

# SILOS AND SILENCES: SHEDDING LIGHT ON CHILD WELFARE AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

## Community Forum Summary

April 2022



## ABOUT OUR FIRST COMMUNITY FORUM

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, The Border(ing) Practices: Systemic Racism, Immigration & Child Welfare research team and community partners hosted a knowledge sharing community forum titled “**Silos and Silences: Shedding Light on Child Welfare and Immigration Status**” with the purpose of exploring how practice and perspectives intersect when working with immigrant families in child welfare services in Ontario and British Columbia (see project details below).

Inspired by discussions with observations with partners working in child welfare, gender-based violence, we noticed the isolation of children in gender-based violence events and the exclusion of immigration status in events on child welfare.

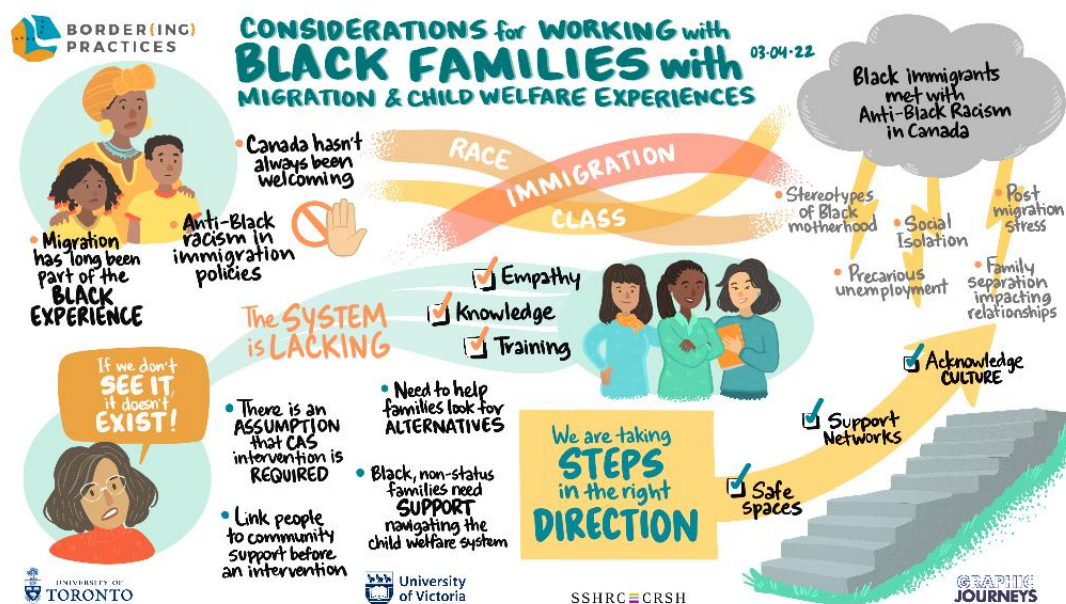
To address these silences, we brought together leaders working in anti-black racism advocacy in child welfare, gender-based violence services and community advocacy for immigrant families and legal services for children and youth with precarious status. Featuring a moderated panel, and a series of workshops, we engaged over 160 participants on the factors contributing to the intersectional silences and invisibility of immigration status in child welfare services.

## THE PANEL

- Moderator: Keishia Facey, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
- Travonne Edwards, University of Toronto, and Black Action Network Peel, ON
- Monica Larios, Peer Champion at Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- Mary Birdsell, Justice for Children and Youth, Toronto ON
- Shaoli Choudhury, YWCA Vancouver, BC

## WORKSHOPS AND FACILITATORS

- Duty to Report for Immigrant Serving Organizations: [Shaoli Choudhury, YWCA Vancouver](#)
- Social Invisibility of Immigration Status in Child Welfare Policies in British Columbia: [Mandeep Kaur Mucina and Manvinder Gill, Bordering Practices](#)
- Intersections, Child Rights, Immigration Status and Child Welfare [Mary Birdsell, Justice for Children and Youth, Khaldah Salih, Black Legal Action Centre](#)
- Considerations When Working with Black Immigrant Families: [Chizara Anucha, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, Bilqees Mohamed, Bordering Practices](#)



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PANEL AND WORKSHOPS

### Anti-Black racism and Child Welfare

- **Policies lack the recognition and clear language and guidelines** to support Black communities and families despite being overrepresented in the child welfare system.
- Migration policies have lengthened family separation for Black migrants and their children which impacts family connection and relationships.
- There is a need to challenge the assumption of professional care and create pathways for considering alternatives to childcare that Black migrant families utilize such as community care, family members or elder siblings.

### The Lack of Attention of Immigration Status in Child Welfare

- Immigration status is deemed “too complex” or is deprioritized in child welfare or considered the responsibility of the family.

- **Disconnection between child's immigration status once in care:** Children or youth who are in care may be unaware of their citizenship status, face criminalization (without status) and face deportation. Current approaches do not consider how removal impacts citizenship status within the family.
- **Deadlines for investigations or case-management support contradict with the time and intentionality required to understand the barriers and needs of families with precarious status.**
- Risk calculations differ based on personal experience of family who have experienced migratory trauma in different social-political contexts. Co-creating and clarifying definitions of risk and safety for involvement can inform practice.

### **Gender-Based Violence, Duty to Report and Child Welfare**

- There is a high expectation of immigrant women to assimilate and trust systems, despite language barriers, fear, and a lack of resources on how the child welfare system operates in relation to their status.
- Gender-based violence services do not have alternatives to duty to report but transparency with families on the role of workers could prevent potential child welfare involvement.
- Precarious status can impact how immigrant women parent due to trauma, wage theft, poverty and consequently invoke child welfare involvement.
- Workers reporting abuse without knowledge of precarious status can increase vulnerabilities as most services (employment and childcare support) are structured to support people with status.
- Organizations supporting women with precarious status are underfunded and require training and resources.

## **SPECIAL THANKS FROM THE BORDERING PRACTICES TEAM**

The Bordering Practices Team would like to sincerely thank all participants, panelists and facilitators who made our first community forum a success. We would like to also thank our research advisory committee members, community partners and team who supported the design and implementation of the event. The Bordering Practices Team intends on continuing conversations with community partners and people with lived experience to inform our research, policy, and advocacy goals and develop workshops for service providers in response to the needs identified from our forum. If you are interested in joining our newsletter and receive updates on the project, please contact: [borderingpractices@utoronto.ca](mailto:borderingpractices@utoronto.ca)

## **PROJECT DETAILS**

**Border(ing) Practices: Systemic Racism, Immigration & Child Welfare** is a collaborative research project led by researchers at the University of Toronto and the University of Victoria working in partnership with child welfare, immigration, and gender-based violence service providers and advocates in Ontario and British Columbia. This research aims to understand how immigration policies, in concert with systemic racism, shape child welfare policies and practices with children, youth and families.