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Re: Public Apology to QTBIPOC Communities in Nova Scotia

The Youth Project, including our Board of Directors, Youth Board, and staff, recognize and apologize for the ways in which we as an organization have caused harm to queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities in Nova Scotia. We have done so historically by perpetuating systemic racism and white supremacy within our organization and continue to do so through our failure to enact changes in our programs and policies.

Throughout its history, the Youth Project has been a predominantly white organization with primarily white staff members, volunteers, and youth accessing our services. We understand that the systemic exclusion of queer and trans BIPOC youth from our spaces, services, and resources continues to reinforce a culture of white supremacy within our organizational structure. Moreover, we acknowledge that BIPOC individuals and communities have been directly harmed by the practices of our organization. We have consistently failed to create spaces that support, affirm, and celebrate queer and trans BIPOC youth. We have also failed to create safe and supportive environments for our BIPOC staff members, volunteers, and community partners.

Over the years, numerous barriers to the inclusion of queer and trans BIPOC communities within the Youth Project have been identified, including: a lack of volunteer and staff representation, a lack of programming which centers the needs of queer and trans BIPOC youth, and a lack of policies to rectify these shortcomings. Despite recognizing these barriers, we have failed to make an intentional shift from acknowledgment to action. As the most well-funded queer and trans youth community organization in Atlantic Canada, it is unacceptable that queer and trans BIPOC youth and community members have been continuously excluded from our services, regardless of intention. We are deeply sorry for the harms we have caused.

A lack of accountability and willingness to acknowledge the harms caused by the Youth Project over time has broken trust with BIPOC communities. We know that countless people have put in time, energy, and emotional work to address racism and colonialism within our organization and that we have yet to listen in a meaningful way. We do not expect this lost trust to be repaired overnight. Rather, we recognize that this type of work involves ongoing action and relationship building. We also understand that, as white people, we will not have all the answers and that our voices are not the ones that should be centered throughout this process.

Therefore, in moving forward, we will be taking action, beginning with the following changes:

- The creation of a Community Hiring Committee (CHC) with strong BIPOC representation, in which paid participants will oversee the hiring process for our Executive Director;
- The creation of a full-time BIPOC Community Education and Outreach position in the Halifax location;
- The creation of an Accessibility Fund to assist individuals from BIPOC and other marginalized communities to participate on the Youth Board and the Board of Directors;
- The creation and implementation of an equitable hiring policy;
- The creation of employee and volunteer safety protocols;
- A review of our current bylaws and policies; and
- The creation of a clear and transparent feedback process to continue to create structural changes that will centre the needs of queer and trans BIPOC youth.

We know that even with the best intentions, we will inevitably continue to make mistakes and cause harm. However, we will no longer make excuses for our failings and we are committed to taking appropriate reparations for our actions. We promise to actively listen to the voices of BIPOC community members, be accountable to the harms we cause, and grow and learn from our mistakes. We encourage any feedback from BIPOC community members around this process by contacting us at feedback@youthproject.ns.ca.

We recognize that we fundamentally cannot achieve our mandate of making Nova Scotia a safer, healthier, and happier place for queer and trans youth without the active involvement and leadership of queer and trans folks from BIPOC communities and we are therefore sincerely committed to this long overdue process.

To learn more about the history of the Youth Project, we suggest reading:

Droesbeck, T. S., (1997). *Not the lady's auxiliary: Exploding the politics of gender relations in the Halifax queer and youth movement* (Master's thesis, Dalhousie University). Retrieved from <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp05/mq24835.pdf>