

Letter from the editor

By Amber Siddiqui

Young people hold immense power—many revolutionary social justice movements of recent decades have been led by youth. While the term ‘youth activism’ typically sparks one to think about the phenomenal Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai, it is important to keep in mind that for every young leader pictured on a magazine cover, thousands more are spearheading movements for causes such as climate justice, the elimination of racism and sexism, 2SLGBTQ+ rights, economic change, and more.

Youth activism, both offline and online, has been on the rise for years, and in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, young people—racialized youth in particular— have been the driving forces behind many of the movements to combat racism, eliminate police brutality, and create systemic change. This willingness to pursue social justice has only intensified over the course of the pandemic.

It is clear that with or without community reinforcement, young people are involved in community development and change. In order for youth engagement to be sustainable and impactful, however, institutions—such as schools—must create more support for youth voices to ensure that community-decision-making is informed by a diverse collection of young people—especially those directly impacted by community change.

Throughout my junior year of high school, I led Milton District’s student equity team. Taking on this role in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as someone who craves human connection, was difficult and trying at times. I did my best to (virtually) build relationships with my teammates and other like-minded peers, however, and realized just how many of us there were out there. By ‘us’, I mean youth activists and community leaders.

During meetings and workshops, I was frequently asked questions related to my equity team—eg. “How did you receive this opportunity?”, “how did you get your school’s administration on board with all of your ideas?”, “how do I start my own equity team?”, “what does your equity team do?”, etc. Though valid questions, I grew increasingly concerned about the obstacles preventing young people in Halton from reaching their potential as activists, advocates, and leaders.

That is how the idea for this toolkit came to life—in the middle of a conversation (more like a rant actually) with the amazing teacher leads of my equity team. If ‘youth have a voice’, as we are told all the time, then where are our microphones? Where is our platform to speak? How do we make people listen to us?

Thankfully, Halton has countless incredible youth and adult allies—Lily Viggiano and the Halton Youth Initiative in particular, were the reason that this toolkit was created in a matter of two months. Nearly 30 remarkable youth volunteers and several community partners from every corner of Halton contributed immensely to the construction of this resource and participated in the learning process together. The beautiful thing about equity efforts is that none of us have to be experts on everything—simply committed to educating ourselves, working together, and helping to build the community we envision ourselves living in.

With that said, while my team and I deeply appreciate the work of the activists, advocates, and leaders of today, we must also commemorate the incredible endeavours of those who came before us—this toolkit was made possible by the hard work of thousands of other people. Now that it has been compiled, I am ecstatic for it to be in the hands of students and young people in every corner of Halton. Though equity efforts are ever changing, my team and I hope that this toolkit will serve as a starting point for current youth equity initiatives in Halton schools. Halton is an extraordinary community with extraordinary young people—I wholeheartedly believe that if youth are given the tools we need to succeed, our collective potential will change the world.

How to use this toolkit

Overarching values and reminders

- Each school and community is unique
- LISTEN to people
- Acknowledge and credit racialized authors, advocates and activists who have said this all before

School and Community Use

This toolkit was designed with a school environment in mind; but the contents, structures and wisdom from others can be used in many settings. In fact, in order to truly move the needle on equity in our communities, equity-focused actions must take place in every space.

Getting Started

We understand that this toolkit is a large body of work. The key will be to take your time and use the clickable table of contents to find things you want to know or to move through the toolkit section by section - taking time to digest and reflect.

To begin, it is important to know how familiar folks are with equity terminology, concepts, and experiences—this information will help everyone get on the same page and guide you to understand where more knowledge and understanding is needed before moving forward. You can do this in a casual conversation, guided discussion, or by accessing online modules and/or video presentations. Remember: everyone on your team will be coming with a unique set of identities, experiences, and knowledge.

Next, head to the “Equity Team 101 Toolkit” slideshow. This gives a general overview of what you will find in each section along with some values and lessons to keep in your hearts and minds as you continue forward.

Building an Equity Team 101

- Equity teams must spend time learning and unlearning in advance of taking action.
- Lean into your strengths and harness the power of listening.

Dismantling white-supremacy culture

- White-supremacy culture seeks to disconnect and divide.
- To dismantle, we must connect and come together—creating a caring community and principled spaces helps us take action on our biggest gaps.

Best practices & protocol pages

- There is a power dynamic involved with “supporting” and “helping” communities seeking equity. Our language and our approach must be thoughtful and respectful in order to minimize harm.

Concluding

As always, move respectfully and humbly in your equity efforts. There is a lot of work to be done and everyone has a role to play. We thank you for taking the time to learn from this toolkit!

Understanding Key Concepts & Terminology

Terms

This is a collection of concepts and terms that you will find in the toolkit. Though it is helpful, this is not a brief, non-exhaustive list, and we encourage users of this toolkit to visit the resources listed below to learn more.

Ableism - Bias against the physically challenged and differently abled (formerly the disabled or handicapped) by the temporarily abled.

Defined by: [Access Living](#)

Allyship - A lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people.

Defined by: [The Anti-Oppression Network](#)

Anti-racism - Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.

Defined by: [Kendra Cherry](#)

Anti-racist - One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.

Defined by: [Ibram X. Kendi](#)

BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, People of Color. A term commonly used to describe individuals who are not considered white.

Defined by: [Pacific University Oregon](#)

Colonization - The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. The action of appropriating a place or domain for one's own use.

Defined by: [Pacific University Oregon](#)

Cultural Appropriation - Theft of cultural elements—including symbols, art, language, customs, etc.—for one's own use, commodification, or profit, often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture.

Defined by: [Colors of Resistance](#)

Disability - An impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or some combination of these. It substantially affects a person's life activities and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime.

Defined by: [Pacific University Oregon](#)

Hate-crime - Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, colour, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.

Defined by: [Pacific University Oregon](#)

Homophobia - Dislike of or prejudice against the [2S]LGBTQ+ community.

Coined by: [George Weinberg](#)

Intersectionality - The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Coined by: [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#)

Islamophobia - Unreasonable dislike or fear of, and prejudice against, Muslims or Islam.

Coined by: [Ikhwan](#)

Marginalized groups - Those who are not fully integrated into society. These groups may be denied opportunities to meaningfully participate in society due to lack of economic resources, knowledge about political rights, recognition, or other forms of oppression.

Defined by: [United Nations](#)

Oppression - The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group.

Defined by: [dRworksBook](#)

Privilege - Unearned access to resources (social power) is only readily available to some individuals as a result of their social group.

Defined by: [Pacific University Oregon](#)

Racialized - Recognizing that race is a social construct, the Ontario Human Rights Commission describes people as “racialized person” or “racialized group”. Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.

Defined by: [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)

Racism - A marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.

Defined by: [Ibram X. Kendi](#)

Racist - One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.

Defined by: [Ibram X. Kendi](#)

Transphobia - Hatred and rejection of transgender identity and a refusal to acknowledge that it could possibly be real or valid.

Defined by: [Transactual](#)

White privilege - Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits, and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white.

Defined by: [Peggy McIntosh](#)

White supremacy - A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and people of colour by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

Defined by: [Challenging White Supremacy Workshop](#)

Xenophobia - Xenophobia is an unreasonable fear of foreigners.

Defined by: [Erika Lee](#)

Concepts

The following concepts are broadly agreed upon concepts that readers may come across in the toolkit. Please take time to become familiar and use digital resources to learn more.

- **Powerful Groups Targeted for Oppression (PGTOs)** - The marginalized and global majority that is strong but faces oppression and is specifically targeted. This includes communities such as BIPOC people, Muslims, Newcomers, the 2SLGBTQIA+ members and more.
- **Incidental oppression vs. Systemic oppression** - Incidental oppression means a situation or incident has come up/happened to cause a group to be oppressed. Systemic oppression means the government causes a group to be oppressed.
- **Visible oppression vs. Covert oppression** - Visible oppression means the oppression is in the open and they are not doing anything to hide it. Covert oppression means they are trying to hide it and not be noticed by people.
- **Racism vs. Prejudice vs. Discrimination** - Racism is the opinion that race influences one's personality, behaviour, and morals, as well as the belief that one race is superior to another. When it comes to discrimination, it's a question of acting on discriminatory views. This can be on purpose, for example, a landlord decides not to rent to any Latinos. A stereotype might be conceived of as prejudice.
- **Youth activism & Activist burnout** - Youth activism continues to stand at the forefront of change, action, and protest. Activist burnout can occur in the face of stress, over-exertion on issues, emotional labour due to the nature of equity efforts, and various other reasons. Self-care, team support, and taking breaks are a must when approaching activist efforts!

Communities in Halton

***Note:** The population data comes from 2016 census for Halton Region

2SLGBTQIA+ - We're unable to find clear data on the Queer and Trans community, as data collection often refrains from asking about gender and sexuality. However, there are resources for all who belong in this community. Even for youth, there are great safe spaces such as [Positive Space Network](#) (PSN) and a recent project, [Halton Pride Collective](#).

Black - Over 15, 200 Black people contribute to Halton's diverse population, which is 12% of the population. There are many groups that amplify and support Black communities. One of them is [Halton Black Voices](#). Their purpose is to create a safe space for all Black people and raise awareness to educate others.

Indigenous - Around 5,100 people in Halton Region identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. The current treaty holders are the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many resources listed under [Our Kids Network Indigenous Reconciliation](#). They include podcasts, maps of Turtle Island, sources for mental wellness and much more.

Muslim - In a 2011 census almost 18,900 people identified as Muslim - and many more have joined the Region since that census. The [Halton Islamic Association](#) and [Muslim Association of Milton](#) give great support and education that Muslims need. There are many places of worship as well. Muslims can pray at mosques, give their child religious education, and much more.

1 - Introducing the "How to Build an Equity Team 101" toolkit

Newcomers - In 2016, we welcomed around 20,500 newcomers (immigrants and refugees) to Halton. Over the course of 5 years, from 2011 to 2016, the population of recent immigrants was 41%. It has probably changed even more. Some supporters are [HMC Connections](#), [Halton Newcomers Strategy](#) and [Community Development Halton](#). They all give resources and services to support newcomers.

Sources and further reading

Communities Sources

- [Halton Demographics](#)
- [Culture Demographics](#)
- [Community Development Halton](#)

Definitions Sources

- [University of British Columbia - Equity & Inclusion Glossary](#)
- [Identifying social inclusion and exclusion](#)

Clickable table of contents

This section will be completed when the toolkit is full compiled - team discussion needed

Options

- One massive doc - clickable ToC within the doc
 - Best option for those who may print
- Accessible google drive folder with View access for all