial* as being *least impactful* of the attractions. The youth stated the memorial honored Lincoln for freeing the slaves, when in fact it was something he did not really do; ergo the memorial felt to them, given the nature of the purpose of the trip, untruthful and disingenuous.



✚ MOST VALUABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

These youth stated their *most valuable learning experience* from the Soul Journey trip ~ the truth about Abraham Lincoln and the freeing of slaves. That in fact, Lincoln did not actually accomplish this.

“My most valuable learning was that no one freed the slaves. Lincoln did not free the slaves. They freed themselves.”

✚ NEXT STEPS / FUTURE LEARNING?

So what are these youth going to do with what they learned through Soul Journey? And how will they use this learning in the future? Two common themes emerged ~ *Empowerment of Self and Others* and *Educate Others*.

THEME 1.

Empowerment of Self & Others

The Soul Journey experience about Black culture and history encouraged them to help better themselves and to attain brighter futures. Many now want to help empower their peers and community to achieve their goals.

“I will take my knowledge and try to make my life and others’ life better through music and other means and to be a leader”.

THEME 2.

Educate Others

The second theme, while related to the first, centered on the youth using the knowledge and information acquired through Soul Journey to help educate others. Many youth said they hoped to share their new found knowledge with their peers and their community.

“I will use it to educate people who don’t know”

3.1.3 Youth: What to Improve

Youth were asked if they had any recommendations to help improve the Soul Journey experience. The preponderance of the youth responded with: *“nothing”*. A few of the youth suggested the Soul Journey trips should be of a longer duration.

3.1.4 Youth: Additional Comments

Overall, the youth that responded appeared appreciative and thankful for the experience of Soul Journey. In the words of one youth – the trip was *“life-changing”*.

“I enjoyed it. Thank you for the experience”

*“I will never forget the memories.
Thank you for the experience”*

“This trip was life changing”



3.2 Analysis of Chaperone Results

3.2.1 Chaperone: Quantitative Self-Report Data

Eight of eight (100%) of the Soul Journey V chaperones completed the Chaperone Evaluation questionnaire. Three of the eight noted it was their first experience as a chaperone. Percentage agreement on the responses is noted in Table 3 below; any responses of “agree”/“strongly agree” of 80% or more are bordered and bolded. As noted below in Table 3, two-thirds or more of the chaperones “strongly agreed” (SA) with all the statements regarding:

- ❖ Responsibilities were clear: SA (87.5%) or A (12.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Trip content was clear: SA (62.5%) or A (37.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Material/training was helpful in preparing for duties: SA (75%) or A (12%) Total: 87%
- ❖ Understood goals for the trip: SA (100%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Attractions were relevant for trip learning: SA (75%) or A (25%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Attractions stimulated my learning: SA (87.5%) or A (12.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ My knowledge of Black cultural heritage increased: SA (62.5%) or A (37.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ I am more appreciative of the systemic biases: SA (62.5%) or A (37.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ My understanding of my cultural heritage increased: SA (87.5%) or A (12.5%) Total: 100%
- ❖ I feel better about my cultural heritage: SA (75%) or A (12%) Total: 87%
- ❖ The chaperones were important to the trip success: Yes (100%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Would recommend SJ to other youth in care: Yes (100%) Total: 100%
- ❖ Overall satisfaction with quality of SJ: Excellent (75%) or Good (25%) Total: 100%

Table 3 – Chaperone Results of Self Report

Table 2: Chaperone Results	# N=8	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
My responsibilities as a chaperone were clear to me prior to the trip	n=8	87.5%	12.5%	~	~
The Soul Journey trip content was clear	n=8	62.5%	37.5%	~	~
Resource material/training were helpful in preparing me for my trip duties/responsibilities	n=8	75%	12%	13%	~
I understood the goals for the trip	n=8	100%	~	~	~
The attractions were relevant to Trip goals	n=8	75%	25%	~	~
The attractions stimulated my learning about African Canadian history/culture	n=8	87.5%	12.5%	~	~
My knowledge increased re- heritage of African Cdn/Americans who are descendents of the slave experience in North America	n=8	62.5%	37.5%	~	~
I am more appreciative of the systemic biases that African Cdn/Americans still face in North America today	n=8	62.5%	37.5%	~	~
Due to Soul Journey my understanding of my cultural heritage increased	n=8	87.5%	12.5%	~	~
Due to Soul Journey I feel better about my cultural heritage	n=8	75%	12%	13%	~
The chaperones were important to the success of the trip	n=6	Yes		Unsure	No
		100%		~	~
I would recommend Soul Journey to other youth in care	n=8	Yes		Unsure	No
		100%		~	
My overall satisfaction with the quality of the Soul Journey trip	n=8	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
		75%	25%	~	~

3.2.2 Chaperone: Qualitative Self-Report Data

✦ MOST IMPACTFUL ATTRACTION?

The chaperones were asked to share what attraction they felt was most impactful and had the most relevance to them. Similar to the responses of the youth, the most preferred attractions were:

The African Art Museum:

Many chaperones thought the artifacts were authentic to the cultural and history of African Americans and Canadians.

“The Museum of African Art because all the artifacts were authentic to the culture and history”

The Civil War Memorial:

Again, the chaperones thought that it was impactful because it honors the soldiers who fought for freedom, and the history of the freedom of slaves.

“The Civil War Memorial because we remembered the soldiers who fought for our freedom”

✦ MOST VALUABLE LEARNING?

The chaperones were asked? What was the most valuable learning from the Soul Journey experience? Similar to the responses of the youth, most identified that it was learning that Abraham Lincoln did not actually free the slaves ~ that the slaves “freed themselves”.

“Abraham Lincoln did not free the slaves out of good will”.

✦ NEXT STEPS/FUTURE LEARNING?

So what did the chaperones say about how they would take what was learned through Soul Journey and use it in the future? Most indicated that they would share the knowledge they acquired with their peers, communities, and their children; that they would use what they learned to help their own community to learn from the past and to come together and attain better futures.

“By passing the knowledge to my peers, helping our own Black community learn from the past and come together, and teaching each other what it means to be Black”.



3.2.4 Chaperones: Recommendations

Although the majority of chaperone respondents indicated they had “*no recommendations*” a few mentioned, similar to the youth, that the duration of the trip should be longer.

3.2.4 Chaperones: Additional Comments

From their comments, it was clear the chaperones believed that the trip was a success; many felt that the Soul Journey experience should be mandatory for all youth of color.

4.0 Discussion

Soul Journey V - 2011 was another successful endeavor; it built on the goals and objectives of the first Soul Journey trip:

For Black Youth in Care...

- ❖ To build and enhance their awareness of the Black cultural history in Canada;
- ❖ To advance the knowledge, appreciation and understanding of African-Canadian heritage.

As evidenced by the responses collected through the post trip questionnaires administered to both the youth and the chaperones, the Soul Journey positively impacted both types of participants. The education provided on the trip increased the youth and chaperones knowledge of their cultural and ethnic histories and has caused them to feel a sense of empowerment which many would like to share with their peers and their communities. Thus, Soul Journey not only has a direct impact on those who participated on the excursion, but indirectly impacts those who are within their family and community circle of the participants.

Both youth and chaperones were not only satisfied with the experience but were thankful for the Soul Journey opportunity. Most had only kind words to describe the experience. The only recommendation that was made by both types of participants was that the trip should be longer in duration. Lastly, both the youth and the chaperones indicated that all youth in care of color should have an experience like Soul Journey; that all should have the opportunity to learn more about and embrace their Black culture.

In sum, Soul Journey continues to be an important factor in providing an interactive learning experience for youth of African decent within CAST care system. The Soul Journey opportunity positively impacts the youth and chaperones involved and it appears to indirectly realize a positive effect on participants' communities. Should Soul Journey continue? Unequivocally, yes. And according to the youth and chaperones, Soul Journey should be offered to all youth in care of color.