

I AM A DIFFERENCE MAKER



WOODGREEN



Rites of Passage Strategic Plan

June 16th, 2023

Prepared by Nene Kwasi Kafele, Consultant



WoodGreen Rites: Building Community

WoodGreen Rites of Passage: A Frame

- WoodGreen's Rites of Passage (Rites) is derived from African traditional Initiation (Rites of Passage) rituals, ceremonies and activities designed to create healthy, responsible adults in a community.
- WoodGreen's Rites process is an African Canadian community-based process that builds on the African value system and framework and is designed to enhance and deepen African Canadian youth self-esteem, build knowledge of identity and history, connect young people to caring circles of community led by Elders, parents and leaders, build self esteem, peer leadership and critical thinking skills and build healthy relationships through a series of safe, culturally grounded intensive challenges, activities and exposure to African-derived knowledge and experiences.
- Rites builds capacity, self-esteem, skills and service to community. WoodGreen Rites strengthens community relationships.
- As well, the WoodGreen Rites process builds in a component for Initiates ("Graduates") to remain strongly connected to the process through group projects, and as peer mentors and alumni supports. This sustains connections, deepens relationships and further builds mature youth leadership.
- WoodGreen Rites of Passage is unique in Ontario.



First Things First... Rites and the Africentric Imperative



Africentricity is a frame of reference where reality and activities are viewed and understood from the perspective of those with lived experience as African Canadians.



The Africentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate relevance and meaningful presence of African Canadians at the centre of everything that affects them - as opposed to being on the margins as an afterthought.



First Things First... Rites and the Africentric Imperative

An Africentric Paradigm seeks to answer some basic questions:

- How is this issue relevant to African Canadians?
- What the implications of this for African Canadians?
- Is community voice fully present or muted, misunderstood, deflected, minimized or trivialised in this story?

- Who made these decisions and was the African Canadian community involved?
- Are African Canadians present in this story?
- Who is telling the story? Who controls the information? What is the political agenda?
- What are the implications for African Canadian children and youth because of this development?

- Who best represents the community's collective interest in this issue?
- Where does the power reside in this development? Does any reside with the community?
- How do we protect our best interests because of this development?
- How do we advance our collective self-determination and sense of community integrity in dealing with this issue?

First Things First... Rites and the Africentric Imperative



NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU
"He who does not know can
know from learning"



WoodGreen Rites is grounded in an Africentric frame



Method and Process

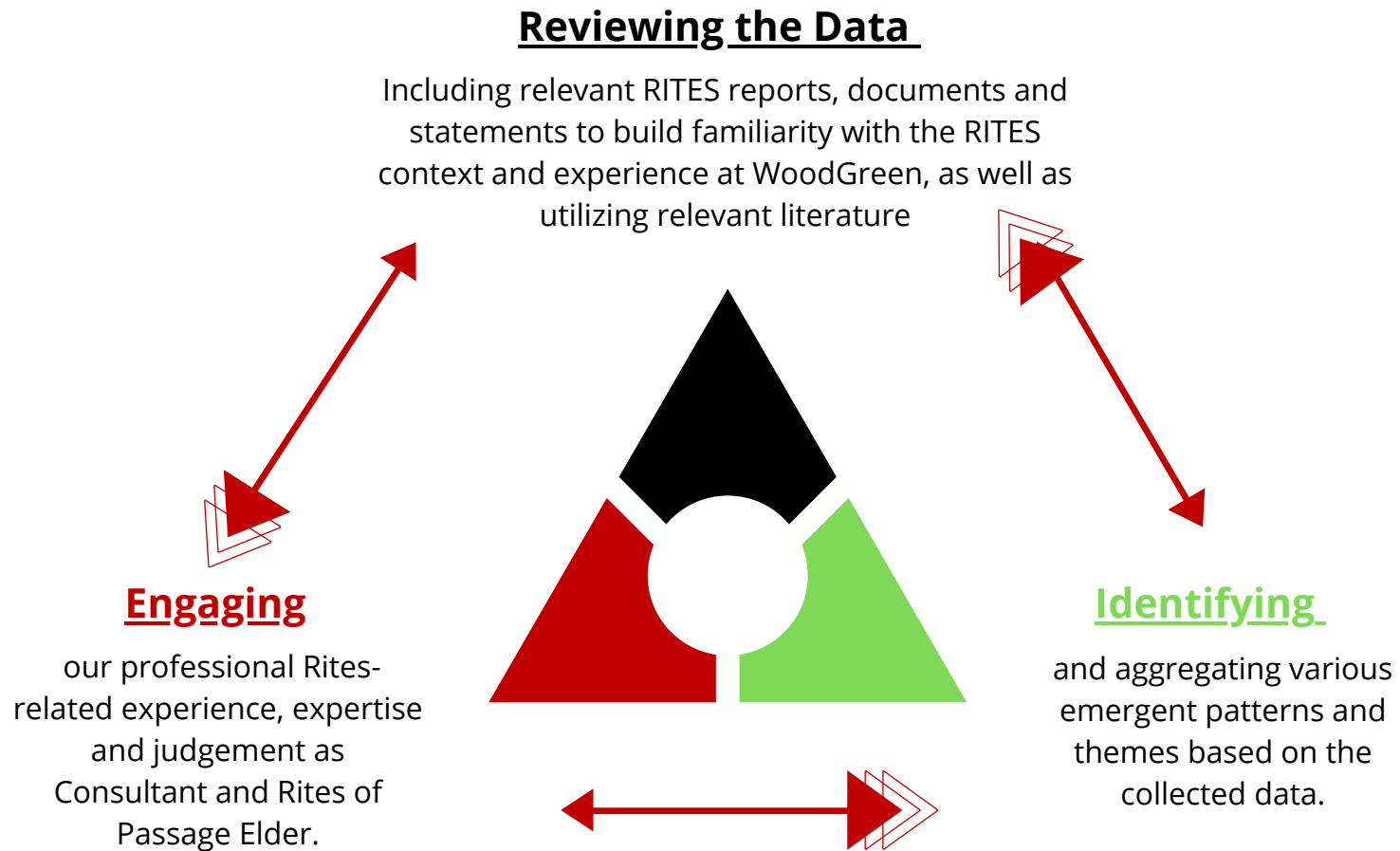


Method and Process

- Over a 2-month period, a mixed method approach was engaged to facilitate the gathering of as much rich data as possible from the widest possible array of relevant sources. This included developing and utilizing interview and focus group instruments, questions and approaches developed through a planning process with the Staff Strategic Planning Committee providing feedback using established research and data collection formats - to ensure relevance, accuracy and usefulness.
- Some feedback information (phone calls and confidential emails) turned into a mix of responding to our direct questions on the one hand and also a bit of narrative extension on the other hand by some. All were very passionate and contextual about their experiences with WoodGreen's Rites of Passage work. We decided to incorporate the relevant aspects of this narrative approach into our work.
- Finally, we engaged in a number of focus groups. We connected with staff as well as some former staff, some former Rites participants, external consultants, key community partners. We met in person with the staff Strategic Planning Committee members.

Data Analysis

A three-stage (triangulation) process to assess the data was utilized. The process involves:



By the Numbers - Data

Focus Groups - 24 total

- Current Rites Staff – 1 session **(5)** participants
- WoodGreen Leadership- 1 session **(2)** participants
- Youth (former Rites participants from different cohorts) focus group **(11)**
- WoodGreen Strategic Planning Committee – 1 formal session / plus several wide-ranging conversations **(6)** participants

Completed Questionnaires - 16 total

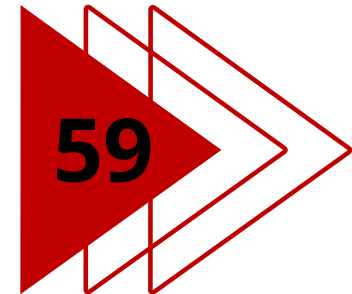
- Former Staff **(5)**
- Former youth participants **(4)**
- Former Consultants **(4)**
- Youth-serving Institutions **(3)**

Phone Interviews - 4 total

- Former staff **(2)**
- Former Consultants **(2)**

Miscellaneous - 15 total

- Policy and documents review **(4)**
- Confidential emails / post-focus group activity **(5)**
- WoodGreen documents reviewed **(6)**



**Total
Participants &
Contributing
Sources**



Moving Ahead...



...Towards a strategic framework

Some Drivers of Success

- Strong and consistent WoodGreen corporate leadership and clear support for Rites
- Advancing WoodGreen's agenda to effectively centre the dismantling of anti Black racism (ABR) and deepen the agency's understanding and analyses of the African Canadian community
- Clarification of Rites community-based semi- autonomy vs WoodGreen (a social housing non-profit, corporate culture) and expectations
- Ensuring that the Rites imperative (especially addressing ABR and African Canadian community realities) is clearly and consistently aligned with WoodGreen's DABE agenda
- Alignment with WoodGreen's youth strategy
- Sufficient long term resource commitment to Rites
- Transparent and consistent communication
- Clearly understood safer and brave space agenda and commitments that incorporate anti-oppressive and anti-racist values for all WoodGreen staff with a strong focus on BIPOC / 2SLGBTQ+ staff
- Visionary and competent leadership from WoodGreen Rites leaders.

3 Year WoodGreen Rites Outcomes



Every African Canadian youth will...

- Get high quality, culturally affirming and safe support they need through the Rites process
- Develop Africentric knowledge, skills, resources and tools to thrive, affirm their worth, build on their talents, support their growth and strengthen resilience
- Be respected partners in the process



Our Communities will be...

- Supported to advocate for community development and system change
- Respected, heard and engaged through collaboration, partnership, joint, equitable sharing and learning



WoodGreen Rites will be...

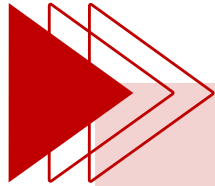
- Recognized as the place to go to for Rites of Passage leadership in Toronto
- Recognized for exceptional Rites services and systems leadership in Toronto and beyond



Every Rites Employee will be...

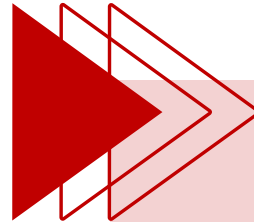
- Supported, respected and valued
- Accountable for delivering professional, high quality, high impact Rites work
- Given the resources and tools to provide exceptional Rites work
- Safe, free from micro-aggressions and respected in our work-spaces and interactions

Rites Vision, Mission and Objectives



Vision

A strong, thriving and diverse African Canadian community driven significantly by WoodGreen Rites



Mission




Support the leadership and skills development as well as growth and transformation of mature, capable, resilient, and community-minded African Canadian youth through intensive, supportive culturally centred African-derived processes of learning and practice.

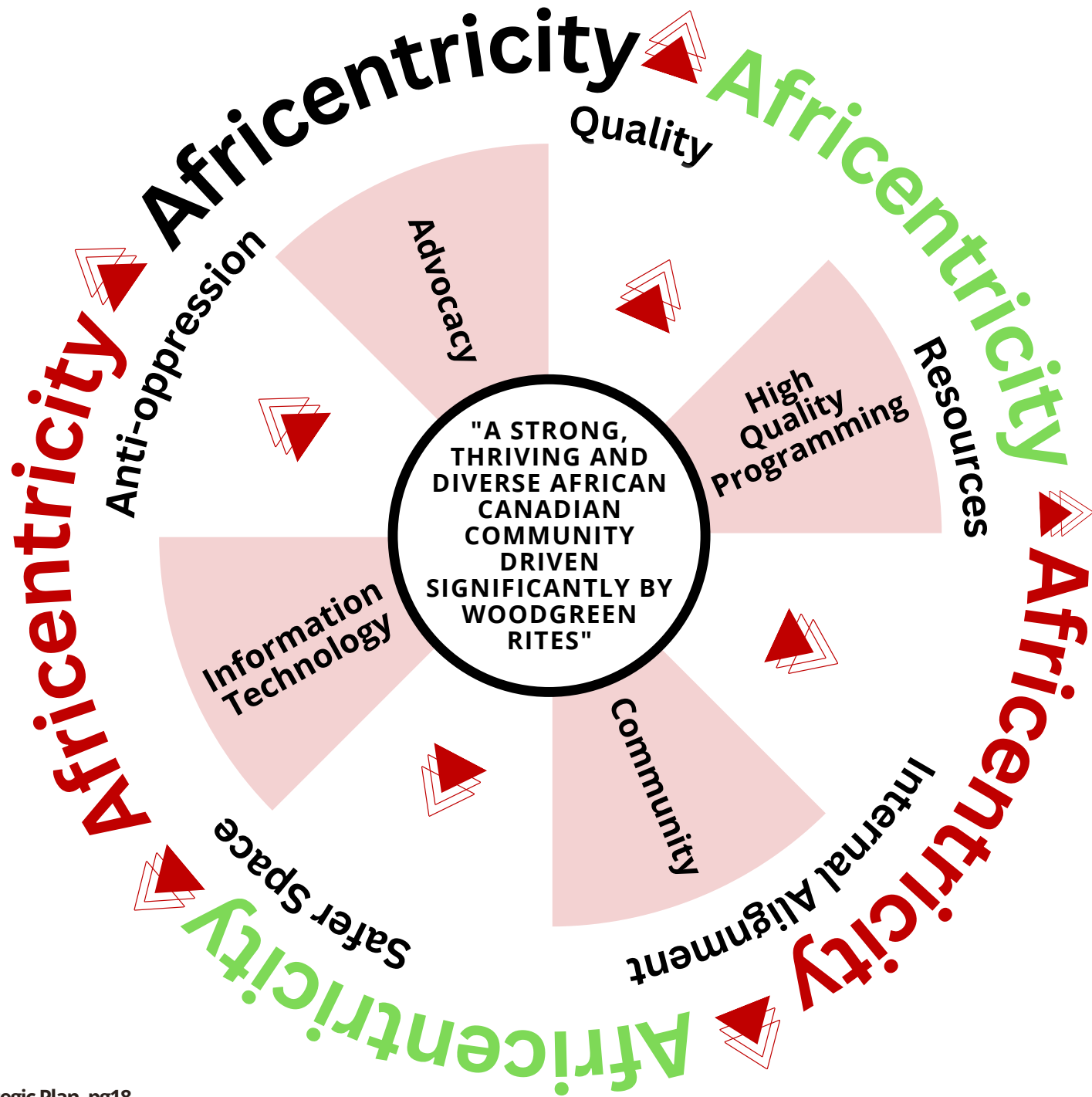
CENTRE FOR YOUNG BLACK PROFESSIONALS
CREATING A SOCIETY AND ECONOMY
IN WHICH BLACK YOUTH ACHIEVE FINANCIAL PROSPERITY AND



"A strong, thriving and diverse African Canadian community driven significantly by WoodGreen RITES"

Rites Objectives

- 
- Deepen cultural and social knowledge and awareness of self, community and society.
 - Build culturally grounded positive self-esteem, cultural confidence and self-confidence.
 - Provide skills and tools to effectively address and manage full-spectrum health and well-being - spiritual, mental and physical; through exploration, preparation and practice, leading to resilience and healing.
- 
- Build and enhance skills of leadership, planning, decision-making, peer and group support, community planning and development, academic excellence and professional engagement.
 - Centre excellence, innovation and ethical behaviour as grounded in personal, family, community and social relationships.
 - Strengthen community, social, youth and professional networks, collaboration, shared planning and work.
- 
- Enhance African Canadian youth maturity, responsibility and service to community through intensive learning, sharing and practice.



Strategic Direction #1

INTERNAL: ENHANCE INTERNAL LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY (CLARIFY, STRENGTHEN AND ADVANCE RITES VALUE AND INTERNAL IMPACT)

- Clarification of roles/boundaries- Rites work/WoodGreen expectations
- Accountabilities, impact and evaluation assessments agreements
- Rites resource development and planning integration into WoodGreen's strategy and operation
- WoodGreen integration/alignment where appropriate
- Centre ABR in WoodGreen
- Identify a Rites Champion at the Senior Leadership/Foundation level of WoodGreen to support and advocate for Rites
- Develop WoodGreen African Canadian staff affinity group
- Hire more senior African Canadian staff for WoodGreen



EXTERNAL: Youth System Leadership and Advocacy (Driven by Rites principles, collaboration, trends analysis and good data)

- Identify and develop positions on Public policy priorities related to African Canadian youth (aligned with WoodGreen positions)
- Advocate against systemic inequities and injustice for African Canadian youth
- Participate consistently in African Canadian youth-related research, youth sector planning tables
- Partner to improve appropriate integration/alignments and impact for African Canadian youth (Financial institutions, social service agencies, community-based organizations, faith groups, STEM organizations, academic institutions, youth entrepreneurs, sector institutions (health, education, criminal justice, child welfare, etc.).)

Strategic Direction #2

Deepen Community Connectivity (Build on Elder and parent assets, community resources, existing strong relationships and youth leadership)

- Community Engagement Plan
- Permanent, representative Community Advisory Committee
- Diversify/ expand outreach to emerging and diverse African Canadian communities
- Bi-annual Trend analysis with communities
- Annual reporting to communities



Centre Technology to Drive Rites (Effective technology, process and infrastructure to support high quality youth Rites experiences and efficient use of resources)

- Improve African Canadian youth access to Rites services and resources as well as promote seamless access to all WoodGreen services
- Improve Rites data collection, data management and management
- Build **Rites portal** to support on-line Rites community of practice (experts, practitioners, researchers, consultants, advocates, students, staff)
- Strengthen Rites social media presence, promotion and impact
- Support better planning and communication of impact (e.g. “dashboard” of Rites impact)

Strategic Direction #3

High Quality, Comprehensive, Innovative Rites Services

(Build on 15-year legacy, position for the future, deepen impact and experiences)

- Acquire Rites multipurpose spaces (Retreat and in-city spaces)
- Strong curriculum and diversified, cutting edge innovative approaches- driven by evidence and experience
- Consistent, comprehensive staff training and accountability measures
- Build Safer and Brave space for staff and youth
- Develop Rites Africentric Impact Assessment Tools
- Re-imagine and re-build Alumni ,Elder and Leadership in Training (LIT) mentorship mechanisms
- Build a robust research and data collection plan- both qualitative and quantitative data curation for planning and good decision-making
- Centre mental health and healing centred racial trauma (training, curriculum methodology, community partnerships and resources, etc)
- Expanded and innovative knowledge development and dissemination agenda (Workshops, conferences, research findings, expert thought leaders' gatherings, etc.)



*Prepared by Nene Kwasi Kafele, Consultant
adinkra77@gmail.com*