JEUNES CCR YOUTH

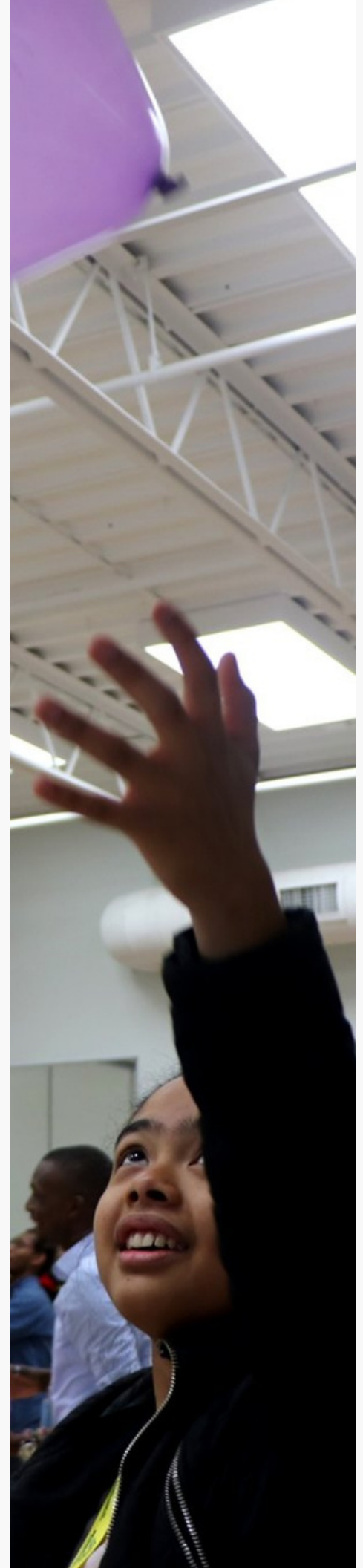# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT

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Introduction

DEAR READER,

Thank you for taking the time and energy to read our toolkit! Newcomer youth engagement is a principle that guides our work within the communities we are part of and care deeply about. We believe youth engagement is a meaningful approach to transforming the very systems that operate on power imbalances. We hope that you will find aspects of our toolkit applicable to your work both personally and professionally within your organization and communities. The toolkit was produced through the contribution and shared knowledge of a Community of Practice composed of 6 organizational leaders across Canada. The purpose of the toolkit is to share the results, concrete reflections, and practical tools with our communities.

This toolkit aims to do the following:

- provide a starting point to explore challenges and best practices for implementing meaningful youth engagement

- include key learnings and critical insights of youth engagement offered by the Community of Practice members

- explore timely issues including navigating financial stress, the impacts of COVID-19 on youth engagement, and Inclusivity and Youth Empowerment

- highlight how a youth engagement approach interacts both horizontally within/across our communities and vertically as they relate to other systems of power

- offer practical examples and strategies of how to fill in the gap between theory and practice within an organization context

Before we proceed, we want to be transparent about the limitations of our toolkit.

Firstly, the content of the toolkit is based on 4 monthly 1.5 hour Community of Practice meetings. Consequently, we recognize that the toolkit only scratches at the surface level for some of the topics mentioned. Think of each chapter as prompts to encourage future in-depth exploration.

Secondly, the toolkit is not necessarily a manual for following a youth engagement process, but is meant to shed light on basic principles for organizations to consider for promoting youth engagement. A key limitation in developing the toolkit is the lack of youth participation. In the future, we hope to incorporate meaningful youth participation into the Community of Practice.

Moving forward, we want to acknowledge that we are in the process of educating ourselves, which means that you will notice that we are not perfect and will make mistakes along the way. But even so, we take accountability and learn from our mistakes with positive human intent.

Lastly, we hope that the toolkit can support more radical approaches towards challenging and disrupting the power structures that negatively impact the agency and well-being of newcomer youth.

In solidarity,
Canadian Council for Refugees's Youth Engagement Sustainability Community of Practice

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) is a national non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. The membership is made up of organizations involved in the settlement, sponsorship and protection of refugees and immigrants. The Council serves the networking, information-exchanging and advocacy needs of its membership.

For more information, click here to visit our webpage.

The Youth Network

The Youth Network (YN) is the youth division of the Canadian Council for Refugees. The Youth Network amplifies refugee and newcomer youth's voice to address challenges faced by newcomer youth and a space to share ideas on how to meet these challenges.

The Youth Engagement Sustainability (YES) Project

The purpose of the YES project was to create a space where CCR member organizations could share knowledge and develop their capacity to support newcomer youth engagement and leadership in organizations. In reviewing previous CCR consultations, we identified common challenges toward youth engagement: lack of resources and funding constraints, supporting undocumented youth, and navigating oppressive health threatening structures. Unsurprisingly, many of these issues came up throughout the YES Project. The CCR put out a call for organizations interested in participating in a Community of Practice and received an overwhelming amount of responses from member organizations. Participants were limited to six organizations that were selected for a diverse representativity such as nature, size, location, and level of youth engagement.

The CCR YES Project Team
Juliana Cortes, National Youth Network Coordinator
Deborah Traore, Associate Executive Director
Tony Luong, Youth Engagement Facilitator
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TERMINOLOGY

<u>Intersectionality:</u> Intersecting social identities shape our individual uniqueness and inform our complicated relationships with power, privilege and oppression. Intersectionality then invites to value and strive to understand the individualism of those around us rather than make assumptions (From You to Youth Toolkit).

<u>Tokenism:</u> The practice of making only a symbolic effort towards limited involvement of underrepresented groups in order to give the false appearance of inclusivity (From You to Youth Toolkit).

<u>Warp-around approaches:</u> Wrap-around is a strength-based intervention through a team of care providers (e.g. educators, mental health workers) and key figures in a person's life (e.g. family, community members, etc.) to create, implement and monitor a plan of support (Homeless Hub).

<u>Paternalism:</u> actions, behaviours, and attitudes that reinforces power imbalances through behaving in ways that restricts/limits the freedom and responsibilities of communities experiencing layers of marginalizations in their supposed interest

Click on the following links for more information:

- **Youth to You Toolkit by FCJ**

- **The 519 Community Centre's Equity Glossary of Terms**

- **Equitas's the Speaking Rights (SR) Toolkit and Community Action Project Guide (CAP) Guide**

- **Homeless Hub's Wrap-around Delivery**

- **Convention on the Rights of the Child and Children's Participatory Rights in Canada:**

- **United Nations Human Rights' Convention on the Rights of the Child**

CHAPTER 1: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Typically, Youth Engagement (YE) is understood as providing services for youth. However, Community of Practice (CP) members have expanded the concept of YE to emphasize:

- meeting youth where they're at
- relationship building
- fostering self-efficacy
- adopting a rights-based framework
- challenging tokenism, inequities, power imbalances, and structural oppressions
- supporting youth to realize they can make a difference and be part of the community
- elevating youth voices in important conversations about politics, the economy, the school system, etc.
- integrating youth members to authentically be part of youth-led projects, a Youth Advisory Committee, and the Board of Directors
- co-designing programs that address youth's academic, social, and emotional needs as they transition into Canadian society
- and empowering youth to take the lead

As you can see from the list of values generated above, YE goes beyond passively providing services with the expectations that youth will feel motivated to show up.

The reality is that the success of youth programming depends on whether it can meet the needs identified by the youth.

An active approach to youth engagement is desirable to ensure that we do not impose what we think is best for youth, but to allow youth voices to intentionally shape our work and time together. There are a few central tenants of youth engagement that reflect the collective values of the CP: youth deserve to be seen and to be heard, youth are put into the driver seat, and youth are given leadership opportunities to design and facilitate programming. While there is not a "right" way to approach youth engagement, there seems to be values that are consistently expressed.

As the toolkit guides us to reimagine alternative ways to enact youth engagement, we acknowledge that community organizations operate under limited resources and time constraints.

There's a familiar saying that organizations are often "running very fast to stay in the same place." And so an important goal of the toolkit is to ensure that we are able to implement youth engagement that is sustainable. There is no concrete definition of YE provided because we understand this concept to be perpetually evolving and co-constructed with our colleagues, our communities, and the youth we work with. As you are working through this toolkit, we welcome you to add your own definitions and values to our growing list.

As we delved deeper into engaging with the concept of youth engagement, we felt that it was important to identify the issues and challenges that come up.

We are able to better understand what issues need to be addressed in order to come up with an effective approach that mutually meets the needs of our work and the communities we support. To demonstrate this point, a CP member brought up some words from Albert Einstein: "If I only had one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only 5 minutes finding the solution." And so what you will notice throughout the toolkit is that the CP members co-created knowledge by first identifying the issues before coming up with practical tools by the end of the toolkit.

BETTER TRAINING TO THOSE WHO ARE DOING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In examining how individuals and organizations are doing youth engagement, there are important questions to bring up: What "should" youth engagement look like? And according to who?

We felt that these are important questions to ask ourselves as we examine the biases that we may unintentionally bring into doing YE. Relatedly, we need to consider how we navigate competing visions of YE from the people and systems we work with. There is also a need for better training or understanding of what it means to work with youth and the barriers that we face. Some important questions to ask are:

- What are the reasons that youth are not engaged in the first place in my activities, or in our community?
- How can we better assist and train those who are hoping to engage youth but are not doing it in a way that respects youth engagement in the first place?

In regards to unpacking these questions, we have provided some snapshots of conversations between CP members:

- An organization is thinking about investing resources in facilitation training and/or workshops on the art of hosting for:
  - (1) youth leaders who need support to take their skills to the next level, or
  - (2) youth workers who need a refresher on what YE is and what it can look like
- In many cases, youth engagement depends on the adult allies, or youth leaders doing the engagement because they develop relationships and build rapport with youth
- It is important to invest in the resources that help with youth engagement such as relationship-building, cultivating empathy, communication techniques, etc.

In doing youth engagement work, sometimes the following scenarios take place: (1) same youth participating in activities; (2) same voices of youth engaged/spotlighted; (3) some leadership opportunities offered to only a select youth (for various reasons but most often because they have had the chance to showcase their leadership while other have not due to point number 2).

What all of these have in common is that the same youth are being uplifted while other youth who equally deserve to be elevated are not. Some possible reasons could be that they need an extra push, extra support, or simply to receive an opportunity to show up. For instance, a CP member mentioned that she sees this issue in New Brunswick, in which she believes is due to having a very small community who: (a) create very tight-knit circles and (b) have social connections to the "right" people to access the "right" opportunities. However, what if a youth lacks community connections? What if there is a language barrier (even if it's being worked on)? What if a youth does not have the tools and resources to show that they have the potential to be engaged and make a difference? Part of this conversation is a larger debate around "who" or "which type of youth" should be engaged and why we think this way. Sometimes it is up to the individual youth to organically want to be engaged and navigate channels to get there, but sometimes it is up to those doing the engagement to reach youth outside the circle of a select few to claim their space and voice.

FLEXIBLE ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

There are concerns that environments meant for youth engagement are not always inclusive.

Sometimes a youth engagement approach requires a certain type of skill or a certain type of youth, which in turn means that some youth are overlooked because they are not there yet. There is a need to provide environments of youth engagement that are flexible in the context that allows all youth to be fully and equally engaged regardless of race, skin color, background, accent, language, culture, religion, gender, gender identity, body size, ability, and or any other identity factor/marker. In other words, an intersectional framework is necessary in doing anti-oppressive youth engagement.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is essential in working with a population that is very precarious in terms of their immigration status -- as it intersects with other aspects of their identities. Another way to apply intersectionality is toward engaging hard-to-reach newcomer youths, especially those with multiple layers of identity such as queer and racialized youth. It is challenging to engage newcomer youth when they do not feel heard or included. We recognize that the behaviours of not feeling heard or included can convey different experiences and feelings that are not exclusive to belonging, such as "you don't matter", "your voice isn't valued, or "you have no power or control." And so to be seen and to be heard are foundational needs that we believe can be met through a meaningful youth engagement approach.

There is a challenge of addressing how youth engagement is often tokenistic and not authentically and meaningfully taken up in organizations.

Some ways to tackle performative allyship is to consider how organizations can create continued engagement that allows for youth to take ownership. As such, youth need access to tools and resources that foster self-efficacy, which acknowledges and appreciates a diverse range of skill sets around the table such as language, lived experiences, interests, wisdom, and knowledge. Additionally, there is a need to unpack how the labelling and stereotyping of youth is an issue that strategically needs to be addressed:How can we counter the negative rhetoric that youth face as they access services and participate in Canadian society?How can we amplify their voices through these processes?

In providing a youth friendly space, there are practical challenges related to busyness and language barriers.

Finding a time that works best is difficult given the many commitments youth have. There needs to be efforts to reduce and eliminate barriers related to food, transportation, and childcare with budget limitations. Language is a barrier when English is mainly used to communicate with parents, families and sometimes youth. Without any official interpreters or translators on staff, it can be hard to gauge how many people read or understand an organization's communication materials (i.e. mandates, guidelines, emails/newsletters).

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

There is an ongoing struggle of how to connect with youth that is expressed in the sentiment of "where do I find the youth?" or "youth are just not showing up."

These are concerns that many agencies across the country are faced with. How can we better engage youth and what are some strategies to reach them? And how can we promote our engagement activities to motivate youth to want to be a part of that too? A CP member reflects on how they've struggled to engage and keep male youth involved in their programming. The attendance of male youth have been sporadic, while they have a core group of female youth who attend regularly. The organization wonders if it is because both program leaders are female and if it would help to: (1) recruit more adult role models or (2) if there needs to be different activities or programming offered for male youth. Another layer to consider is whether a gender binary is helpful in addressing such an issue. For instance, if more sports-focused activities were offered to appeal to male youth, are there potential implications of perpetuating patriarchal stereotypes? Again, we acknowledge that there are no "perfect" solutions and that we are still in the process of learning.

Another challenge appears to be engaging youth with more educational-based workshops.

For example, a CP member noticed a pattern that plenty of youth attended their recreational activities as it is easier to make such programming sound attractive, but drawing youth to the more structured activities that cultivate leadership and adaptation skills can be difficult. As such, how do we strike a balance between providing a relaxed, friendly environment and covering more "serious" conversations or life skills?

Another ongoing issue is to find ways to build strong relationships with youth to encourage them to continue to attend the activities.

For instance, an organization hosted an annual week-long residential summer camp that allowed youth to build up positive connections with staff, volunteers, and each other. What the organization discovered was that these were the same youth that continue to come to their programming due to this built sense of trust and rapport. And so what are other meaningful ways to build this up in organizations?

CHAPTER 2: FINANCIAL STRESS

It is not surprising that financial stress often comes up as a frustrating process faced by community organizations. While we may not be able to change the entire funding system, we want to encourage community-based responses to better navigate financial constraints. When we focus on what is within our control at the micro level, we open the possibility to change the funding structures and policies at the macro level.

The impacts of funding on youth engagement can be seen through the structure and governance of the organization. Within our CP, we had a member from a volunteer-run organization share her insights on how they function and the myriad challenges that such an organization faces, such as the lack of reliable funding and the barrier of depending on volunteers and youth "showing up" to carry programming. The pressing challenge is that most of the volunteers work full time jobs with limited capacity to facilitate programming. But even so, there is flexibility for the volunteers and youth to actively shape the organization's culture that is not influenced by the terms and conditions attached to funding.

On the flip side, organizations with a paid team may take many years to develop relationships with funders and decision-makers to establish their role and indicate the needs for their programs to exist. After receiving funding, a CP member shared that their organization carries out a selection process where a few youth are selected to participate in their activities. There is a higher likelihood that youth will show up because they have put work into their application and demonstrated why they would be a great candidate. After completing that initial youth engagement phase, there is not as much concern of promoting youth engagement. However, this all depends on the type of funding received and without such funding, they would most likely be in a similar position to the volunteer-run organization. This poses an important critical reflection: what are the ways in which youth engagement is connected and dependent on funding and what problems does this bring up?

Perhaps YE being mobilized by funding in the majority of cases means we should begin to think about how to engage the Private sector where YE is concerned. Alternatively, what are the factors/forces that keep bringing a volunteer-run organization's youth back to their programming? What are the differences compared to a paid team format where youth may show up simply because they have signed a YE commitment at the beginning of the program and need to continue showing up? Is this helping it be accessible and inclusive?

COMPETITION AMONG COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

With limited funding and access to financial resources, there is often so much competition between community organizations.

All organizations are trying to access the same limited pot of funding. Unfortunately, this is a difficult issue to address as we know that such funding is critical to organizations. An important point to consider is that one organization cannot cater and answer to all of the needs of refugee youth. Organizations need to have a clear mission, to be aware of each other, to refer youth to services they need, and to collaborate in meaningful ways that best cover diverse needs. A question to consider: is it possible to try to foster partnerships with organizations outside of the government? A CP member expressed that they would love to see partnerships with Tech companies who can help to foster technology skills among newcomer and refugee youth, which can help to engage them in these types of careers while addressing their barriers.

UNSUSTAINABLE STRUCTURES

The primary concern regarding budgeting for many organizations is that it is heavily and historically dependent on the government.

When a new government steps in, an organization's contract agreement is at the mercy of the priorities of the government of the day, which harms the program's continuity and sustainability in the long term. On a related note, the fact that funding is often short-term (1-2 years) creates a lack of sustainability in programming and support.

There are alot of "youth-focused" funding models that are not youth-friendly or youth-engaged. The strings attached to funding makes it difficult to instill a youth engagement approach:

- Funding that doesn't allow for program essentials (food) or has very limiting eligibility criteria (youth status, age, number of years in Canada)
- Funding that isn't responsive to the needs of youth-government identified priorities - trying to fit what you want and need into predetermined outcomes that may not match
- Duplication of service/competition with other agencies/service providers due to unwillingness to collaborate unless they are the ones receiving the funding

The need for core funding is really prevalent, as most funders want to give money for a new specific project and don't take into account the financial needs for adequate administration and overhead costs.

It appears that this is a problem throughout the non-profit sector, making it very difficult to make ends meet with added pressures to come up with new, different projects every year. When funders and their priority areas are inconsistent, it is difficult to continue offering a successful program that is long-lasting.

Staffing is usually by far the biggest expense and is the least "attractive" for funders to give money towards. This can be very frustrating and further limits an organization's capacity to serve their clientele. It would be helpful for organizations to communicate with each other the strategies they employ to mitigate these issues. It would also be helpful if organizations worked together to raise awareness about these common issues to the funders and to push for improved funding protocols, such as core funding and multi-year funding.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

In navigating ongoing financial constraints, it can be useful to break down strategies into two categories: (1) partner-relations support and (2) access or development of tools to support funding opportunities. Such categories open up important reflection questions:

- What are some tips or strategies we could all benefit from when it comes to knowing how to build intersectoral partnerships and expand the pools of funding?
- How good are we at telling the story of where the need exists to potential funders?
- How well are our advocacy efforts and are they supported by key data?
- Our reporting may look different from funder to funder but perhaps organizations could collaborate and include insights on what a successful measure of success or return of investment metrics should look like?

A CP member shared that their organization invested effort and time into building connections and relationships with the private sector.

In doing so, these partnerships are considered not only for funding reasons but also for mentorship relationships or possibilities of internships or summer employment for youth. Another CP member agreed and shared that it's important to connect with funders and even sometimes facilitate (broker) introductions and relationships with youth who want to apply for funding.

To get around the funding constraints, a CP member's organization shared assets with other organizations which was proven to be beneficial.

For instance, sharing a public building with multiple non-profit organizations allowed for partnerships to develop. Such partnerships within close proximity allowed everyone to share equipment including camping gear, activity space, and other facilities. Minimizing the costs of many activities allowed money to be redirected back to the improvement of programming. A similar approach was taken to connect with small businesses to lower the cost of programming through group rates, discounts, and "freebies." While financial constraints continue to be a stressful problem, we need to stay open to new ideas, new programming, and to new funders and initiatives.

In the time of COVID-19, it is evident that youth engagement has faced significant disruptions.

This chapter highlights all the ways our CP members are thinking about the challenges that COVID-19 has affected our work. Many of the conversations focused on issue identification that have amplified systemic issues related to access to technology, housing, food security, violence, and personal and communal safety. What you may notice is that many of these issues have existed pre-COVID-19 and the only difference now is that some have become more amplified and thus more urgent than ever to address in our work. When difficult circumstances arise, we need to resist reverting back to practices where youth have less control and agency. In addressing the impact of COVID-19, here a few important reflections:

- **How do we maintain youth engagement when people cannot gather physically in one place?**
- **How can we ensure youth are still being seen and being heard when there is all of this social upheaval happening?**

TECHNOLOGY & LITERACY

As soon as COVID-19 quarantine measures took place, organizations needed to find ways to adjust with working and supporting clients in a remote environment.

In responding to a pandemic, people are impacted in different ways and need time and access to resources to process a collective traumatic experience. Empathetically, we can understand that families are struggling to adapt to new changes on top of a different culture and language. What that means is that the need to attend virtual programming may understandably not be their top priority. While technology appeared to be the next logical step, it has also proven to be a massive challenge.

When it comes to youth engagement, the challenges of accessing technology are prevalent among youth and their families. Some telecommunication companies have stepped up to alleviate some of the pressure. Adding to that, there are also challenges of technological and computer literacy that need to be addressed. These are important considerations as organizations move their programming and workshops onto virtual platforms to continue building on literacy, mental health, and leadership capacity building. An interesting remark was made that such a crisis has prompted us to look at technology in a different way by ensuring that our technological resources are upgraded and up to par to ensure that we can be proactive and implement interventions in a timely manner.

The limitations of virtual programming may fail to accommodate different learning styles. Additionally, youth may experience a screen burnout (i.e. zoom fatigue) which may impede their ability to fully engage.

We need to tap into our creativity to plan meaningful and fun alternative engagement activities besides sitting in front of a computer for 2 hours. There are also concerns around language barriers and how intimidating it can be to participate in a virtual space. As schooling adjusts to an online environment, youth and their families may struggle due to unfamiliarity with the language and the school curriculum.

An upside to a virtual platform is that it allows for more flexibility for volunteer-run organizations to provide more support

While virtual programming is not easily accessible to all, it has also provided access to some youth that could not attend in-person services prior to COVID-19 (i.e., due to distance, transportations, etc.). A CP member shared that implementing virtual tools has made programming more flexible for youth to access their services when they need them rather than at a set time every week.
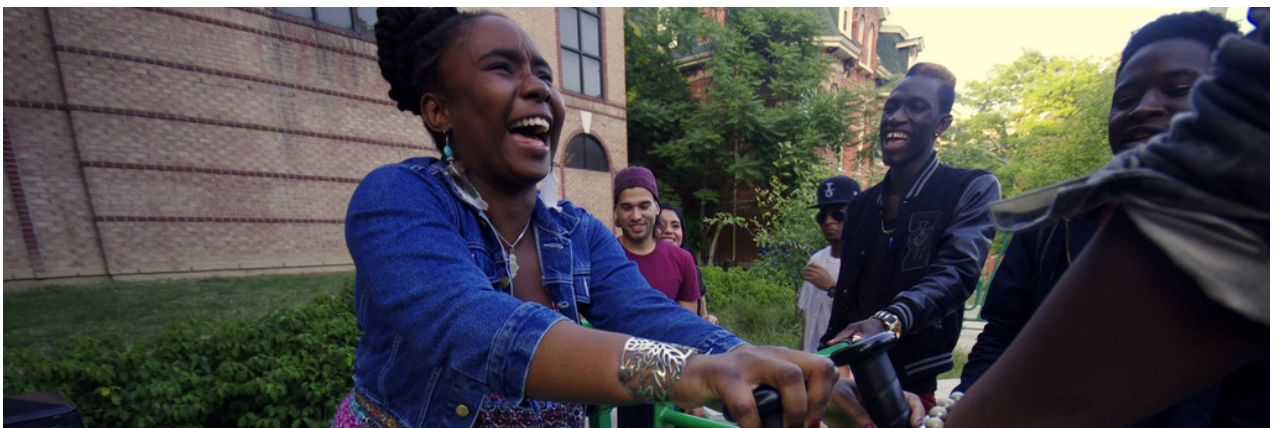
COMMUNAL SPACES AS SAFE HAVENS

Communal spaces were safe havens that allowed some youth to escape from environments that were not the best for their safety and wellbeing. However, COVID-19 has forced youth to spend all of their time in a space that may put them in a crisis/survival mode.

There is also the lack of access to friends or school as an outlet. As such, there are high emotions that affect youth's capacity and ability to look at their future, their skill development, and their career planning. In shifting the focus towards psychosocial support, we recognize that enhancing wellness can be achieved through both family support and individual intentional support. The challenges of integrating wrap-around approaches are the amount of time and people required to do so.

A meaningful part of programming is the ability to have a gathering place for youth to disconnect from the challenges and pressure lived at home and to focus on their own personal wellbeing and skill development. It is important for youth to feel safe and comfortable at home and the goal we are now all working towards is to ensure youth continue to be engaged and are able to participate in various activities remotely. The problem is when other factors are considered and some examples from CP members come to mind:

(1) "I work with a couple of youth who are often responsible for taking care of their younger siblings and as we would chat on the phone, their younger siblings are crying or need to be taken care of. This has affected the dynamics of our conversations and has made it more difficult for youth to be particularly paying attention to the programming or activity being offered during that time."

(2) "A youth has shown very different attitudes and behaviours when being at home with his dad compared to previous participation in our youth activities away from home. In some cases, it is as if he does not want to allow himself to be happy and fully engaged because his dad is having a hard time. It is almost as if he does not want to permit himself the opportunity to be joyful, smile, or laugh. We recognize that this is a complicated dynamic that is amplified during this COVID-19 situation."

(3) There are subtle ways that youth disengage from the virtual space by turning off their microphone or camera, and choosing to not show up. It becomes difficult because doing a virtual check-in is not the same as doing it in-person. Without the access to a physical space where casual encounters can take place with other peers and adult allies impacts the cohesiveness of the group.

(4) There is a connection between vulnerable housing issues whether with family or roommates and an uptake in policing and surveillance. The consequences of having to show identification to the police places youth with precarious status at higher risk. The effects of systemic racism are dangerous when the power of authority is put into the hands of police officers, transit officers, community housing security, public health officials, and other ways that youth are targeted. There is a pressing need to inform youth of how their rights have shifted and what tools they can use to ensure a sense of control and agency in navigating systemic oppression and violence.

The examples above sheds light on how outlets for youth to express themselves are restricted during this time. There are issues of safety both inside and outside of the home and the community spaces that youth are navigating during this time. A potential disadvantage of technology is that while it has allowed us to remain connected and continue programming remotely, the psychosocial wellness is limited or delayed compared to in-person connectivity.

HOW YOUTH ENGAGEMENT HAS CHANGED (RECRUITMENT & RETENTION)

There are unique challenges in retaining and attracting youth to attend virtual programming.

The component to meet in-person was an important factor to motivate youth to show up. Before COVID-19, we were already living in a world where youth's attention span is shorter and being constantly bombarded with a variety of visual stimuli. Presently, COVID-19 is prompting us to improve our engagement in ways that are more selective, attractive, and competitive to not entice but also retain youth in programs and services. At the same time, it was easier to refer and redirect youth to other real-life services and networks within the organization through a wrap-around approach. Youth programs built around community connections and in-person sessions are faced with a situation that requires us to go back to the drawing table. There are key reflections that come up for organizations to maintain youth engagement:

- How are we going to recruit youth for programming and ensure we are reaching all of the potential youth in the community so that nobody gets left behind?
- How are we going to adapt our programming such that we are still able to have those key one-on-one's with youth where so much insight is shared and relationships are built?

ADVOCACY

Identifying opportunities for advocacy are valuable for strengthening services and offering better support for youth. In light of COVID-19, there have been many conversations highlighting issues of health inequities stemming from the unjust and uneven distribution of resources. As such, we can take the opportunity to advocate for basic rights and principles that promote youth engagement. By doing so, we can address the personal needs of newcomer youth through advocating for systemic changes.

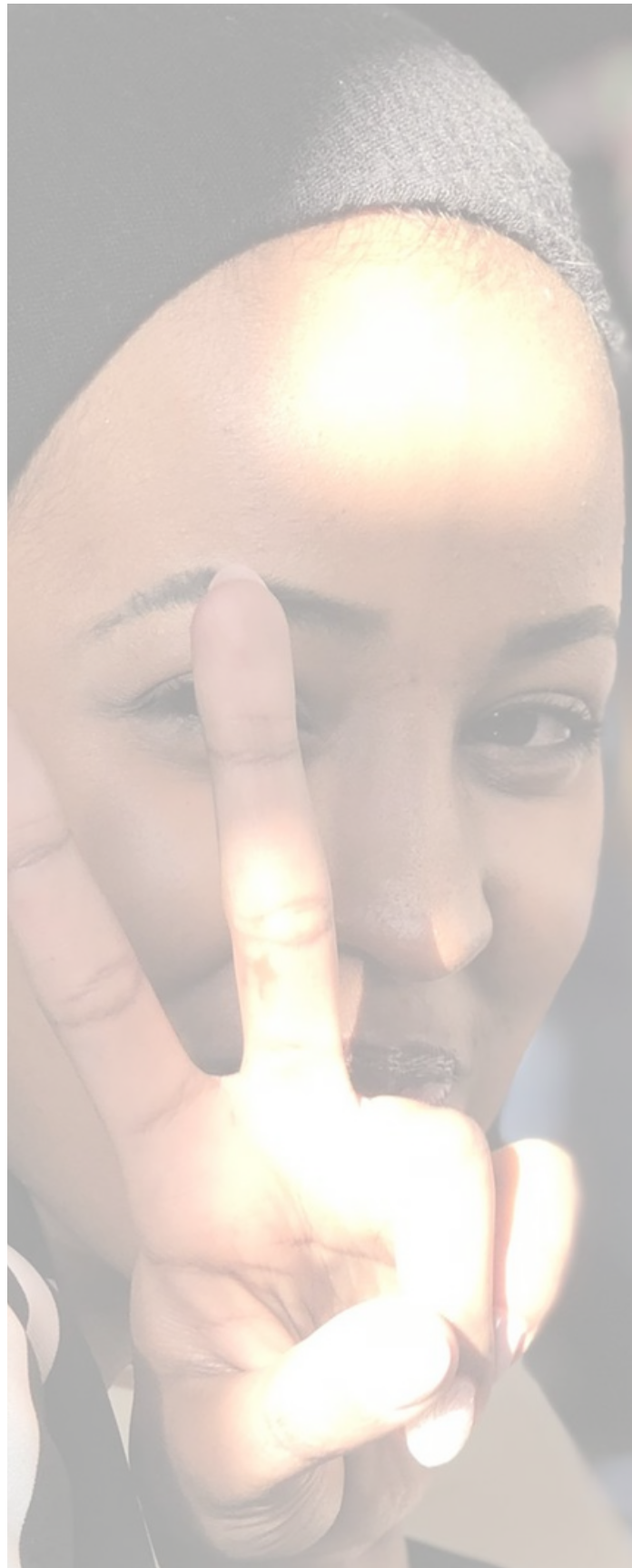What this can look like is to advocate on issues such as:
- Ensuring diverse representation of staff (i.e. people speaking different languages to reach out to different people),
- Think about mental health as a requirement rather than an option for program design
- Accessibility of resources in terms of languages, learning styles, technological and virtual tools, and providing one-on-one support

CHAPTER 4: INCLUSIVITY & YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The concepts of inclusivity and youth empowerment are valuable aspects of implementing a youth engagement approach. Both of these concepts allude to a deeper level of youth engagement that is worthwhile to further explore how it impacts our work. While there are overlaps between all of these concepts, there are important distinctions between them.

For starters, we need to unpack the conversations around the concept of inclusivity: What do we mean when we are using this word? It's a word that gets thrown around a lot, but how can we really, truly be inclusive when working with diverse populations?

A CP member shared a quote that resonated with her: "Inclusivity does not mean I will take your chair at the table, it means that I will bring my chair to be at that table too." One of the organizers of the Black Lives Matter march said that last week when we all gathered in Fredericton to show our solidarity and that just stayed with me. It is so pertinent to the conversations we have been having as a group around inclusivity and empowerment of youth. Majorities often fear that when Minorities are asked a seat at the table, that the voice of the majority will be tuned-out. That thinking is the exact opposite of inclusivity because fearing what someone with a different perspective and experience might say will take away from the conversation instead of enhancing your understanding of it. We need to talk about the difference between integration and inclusivity. Integration is bringing another chair into the table but inclusivity is that chair actually belonging to the rest of the table (i.e. having a voice).

INCLUSIVITY

Here are some important values that we believe are represented in the concept of Inclusivity:

- Authentic participation that is not tokenistic or paternalistic
- Demonstrate flexibility for different abilities, skills, lived realities, and appreciation of diverse and intersecting identities
- Create a sense of belonging and community for youth to connect and learn from each other
- Create "brave spaces" to allow youth to explore, to unpack, and to (un)learn these concepts as it relates to their own positionality
- Address bias in youth such as cultural or religious values that can create barriers in youth understanding and respecting each other
- Confront settler colonialism through education of Indigenous history and strive towards meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous youth and communities

Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment is an evolving concept and here are a few values that we believe are integral:

- Youth deserve to be seen and to be heard: allowing youth to build on their identities and capacity to feel fulfilled, to take up space, and to have a voice
- Go beyond development and embed a sense of ownership (autonomy), which means putting youth in the driver seat
- Holistic person-centered approaches: rights-based and strength-based
- Challenge the perception that youth engagement is providing programs and to actually hold space to listen to what youth need to push themselves and their communities forward
- To allow youth to develop their own toolbox to navigate their journey of growth as the expert of their own life at their own pace rather than adult allies imposing their own views of what they've decided is best
- Social justice oriented: organizational leaders to share power with youth and to challenge systemic inequalities through demonstrating solidarity and non-performative allyship
- Youth are given the space to develop the tools to take leadership and create change
- Important to continue the conversation around reconciliation that bridges newcomer youth communities with Indigenous communities

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

While we reflect on the concept of youth empowerment, it is important to pause and reflect on what we mean by using this concept.

A critique of empowerment is that it may assume that youth do not have power in the first place and thus "need" to be empowered. The implications of sharing power then may come from personal biases of what we believe youth need and how we should meet their needs. Without a critical understanding of empowerment in relation to power dynamics/structures may prove to be disempowering for youth. And so self-reflexivity is an important ongoing practice that helps to identify our positionality and catch what we project onto the youth we are supporting.

We understand that empowerment is shaped by different perspectives and experiences, and so our toolkit highlights our own perspectives, which is one of many different definitions that exists outside of this toolkit.

While such critical conversations are fruitful, we recognize that we need to understand what these concepts mean for the youth we're working with. In reality, it is important to collaboratively determine the meaning of these words within our own communities. Infusing the principles of equity and social justice can be meeting youth where they're at by taking time to listen, care, and connect to build mutual support.

A youth empowerment framework examines the barriers due to power systems that are imposed onto youth that prevent them from being in the driver seat. It can be envisioned as a very personal journey that focuses on capacity building (to be at the level of autonomy to take ownership of their growth and power to make meaningful decisions) while transforming the environmental/structural conditions around where we work, live, and play.

In order to fill in the gap between theory and practice, we shared our experiences around how we implement inclusivity and youth empowerment at the personal, organizational, and communal level. The rest of this chapter includes practical strategies and tools that you may find helpful for your own work.

LESS STRUCTURE

Opting to have less structure within a youth group can show inclusivity because many youth come from contexts that are already structured with many rules and rigid schedules.

In recognizing that youth are already bombarded with so many rules and structure (both at home and at school), it's beneficial to allow a freer space for youth to come and go as they please. We recognize that this may be difficult for organizations to implement as there is comfort found in being organized and having certainty. However, it is worth considering the point that when activities and programming are seen as too rigid, youth may be prevented from fully claiming a space as their own.

Allow the gift of flexibility for a demographic who often has too much structure in their lives. For instance, try to make sure that meetings and youth activities do not have a time limit or specific rules. For programming, we can allow for more fluidity and flexibility through not limiting it to a specific age range, to a strict start and end date, and to allow for an openness that is organic. From the start, organizations can be transparent about the kinds of support that can be offered so that youth aren't afraid to seek support. In doing so, we need to be aware of how to alleviate fears youth may hold from previous negative experiences of attempting to access support. For instance, a volunteer-run organization can express transparency by expressing that while the staff may not be paid, they willingly choose to show up because they care. Ultimately, the message conveyed to youth is "you're important and we believe in you."

We can allow youth to co-construct what the space looks like such as the program name, what the mandate is, what they would like to discuss, and who they would like to come talk.

By doing so, this approach changes the way we have to work based on different types of program experiences. It is a different layer of work that requires skills to take a participant driven approach that is flexible and adaptable (but it does require great training to do this well). A participant driven approach is one where participants identify what's important to them, what they need, and what they want to achieve (rather than us imposing what we believe is best for them).

After a program has been established, youth participants can collaborate on a group contract that documents ground rules and what everyone wants the space to look like, and what personal and communal needs are to be met (i.e. listening/respecting each other and what some examples and counterexamples of that look like).

The purpose is to have a clear understanding of collective accountability and a commitment towards co-creating an inclusive space. The community contract can be signed by everyone afterwards to ensure that we all do our best to adhere to a collectively agreed upon guidelines.

REFLECT & EVALUATE

There is value in creating space for ongoing reflection and evaluation of the terminology we use and for checking in with ourselves to ensure we are practicing our values in programming.

In reflecting on our relationship towards specific terms (i.e. empowerment), we can check-in on how everyone understands and applies a theory/principle into their work. Instead of accepting things as they are, there is value in questioning the meaning behind words that are used to design and facilitate the intent of programming. To clarify, challenging the meaning attached to a word does not mean we are critiquing the person that said it. And so an open space for learning, vulnerability, and building trust works best for these types of conversations to take place. As mentioned before, it is important not to get too caught up on the terminology but to consider the weight that certain words carry with them.

Another important aspect of reflection and evaluation is to ensure that we are not imposing programs that we believe are right for the youth or what we believe they need.

An alternative response is to take frequent moments of pause to reflect back on the goals and needs expressed by the youth. A CP member shared that what works for her is to have one day blocked off per month to take a look at what has been accomplished thus far, how on track they are to ensure they are responding to the goals and needs of youth, and what needs to change moving forward if they realize a gap.

On a related note, a CP member mentioned that we often discuss things we've encountered or find healing in our work but we're not able to put words on it or describe these experiences. This can make it difficult to share our ideas, experiences, and feelings with each other. As such, having pauses can help us to share our work and to THINK about what we know regarding concepts that shape our practice. That said, organizations often do not have that space to reflect as they are often bombarded with other tasks that demand their immediate attention. We hope to encourage our communities to do their best to include moments of collective reflection as a way to ensure everyone is on the same page.

MEET YOUTH WHERE THEY'RE AT

Meeting youth where they're at can mean directly asking and engaging with youth throughout programming development, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation.

We can recognize and appreciate the skills and insights that youth bring to the table by moving away from a damaged-centred framework. An alternative approach is to take up a youth resiliency framework that acknowledges the barriers and hardships that youth may face, but does not erase the resiliency, desires and strengths of youth. Moving towards a resilience-centred frameworks disrupts the assumption that youth are damaged and instead celebrates the strengths and knowledge they share with our communities.

Empowerment means listening to youth and truly believing in their capacity and creativity for leadership and creating meaningful change.

We can open up channels of communication that emphasizes mutuality. For instance, if youth are worried about employment, we can tailor programs for developing tools for career development. The perspectives provided by youth can help shape how the program will happen and which organizations and resources they would like to be connected with to fulfill their needs and succeed. To gather helpful information / youth input for programming, we can start with asking youth directly their reasons for accessing a space:

- What are their goals?
- What do they hope to gain from showing up?

When we listen to what youth are saying to us, it allows us to take a moment to reflect whether the support we are providing matches/meets the goals expressed by youth. And if it doesn't, we can be accountable for our actions by making any changes that will help meet the needs of youth as much as possible.

Another way to gather youth input is by having focus groups that are made up of youth from the target group. Additionally, it could be helpful to include youth who are older so that they are able to reflect back on their previous experiences and share what was helpful and what could be improved. A youth advisory committee can be beneficial for allowing youth to identify the barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their potential and so the organizations can address those. And so a youth empowerment approach also means identifying what youth need, hearing where they lack support, and then we are able to come up with the support they need.

Notably, building rapport with youth right from the start is important for building success.
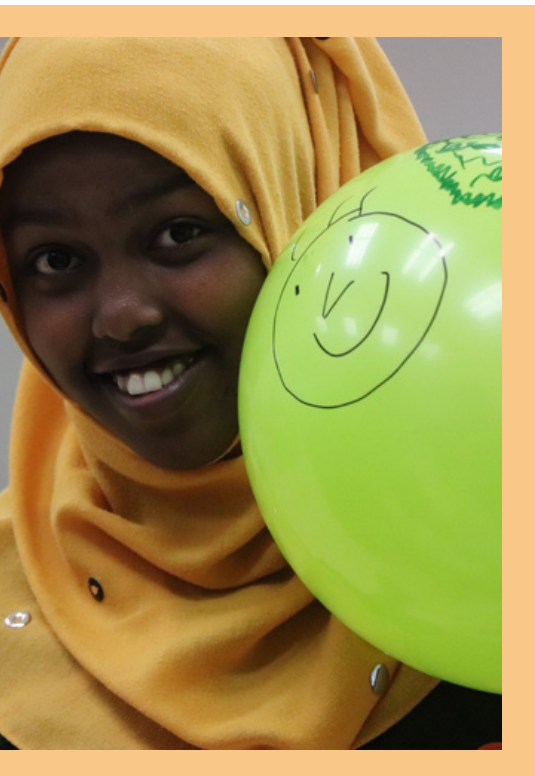
To be seen as only the facilitator limits the potential of the powerful alliance between allies and youth. There is a need to build genuine friendships with youth that demonstrates an example of what healthy relationships can look like.

"BRAVE SPACES" INSTEAD OF "SAFE SPACES"

The idea of brave spaces is deeply intertwined with the philosophy of "growth in the uncomfortable" and driving the point that things often do not change until someone is brave enough to speak about it.

Something that we've learned is that not every conversation or space can be "safe" for everyone, and so we need to be brave in holding space for feeling uncomfortable in our journey of growth. Being uncomfortable is such an important skill to develop because a lot of great things can come from that. Within the youth group itself, issues related to respecting diversity may arise. A CP member shared how important it is to clearly communicate that "difference among us is not weird; different is just different." Youth inevitably come from all walks of life, representing various cultures and religions. For instance, a CP member shared an experience of dealing with a conflict between youth belonging in the same religion: "you are not doing that religion right." Such a remark and others similar to it puts a strain on relationship building. We need to hold space to have difficult conversations and unpack our own biases before it ruptures the group cohesion. From there, we can demonstrate how being "different" is advantageous and enhances our personal and communal well-being.

The notion of inclusivity within youth spaces means being intentional about respecting and valuing differences.

Despite coming from different places, youth can still be connected to each other through understanding their similarities. The goal is to remind each other that we are tied together through our shared humanity, which can create a shift in appreciating different perspectives and lived realities. Although the shift may not happen right away, it is worthwhile to unpack these issues as they come up rather than to breeze over it. A CP member reflected that while strong tensions may arise in conflicts, it is harder to not like someone that you have grown with and have cared for.

YOUTH TAKING THE LEAD

Practical ways to involve youth within an organization include setting up youth-led projects, a youth advisory committee, and inviting youth as members on the Board of Directors.

However, what does it mean to ensure that youth are "authentically" involved? Otherwise, it can come across as very tokenistic -- which may disguise certain actions as inclusive but fail to challenge power dynamics/structures and thus reinforce existing oppressive practices. It is important to have youth be a part of spaces of power where decisions are made and strategic planning takes place.

A CP member shared that an effective way to engage youth is right from the beginning such as before writing a grant or funding proposal. The reason is that instilling a sense of ownership is difficult when youth are asked to fit into a box that is premade for them, and so having youth engaged in the process allows the program to be owned by them: "made by them and for them." An educational component is to support youth in figuring out the power systems at play. While adult allies may be critically aware, youth may not have access to the same opportunity.

Providing tools for youth to identify, to process, and work through the barriers--such as those imposed by funders--is a meaningful way to collaborate together. Allowing youth to share their perspectives and feedback can help organizations to further strengthen advocacy efforts.

While there are logistical aspects to facilitating a session or running a program, organizations can still make opportunities for youth to lead an aspect of the program. For instance, a CP member shared that during their weekend retreat, certain youth were asked to take leadership roles (i.e. leading the ice breakers, facilitating a debrief, collecting valuable feedback on programming). Additionally, when there were special cultural events such as Ramadan and Lunar New Year, youth were invited to share a presentation of their cultural traditions. This allowed youth to take ownership of their background and choose what they wanted to share with us. In facilitating the session, the youth presenters switched sides with the adult allies to engage in a mutually beneficial learning experience.

We must intentionally thank youth for imbuing our communities with purpose and meaning through sharing their knowledge and stories.

YOUTH IN THE DRIVER SEAT

There is a powerful moment whenever we hear that youth feel that they belong and that they have influence when they are sharing knowledge with an organization about pieces that form part of their identities... but why not ask them to lead other parts as co-facilitators?

We are too "trained" to see youth as merely receiving the type of service that our immigrant-serving umbrella offers and for that they can also be in the driver seat of delivering it to their peers and benefit too. What does it mean to be more intentional at all of our future youth activities and youth planning to stop thinking that we are (or can be) the only facilitator? Instead we can start asking for support from the various youth in leading some of the activities. Keeping in mind that this will require mentorship, support, training and exploring options for truly building that skillset in the youth we work with.

EXAMPLE OF SETTING UP A YOUTH ADVISORY

A CP member shared that setting up a youth advisory committee (YAC) turned their programming around.

Previously, they offered mostly recreational activities with a few one-off projects that were based on guessing what would be most appealing to youth. However, they discovered that this approach was very ineffective. And so the idea to set up a YAC came into effect. Logistically speaking, there were entrance interviews to select youth who wanted to be more active in the group. Honorariums were offered as a symbol of honouring the youth's commitment to taking responsibility. There is a 3-month period for each cohort of the YAC.

Setting up a YAC gave opportunities for youth seeking to take on more responsibilities to develop their leadership skills.

Some of the responsibilities included facilitating meetings, attending group discussions, and making decisions as a group regarding what youth wanted to see in programming. As such, many of the youth took charge of doing ice breakers, leading check-out questions, brainstorming a timeline for planned activities and topics, and determining what kinds of guest speakers to invite. It turned out that the YAC was a great starting place for youth to feel comfortable sharing their ideas with enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment. This allowed the organization to listen and then to appropriately address the needs of the youth through changing and updating the programs that were previously offered. Additionally, being part of a YAC can be beneficial for resume building and for future career development opportunities. At the same time, it was important to be transparent about the capacity of the organization to carry out the ideas and feedback shared by youth. So far, this way of setting up and implementing a YAC within an organization has been successful.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

To preface, an approach can be helpful in providing guidance or a starting place for us to think of how we're doing it rather than what we are doing.
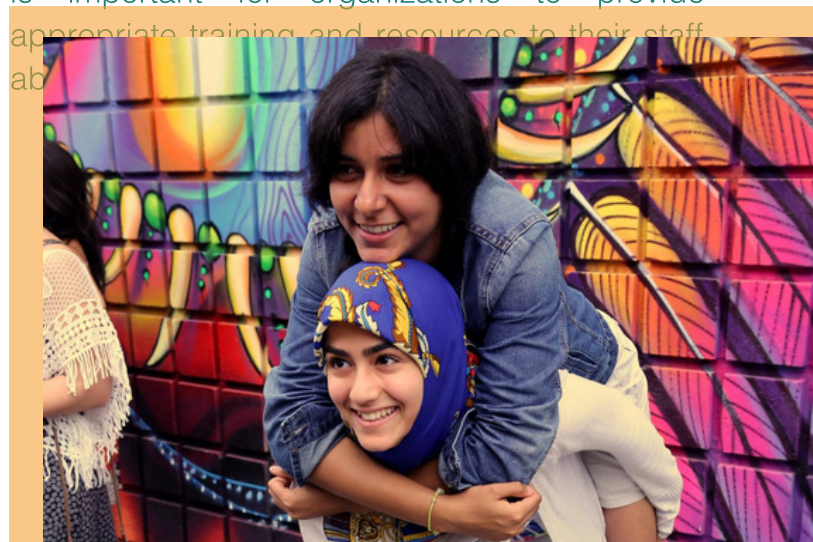
There was a proposal by the CP members to take up a rights-based approach that was a novel concept for many of us. Such an approach emerged from critically questioning instances where adult allies fail to respect youth's rights, opinions, autonomy, and their lived realities. A rights-based approach allows us to imagine what a youth-centred space looks like.

And so to consider taking up a rights-based approach: it's a way to have the child at the centre of any work or approach. Such an approach reflects article 12 (about participation and the right of the child to be heard) and article 3 (about keeping children's best interest), which focuses on making decisions that prioritizes the best interests of the child. In this context, participation means allowing children to have spaces to voice their opinions that carry weight in the decisions that impact them. Within community organizations, such an approach calls for accountability, which means a responsibility to act on what children share with us. Part of this is recognizing the fundamental sharing of power that comes with "participation", which can be expressed when we actively recognize and act on children's input. As adult allies, whether that means as parents, guardians, or mentors, we accompany and support youth through relationship building.

The rights-based approach is a very personal approach to meet youth where they're at and assess what the adult ally can support while being aware that youth have agency and autonomy. There is an understanding that no one is necessarily independent and more so interdependent as we develop and grow together. What this means is that having access to guidance and accompaniment is vital without imposing our own biases and projections onto youth.

The diversity of the rights-based approach includes the right to express oneself, their identities, and that they feel safe. It values intersectionality and considers the multiple aspects that impact a person's wellbeing such as gender, culture, socioeconomic status, and so on. There is also an element of protection that is enacted through a balance. For instance, one of the CP members shared that while their organization's main focus is the language-learning program, they recognize that youth sometimes need a more personal approach to learning. This may involve spaces for establishing personal relationships and supporting emotional processes the youth may be undergoing.

When adopting a personal learning approach, it is important for organizations to provide appropriate training and resources to their staff ab

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

What is a Community of Practice?

The CCR received an overwhelming amount of interest for the YES Community of Practice, which meant we had to make choices based on the need for a diversity of organizations. The CCR acknowledges that it was not our intention to exclude CCR organization members and will consider this feedback critically for future projects. We limited the selection process to 6 organizations who met on a monthly basis between February 2020 and June 2020. There was diverse regional representation from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. CP members have shared, learned, and co-created knowledge on the topic of YES. As a result, we decided to develop the YES toolkit to share our insights with our communities.

Based on literature we've reviewed, we defined a Community of Practice as the following: a group of people who share an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfil both individual and group goals. Additionally, members of the Community of Practice share best practices and co-create knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice.

We presented this definition at the first CP meeting and asked members to reflect and share their thoughts and feelings. From there, we redefined a CP as a group of community people with similar values and with a variety of expertise in the domain of youth engagement committed to improving YES by pausing and reflecting together.

CP members interpret the goals of the YES project by demonstrating how it applies to their evolving approaches towards YE in their work and local context. Commiting to a practice means members come to an agreement upon a body of knowledge. The CP encourages members to share their stories and to learn best practices from each other. Some uplifting words from a CP member's reflection: "It was evident from the first CP meeting that this is a group of dedicated, talented and passionate individuals who have vast experience and expertise in this domain; I am truly looking forward to getting to know their perspectives and work further. It is also clear to me that the people who were there want to be part of this and that they are the right people." The group dynamic has been very positive, allowing everyone to hold a safe and caring space for each other. Although the YES project has been completed, all CP members have decided to stay connected and will take ownership of facilitating future CP meetings. We are super excited to hear what the future has in store for the CP (there are rumours of developing a second toolkit that goes into more depth of the concepts we've explored in this toolkit)!

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Brittany Dunstan, She/Her (Victoria, BC)
The Enable Program for Children & Youth
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre (VIRCS), BC

After having lived in a few different countries, Brittany is now grateful to call Victoria home, where she is able to live, work and play as an uninvited guest on these beautiful lands. Brittany is happy to be working at VIRCS as the Facilitator for the Enable Program for Children & Youth! For the past two years, Brittany has had the unique opportunity to get to know and directly work with newcomer, immigrant and refugee youth from many different cultures.

Her role involves collaborating with community members to offer summer camps, activities and workshops to newcomer youth around topics such as leadership, indigenous knowledge, cultural awareness, nutrition, and healthy relationships. Weekly academic support, in-school art-based wellness programs, a creative Kids' Club and regular youth hang-out activities make up a core part of the Enable youth programming. Brittany's role also means guiding a Youth Advisory Committee to shape the youth program, something unique that VIRCS offers. This year the YAC wrote a successful grant to create hampers for 50 other newcomer youth in the city to keep them active throughout the summer. It's always busy, active and there is plenty to learn about different ways of communicating, sharing and experiencing life!

www.vircs.bc.ca
Facebook: /NewVIRCS/ and /EnableVIRCS
Instagram: @vircs_enable

Mike Lally, He/Him (Surrey, BC)
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society

Mike has over 18 years of experience working in the not-for-profit and education sectors in supporting initiatives that assist newcomers and their families. Mike has helped design and implement a variety of enrichment and expanded learning opportunities targeting diverse populations and communities, that encourage community members to become actively engaged in the growth and development of the communities they live, work and play in.

Mike joined DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society in Spring 2019, and since arriving has been active in helping support and develop the youth programs/strategy organization wide that will help educate and encourage local youth members to become active members and leaders of positive change in their respective communities.

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Link to Website(s):
1.   **https://www.dcrs.ca/**
2.   **https://www.dcrs.ca/our-services/youth-programs/**

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Steffanie Beekman, She/Her (Edmonton, AB)

Steffanie is a passionate community development practitioner that thrives in spaces where she can be creative and connected to people. She has been working with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) since 2013 - joining the organization after working in the non-profit and private education sectors for ten years. In her current role, she leads a team that empowers ethno-cultural community leaders of all ages through self-identified capacity building using a strengths-based approach in areas, such as, strategic and operational planning, fund development, project management, program development, and advocacy.

Steffanie has been privileged to work collaboratively with community and other stakeholders to develop and implement community-based programs to reduce social isolation and promote diversity and inclusion. Steffanie has been a critical collaborator in the development and execution of dozens of community-driven projects and programs such as Global Girls, Standing in HER power Showcase, My Journey Youth Art Project, 150 Stories: Connecting Us All, Brighter Futures Back Home, and more.

Coming from a family of immigrant grandparents, working at a settlement agency during the Syrian Refugee Crisis, and visiting other parts of the world- Steffanie has learned first-hand the power of people, culture, and community. She cares deeply about social justice and strives to do what she can, in all of her personal and professional roles, to work towards a healthier, more equitable society. In her spare time, Steffanie enjoys travelling, trying to learn Spanish (which has been a relatively slow 5-year process- but will get there one day!), reading and enjoying time with her daughter. She is also involved in several social enterprises and international development projects.

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Philip Ackerman, He/Him (Toronto, ON)

Philip has long been an adult educator who has been committed to working with newcomer youth in a wide range of community settings. He has been a strong advocate of access to education for newcomer and migrant youth, supporting several academic and community-based interventions around this issue over the past decade. More recently, since graduating from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) with an M.Ed in Adult Education and Community Development, Philip has been the Program Coordinator of the Social Service Worker: Immigrants and Refugees Program at Seneca College in Toronto, Canada. In addition, he is currently the Toronto coordinator for Equitas, supporting human rights-based education for marginalized groups of young people across Canada.

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Emilia Gonzalez, She/Her (Montreal, QC)
Say Ça!

Emilia is a young researcher interested in newcomer youth wellbeing and resettlement. Her work explores youth resilience and participation through a child rights-based approach. She is currently a Master's student at McGill exploring how community-based support contributes to migrant youth's experiences in Montreal. Her thesis project is a community research collaboration with Say Ça!, a community-based organization that delivers a one-on-one language learning and mentoring program to newcomer youth in Montreal. Emilia has also worked and volunteered with several other non-for-profits serving immigrant and refugee youth in the city.

Emilia was born in Colombia and currently calls Montreal her home. She loves connecting with young people, listening to their stories and developing projects together that transform both the people involved and the society they collectively create.

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Arianne Melara, She/Her (Fredericton, NB)
New Brunswick Multicultural Council

Arianne was born and raised in El Salvador and currently lives in New Brunswick, Canada. She arrived to Canada as an international student in 2011 and holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Economics and International Relations from St. Thomas University. Her Honours Thesis focused on Globalization and Canadian Mining in Guatemala's indigenous communities. She considers herself grateful to be living and working on the unsurrendered and unceded traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet).

Arianne is deeply passionate about working with youth. She believes that through the empowerment of youth and by the development of the right policies that include youth's lens, the world would be a better place. Her involvement in volunteering roles include: past Regional Youth Representative of Development and Peace; Mentor for the Atlantic Canada Study and Stay International Student Program; and Board member of NB Champions of Children and Youth.

Arianne's most notable accomplishments in life include: her nomination for the Top 25 Immigrants in Atlantic Canada Award; being featured as a "Young New Brunswicker to Watch" by Huddle Today and as one of seven "Young Women of Conviction" by CBC.

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   2. **https://www.linkedin.com/in/arimelara/**

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Tony Luong, They/Them (Edmonton, AB)
Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network

Tony Luong is a Queer Asian Nonbinary artist and community storyweaver. Tony weaves stories together through performance art, podcasting, writing, and painting. As a recent graduate of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Tony has a strong interest in youth empowerment and prevention of sexual violence. At the Canadian Council for Refugees, Tony has facilitated the Youth Engagement Sustainability (YES) Project by coordinating the Community of Practice (CP). In order to weave together the knowledge co-created by the CP, Tony developed and designed the YES toolkit. Currently, Tony is the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, supporting community organizations and survivors of sexual violence to create positive changes that push our communities forward.

Through working and creating art with the communities they are a part of and care deeply about, Tony is inspired by stories of love, liberation, connection, and healing.

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Juliana Cortes, She/Her (Montreal, QC)
Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network

Juliana Cortes Lugo has lived an extraordinary, unique life. Her life has taken her from the outskirts of Bogota, Columbia, where she was born and raised, into the streets of Montreal. Juliana, who graduated from the University of Alberta in 2014 with a degree in Political Science with a minor in Sociology, has learned, both through her academic and personal lenses, how to honour the complexities of human life and the larger social-political we interact with every day.

Juliana is also pursuing a diploma in Community Economic Development at Concordia University. Juliana's awareness of the relationship between social systems and individual lives is what helps her be such an integral source of knowledge, support and solidarity for immigrant and refugee youth forced to navigate new environments and complex emotional demands.

Juliana has worked with immigrant and refuge youth for over 7 years. Juliana has consistently demonstrated her value as a community-builder and cultural connector. She is also an experienced program developer, workshop facilitator who is skilled at centering the voices of Newcomer Youth. Juliana has a special ability to bring sincerity, heart and patience to every interaction, whether in the office, classroom, or wider community.

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CONCLUSION

Again, thank you for taking the time and energy to read our toolkit!

Coming full circle, we want to leave you with a few words that we shared in our letter from the beginning of this toolkit. Newcomer youth engagement is a principle that guides our work within the communities we are a part of and care deeply about. We believe youth engagement is a meaningful approach to transforming the very systems that operate on power imbalances. We hope that you will find aspects of our toolkit applicable to your work both personally and professionally within your organization and communities. The toolkit was produced through the contribution and shared knowledge of a Community of Practice composed of 6 organizational leaders across Canada. The purpose of the toolkit is to share the results, concrete reflections, and practical tools with our communities.

Ultimately, we know that as the reader, you care about making a difference towards engaging youth. Just know that you are not alone in this journey of ongoing growth and exploration.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED ?

Join a CCR member organizations

ccrweb.ca/en/members

Becoming a YN member is an opportunity to

Connect with other newcomer youth across Canada, learn from each other innovative ways to engage youth and promote youth leadership

Implement a youth engagement lense in your organization

Email us at: yn@ccrweb.ca

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