



# Youth Action Gathering (YAG) 2015

October 3-4 2015, Vancouver  
Report

The Youth Action Gathering (YAG) was held on October 3-4 2015 at UBC Robson Square, on Unceded Coast Salish territories in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was organized by the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) in partnership with the Vancouver Foundation's Fresh Voices Initiative and MOSAIC.

The YAG brought together newcomer youth and allies to learn, share, network and collaborate on actions and strategies to address common challenges. The organizers worked hard to establish an anti-oppression environment and make the YAG a safe, fun, comfortable and inclusive space for youth.

Nearly 200 participants from 6 provinces across Canada attended the conference. 150+ were youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds, 6 were youth who identified as indigenous to Canada, and 40+ were youth workers and allies. The 2015 YAG was the largest YAG conference to date in terms of youth participation.



All photos in this report were taken by Jennifer Sarkar



The event was youth-led in both organization and participation. The CCR's Youth Network and the Fresh Voices Initiative's Youth Advisory Team were instrumental at every step of the YAG. The members of both youth teams worked to organize the logistics of the conference, to find speakers and facilitators for the sessions, and to act themselves as speakers, facilitators, resource persons and MCs during the YAG.

**“What I liked the most was coming together and sharing amazing ideas about the issues that we’re facing.” - YAG participant**

## *What is the YAG?*

The Youth Action Gathering (YAG) is the CCR Youth Network's annual conference by and for immigrant and refugee youth across Canada.

## Program

The program consisted of plenary sessions with keynote speakers and breakout sessions for participants to discuss issues, share their stories and experiences, and propose solutions and actions. The participants also got to know each other better during a social event on the Saturday night. A recurring theme in the conference was the collaboration between indigenous youth, and immigrant and refugee youth.

Plenary session themes:

- Youth engagement
- Indigenous and migrant movements in Canada and abroad
- Access to education

Breakout session themes:

- Immigration and refugee systems
- Sanctuary cities and the role of local government when advocating for migrants' rights
- Sex education for migrant communities
- Getting involved in the CCR Youth Network
- Going deeper when exploring gender and sexual orientation
- Workshop on advocacy and system changes



**“After the YAG, I plan to continue my efforts in building a stronger and more united community and creating spaces where youth are encouraged to be all that they can be.”**



## Outcomes

The participation of youth from across Canada led to an engaging, educational and inspiring weekend. The diverse group of participants learned from each other and made friends, animated discussions generated ideas and strategies to address challenges, and everyone involved returned home empowered, with more knowledge and fresh motivation to work on key actions.

Throughout the YAG, participants discussed the common issues that affect them and developed strategies and actions to address them. At the end of the conference, they completed an exercise to select priority issues and actions to focus on after the YAG. The following are the most important issues and actions as chosen by the participants:

### Priority Issues

- Immigration policy
- Access to education
- Mental health

### Priority Actions

- Start hiring young people
- Support youth scholarships
- Develop youth engagement/leadership

## What did participants think of the YAG 2015?

When participants were asked about their experiences at the YAG, the responses were highly positive.

They felt that the YAG was fun, informative, inclusive and a safe space for immigrant and refugee youth. They enjoyed learning from the speakers, discussing important issues, and most of all meeting new people. They were inspired and motivated to use what they learned at the YAG by engaging their communities, planning advocacy initiatives, educating others, and working in solidarity with indigenous peoples.



In terms of improving the YAG, several participants shared that in future YAGs there should be fewer speakers and more youth discussions and engaging activities.

It was also mentioned that some youth felt limited because they had to choose only one breakout session per day, and would have liked to attend more workshops.

**“We are strong, we are smart, and we contribute positively to Canada.” – YAG participant**

## How to get involved with the CCR Youth Network



Here is how to get involved:

- Sign up to the [CCRYOUTH listserv](#) to stay informed of the YN’s activities
- Connect via email: [yn@ccrweb.ca](mailto:yn@ccrweb.ca)
- Like the YN on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ccryouth>
- Consult the YN page on the CCR website: [ccrweb.ca/en/youth/welcome](http://ccrweb.ca/en/youth/welcome)

The CCR Youth Network is always looking for new members.

Join the YN to connect with other refugee and immigrant youth, participate in the YN’s decision making process, and be involved in activities such as the YAG, and an exciting new campaign to promote refugees in Canada.

**“I think it is important to raise our voices against second class citizenship, because we want equal rights and safety. I realized that if we do it together, we can achieve it”**  
– YAG participant

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all members of the organizing committee from the CCR Youth Network, Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team, Vancouver Foundation, MOSAIC, and CCR for your hard work. Thank you to the Vancouver Foundation, MOSAIC and World Education Services (WES) for funding the YAG and for supporting newcomer youth from all over Canada to attend the conference. Thank you to the wonderful speakers, facilitators, and MCs for bringing your knowledge and inspiring the participants. Finally, enormous thanks to each and every participant who attended the YAG for your contributions to the discussion and for bringing so much energy and ideas to the event. We hope you have been empowered and inspired, and to see you at next year's YAG!



**“Thank you for empowering youth.”**  
– YAG participant



## Annexes

### Full list of priority issues and actions

The following issues were identified by participating youth in the closing plenary and voted on using a “dotmocracy” process. They are ranked with highest priority first in each category of issues and actions.

#### Priority issues

- Immigration policy
- Access to education
- Mental health (raise awareness)
- Stereotypes and islamophobia
- Violence against women and girls (especially indigenous)
- Bridges with indigenous people to decolonize
- LGBT issues
- Sex education within immigration communities
- Do more surveys, research, consultation with youth
- Employment opportunities for youth

#### Priority actions

- Start hiring young people
- Support youth scholarships
- Develop youth engagement/leadership
- Educate the public about newcomers
- Support newcomers with disabilities
- Provide training in advocacy and human rights
- Educate immigrants on issues and resources
- Support sanctuary cities
- Create podcasts to share information and events
- Start a blog to feature inspiring people and mentors

## Summary of YAG Sessions

Saturday October 3<sup>rd</sup>

### *Morning sessions*

#### **YAT Fresh Voices and CCR Youth Network journeys**

- Panel presentation followed by a moderated Q&A
- The Vancouver Foundation Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team and the CCR's Youth Network discussed their work and how they are working toward positive system changes within diverse communities. They presented some of their highlights and achievements, key challenges and how they overcame them as a group.

#### **Youth engagement, what are your thoughts?**

- Small group discussion to reflect on the previous presentations
- Groups discussed how to improve existing initiatives serving and supporting immigrant and refugee youth

### *Lunch and learn*

#### **From local to global solidarity**

- Speakers discussed colonization and its legacy and presented on movements of indigenous and migrant communities in Canada and abroad

### *Breakout sessions*

#### **A) The immigration and refugee system – how does it affect our communities?**

- Resource people provided insights on the new immigration legislation (Bills C-24 and C-31), and reflected on many relevant questions such as: how does the system affect young people in particular? What should we highlight in the immigration system? What are some of the most recent changes at the federal level and how do they affect immigrant and refugee communities? Why should youth be concerned even if they already have status in Canada?
- **Key issues**
  - Stereotypes, racism and discrimination
  - Changes in immigration policy
- **Key actions:**
  - Promote diversity to raise awareness. Hold more meetings & events with non-immigrants to raise awareness
  - Create space for youth – organize youth-led activities, access the media, more youth participation in government
  - Focus on education – among peers, at school, in communities
  - Have an open dialogue outside of mainstream media (e.g. use art such as theatre)
  - Hold a peaceful march or a national convention

## **B) Sanctuary cities and the role of local government when advocating for immigrants' rights**

- Immigration policy is the responsibility of the federal government; however local governments affect residents directly. Resource people reflect on how local governments can be supportive of diverse immigrant and refugee communities, the meaning of a sanctuary city policy and how it can be implemented.
- **Key issues**
  - Supporting people without status
  - Access to services for migrants (particularly non-status or precarious status)
  - Solidarity between people with different migrant experiences/journeys
- **Key actions**
  - Advocate for people without status, to provide them access to services. Build support networks (e.g. the Precarious Status Youth Network).
  - Push back against the discriminatory federal laws – sanctuary cities are local responses but not ultimate solutions
  - Encourage more municipalities to adopt sanctuary city models, advocate for more staff training
  - Develop practices within our own agencies to carve a space for non-status participants

## **C) Workshop on sex education for migrant and refugee communities 101**

- Resource people discuss what should be considered with regard to healthy sex education when working with migrant communities. They discuss why it is important that sexual health education exist in diverse communities and how to create space for safe, supportive and accessible information and services for immigrant and refugee youth.
- **Key issues:**
  - Intersectionality (homophobia, sexism, racism, ableism, classism...)
  - Exclusion, isolation and discrimination because of sexual orientation/gender identity
- **Key actions:**
  - Raise awareness about diversity among the general population and among gay/lesbian population, transgender population, etc. through workshops, conferences like the YAG, and more.
  - Advocate for positive portrayals of LGBTQ persons in the media, particularly with regard to intersectionality

Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup>

Morning session

**Plenary: how do we make education accessible to all immigrants?**

- Presentation on exploring the issue of immigrant communities in the education system.

Breakout sessions

**A) Do you want to be involved in the decision making process of the Youth Network?**

- Session for participants interested in becoming a driving force for the network's national projects, and connecting with other immigrant youth across Canada. Included brainstorming on how to continue engaging with immigrant and refugee youth
- **Key issues:**
  - Mental health
  - Immigration system and policy changes
  - Discrimination/stereotypes
  - Access to education
  - Homeless youth/housing issues
  - Youth engagement
  - Employment issues
- **Key actions:**
  - Awareness-raising initiatives (e.g. documentary being done on mental health, social media, etc.)
  - Educating people – hosting workshops, developing projects
  - Educate not only youth but focus also on adults and young children
  - Political advocacy – bring attention to bills C-24 and C-51 – focus on the impact youth can have to bring awareness to the bills and lead to eliminating them

**B) Going deeper when exploring gender and sexual orientation**

- Session for exploring a range of issues facing immigrants and refugees when it comes to inserting a critical lens on gender roles, sexuality, sexual identity and sense of safety and belonging
- **Key issues:**
  - Representations of LGBTQ persons in the media
  - Specific barriers to sex education facing immigrant/refugee youth
- **Key actions:**
  - Advocate for more safety and inclusion
  - Use individual stories to raise awareness and educate people.



### C) Workshop on advocacy and systems change

- Session to explain to participants what they should know when advocating for systems change and what is important to know about the different levels of government.

#### - Key actions:

- Hold regular meetings to discuss issues
- Gather to form a collective force, come together as a group to have a stronger voice, so people will listen
- Use the media – create a blog, use social media to increase awareness, empathy and support, and translate communications into non-English languages to reach more people from immigrant communities
- Talk to school boards

Promote immigrant and refugee stories, launch awareness-raising campaign

### YAG Evaluations Response Averages (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

I feel the objectives of the YAG were fulfilled	4.5
The event was both fun and informative	4.6
I feel YAG is a safe and supported space for immigrant and refugee youth	4.9
The speakers helped my increase my knowledge and understanding of issues that affect immigrant communities	4.5
I feel motivated to continue working on the issues raised at the YAG	4.7
I felt that the YAG created an inclusive and engaging space for different cultures, identities, faiths, languages, ages and migration journeys.	4.7
I enjoyed the food and the venue was accessible and comfortable	4.1

