

2023

SUMMARY REPORT

CYRRC FORUM ON IMPROVING
COLLABORATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
WITHIN THE SETTLEMENT SECTOR





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EVENT SUMMARY

CYRRC FORUM ON IMPROVING COLLABORATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE SETTLEMENT SECTOR

On March 15th, 2023, the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) brought together youth with refugee experience (YREs), service providers, community partners, academics, and policy makers for a pre-conference forum at the 25th Metropolis Conference in Ottawa. The forum focused on two major themes emerging from CYRRC's five years of research:

1. Collaboration between stakeholders
2. Engaging youth with refugee experience in decision-making.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS



Supporting the settlement of newcomer youth requires that we treat many moving parts as an integrated whole; housing, education, financial support, and health care all operate in conjunction with each other (Pelley, 2022). Collaboration between stakeholders - academics, community organizations, settlement provider organizations, policy makers, and people with lived experience (PWLEs) - ensures that diverse perspectives and expertise are brought to bear on decision-making, helping to make policies and programs more responsive to the needs of those they are intended to serve. As keynote speaker Hanen Nanaa summed up in her opening address, "We all need each other to survive."

PRESENTATIONS

RESEARCH ON EDUCATION, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION, AND LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

A goal of the forum was to share findings from some of CYRRC's recent research, and engage in discussion about how to work across disciplines to support the settlement and integration needs of YREs. Four CYRRC researchers presented on some of the issues facing refugee children and youth in the home, at school, and in the community.

Mental Health of Newcomer Refugee and Immigrant Youth During COVID-19

Reza Nakhaie, University of Windsor

Dr. Nakhaie's research found that food insecurity, length of time in Canada, resilience, and number of siblings impacted newcomer youth's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecurity was the largest predictor of worsening mental health. Length of time in Canada also negatively impacted newcomer youth's mental health, while resilience and a higher number of siblings had positive impacts on mental health. Recommendations from the research include improving income security for newcomer families and establishing more open family immigration policy to increase social support and connection for newcomer families.

Language and Reading Development of Refugees

Redab Al Janaideh, University of Toronto

Compiling findings from multiple projects, Dr. Al Janaideh highlighted the connection between refugee children's wellbeing and learning processes. High behavioral problems (externalizing problems, ADHD, likely as the result of trauma) were associated with low English language abilities, suggesting that children who are struggling to learn the host country language may require psychosocial support. The research also found that lower socioeconomic status was associated with lower host language outcomes, suggesting that supporting refugee parents' access to employment and work-related skills training may benefit children's learning and language development.

Persisting and Resisting: Youth with Refugee Experience Accessing Education in Halifax

Susan Brigham, Mount St. Vincent University

Dr. Brigham's research highlighted a number of factors that affect YREs as they enter the school system. Language barriers were a significant challenge for youth in terms of school, work, and forming friendships; youth also struggled to access language support. Friendships helped youth with language-learning and creating a sense of belonging. Despite these challenges, youth had high aspirations for the future and showed significant resilience. To better support YREs, school systems need to consider the many strengths youth bring to the classroom and avoid singular representations of YREs. As well, gender differences must be considered by educational policy makers and settlement agencies to ensure wider access to education.

Promoting Emotional Well-Being in Refugee Newcomer Families in Waterloo Region: The Case of Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre

Redab Al Janaideh, University of Toronto

Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre was taken as a case study of effective, holistic community care. The key learnings from Sanctuary's model include adhering to principles of trauma-informed, linguistically tailored, and culturally sensitive healthcare; partnering with other service providers and local actors to address multiple needs in one space; involving individuals with refugee experience; taking a flexible and adaptable model of intervention; establishing trusting relationships between providers and clients; and attending to the wellbeing of employees and volunteers.





PANEL DISCUSSIONS

WORKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Panelists recognized that collaboration across disciplines and sectors is important, but that there are challenges involved in addressing the multiple, interconnected systems affecting refugee children and youth. Successful interventions would need to involve youth, parents, teachers, as well as a range of other actors in the community. Refugee families experience multiple and diverse needs that are best addressed with holistic, wrap-around support. This could take the form of a multi-service hub, such as Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre, which invites other service providers to their centre to provide newcomers with different services in one location.

Working across disciplines can be challenging. Community partners emphasize the need for trusting relationships to be built between community partners and academics. Research processes must become more flexible to allow for the time needed to build these relationships, to properly compensate community partners and YREs, to meet participants where they are, and to recognize the experience and expertise that community partners bring. It is also important that service providers and researchers understand the culture of the people they are working with, and/or that they partner with cultural-brokers who can act as a bridge and provide necessary context.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Involve cultural brokers when implementing a new program. In research, try to hire RAs who are culturally responsive or who can act as cultural brokers. Understanding participants' culture is key to implementing a program or research study.
- When collecting and analyzing data, get feedback from the community on what might be missing or overlooked. Ensure that you are asking the right questions, especially when you are unfamiliar with the culture.
- When doing research, spend as much time as possible with the community organization and with PWLEs in order to build trusting relationships and better understand their worldview and what is important to them.
- For service providers, framing mental health supports as “wellbeing” and using an assets- or strength-based approach could help bridge the gap between mental health services and newcomers. Recognize newcomers' resilience, encourage conversations around strategies they used in the past to cope, and have them share those strategies with each other, even across cultures.
- It is important to recognize that refugee populations are not inherently vulnerable; they have been made so by circumstances and larger structures, it is up to the community to break down those barriers.
- Refugee clients must be treated as unique individuals, not a monolithic group.

FISHBOWL DISCUSSION

ENGAGING YOUTH WITH REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

The importance of engaging PWLE in collaboration is increasingly being recognized; however, much more needs to be done to engage PWLE in policy and program development (Pelley, 2022), as well as research (Arteaga et al., 2022).

YREs and policymakers participated in a fishbowl discussion on the importance of youth engagement, and how to increase youth participation in research, policy, and programming.



Learning to embrace vulnerability gives youth power and helps to navigate barriers, as vulnerability is related to taking new chances and opportunities even when you don't feel fully "ready."

- Hanen Nanaa

Refugees arriving in Canada are often told to wait—wait until you learn English; wait until you get Canadian experience. This makes youth feel like they have to wait until they are fully integrated or fully “Canadian” before they can participate in society—whether that be through employment, higher education, or politics. Being told to wait is incredibly disappointing for people who have already had their life put on hold for so long and who may not have the luxury of waiting as they have people depending on them. Youth with refugee experience should not have to wait to have their voices heard. They have valuable expertise to contribute to Canadian society, including research and program and policy development.

Barriers Facing YREs:

- YREs regularly face the experience of having others decide what they are/are not capable of. For example, they often do not have much say in choosing high school courses that they are interested in.
- It is important to recognize and address gender disparities among YREs. Women often have less access to technology and public speaking opportunities.

Methodological Issues to Consider When Involving YREs in Research:

- It is important to be conscious of which YREs are involved in research. Is it mainly those that are already excelling and involved? If so, what can be done to reach YREs who are less engaged?
- It is also important to ask whose voice or experience is missing from the research. For example, some datasets only include information on principal applicants. This leads to an absence of information about dependents (including YREs) and those with precarious statuses.

- There is no consistent definition of “youth” and “newcomer” across research.
- It is extremely important not to think of or treat YREs as a homogenous group.
- It is important to ensure that YREs understand the questions they are being asked, using terminology that makes sense to them.
- YREs who have experienced trauma may need support when participating in research that asks them to describe their traumatic experiences or mental health issues.

Recommendations for Engaging YREs:

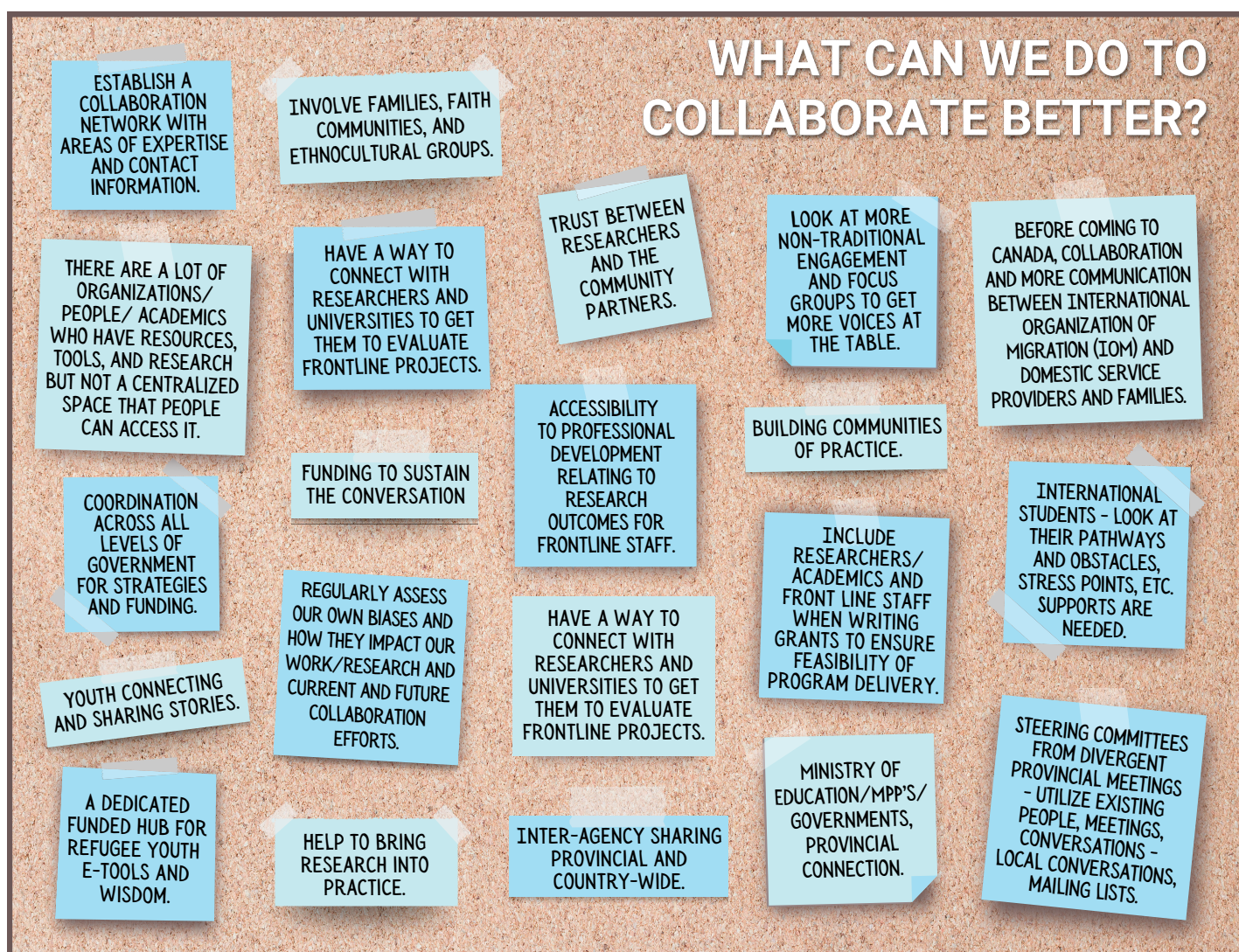
- Recognize that youth are experts in their own lives.
- Allow youth to lead consultations/ focus groups in research. Give them decision-making power.
- Recognize and address power dynamics between YREs and established systems and structures.
- Include YREs to consult on data analysis and help researchers understand the limitations of the data. Ensure that data is shared in ways that reflect how it was given.
- Listen to what youth want and what challenges they are facing. Treat each youth as a unique individual and do not treat YREs as a monolithic group.
- Working with YREs requires listening with an open heart and mind, and allowing youth to share their insights and experiences without judgements.
- It is important that YREs be compensated fairly for their time and expertise.
- Sustainable funding is important for retaining staff and building trust-based relationships over a longer time. At-risk youth especially need someone they trust to be involved, which can be achieved by hiring an ambassador.
- Holding focus groups in places youth are familiar with -such as restaurants, baseball fields, etc be helpful. Providing a meal is important when meeting with youth, and is a great way to build a sense of community.

GROUP ACTIVITY

MOVING FORWARD IN COLLABORATION

Participants broke into groups to discuss the following:

1. What can we do to collaborate better?
2. What are possible challenges and solutions?
3. Who needs to be involved?
4. What processes are needed?



WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS?

LIVED EXPERIENCE - GIVE A VOICE TO THOSE WHO THE PROGRAMS ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP.

COMPENSATION FOR YOUTH LABOUR (I.E. THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN CONSULTATIONS/ FEEDBACK)

COLLABORATION - TIME IT TAKES IS NOT COMPENSATED.

ENGAGE OTHER PEOPLE TO MEET REGULARLY ONLINE. TO AVOID BURNOUT AND ADD NEW VOICES.

HAVING MORE FUNDING, WITHOUT MONEY IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO DO ANYTHING

SERVICE AND INCOME SUPPORT. FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL SUPPORTS. SHARING INFO SO THERE IS NO BREAK IN SERVICE.

CHALLENGES: TIME AND FUNDING COMPETITION.

MORE SPACE AT EVENTS LIKE THIS TO CONNECT AND COLLABORATE.

SOLUTIONS: DIVERSITY IN FUNDING, COMMUNITY-BASED FUNDING, TRAINING ON WHAT COLLABORATION IS, NEWSLETTER/ COMMUNICATION

YOUTH PROGRAMMING - BRIDGE GAPS BETWEEN ALL EXISTING/ CURRENT OFFERINGS.

MORE CLEAR FUNDING GUIDELINES FOR GRANTS, ETC.

MAKE IT CLEAR TO NEWCOMERS WHAT SUPPORTS THEY ARE ENTITLED TO AT EACH STEP AND IF THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS CHANGES.

FLEXIBLE MULTI-YEAR FUNDING.

FUNDING FOR YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS. FUNDING FOR HONORARIUMS FOR YOUTH.

VETTING, SCREENING, AND COMPASSIONATE TRAINING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC.

MAP OUT EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS, WHAT NEEDS ARE BEING ADDRESSED, AND WHERE THERE IS A VACUUM IN SERVICE DELIVERY

RESOURCES/ TOOLS FOR LOW-LITERACY INDIVIDUALS NEED TO BE MORE ACCESSIBLE

TO SUSTAIN, HAVING A STRONG VISION/ MISSION AND BRINGING IT BACK TO YOUR WORK HELPS DRIVE CONTINUED WORK.

MEASURABLE FUNDING - ACTIVITIES HAVE TO FIT IN REALLY RIGID BOXES.

CLIENT SURVEY FEEDBACK.



WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED?

FUNDERS; POLICY MAKERS; RESEARCHERS; CLIENTS/ STAKEHOLDERS; YOUTH/ PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE; TEACHERS, DOCTORS, LAWYERS

MORE COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY AND RESEARCHERS MOVING FORWARD

FAMILIES

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT; YOUTH (BY YOUTH AND FOR YOUTH); COMMUNITY (NON IMMIGRANT) - BOTH PERSPECTIVES; PRE-EXISTING GROUPS; FUNDERS

CLIENT/ NEWCOMER SURVEY

THINK BEYOND THE SETTLEMENT SECTOR FOR COLLABS THAT CAN HELP ADDRESS GAPS/ NEEDS, ETC.

LIVED EXPERIENCE IS AN EXPERTISE AND SHOULD BE PAID AS SUCH

PARENTS

YOUTH

CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

WHAT PROCESSES ARE NEEDED?

HAVE A CENTRAL COORDINATING BODY TO CONTINUE REGULAR MEETINGS.

IRCC FUNDING-COLLABORATION INCLUDED IN OUTCOMES.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN ABOUT YOUTH PROGRAMS AND SETTLEMENT ACROSS CANADA.

RESEARCHERS NEED TO SHOW HOW THEY WILL BE SERVING THE COMMUNITY, NOT JUST TAKING INFORMATION.

META-ANALYSIS TO GATHER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH TO PRESSURE IRCC TO ACT ON THIS.

USE EXISTING CHANNELS-PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY (P2P), SETTLENET.ORG.

RESEARCH ENGAGING YOUTH NEEDS TO HAVE EXTRA FUNDING TO SUPPORT YOUTH

DISCUSSION AND IDEAS; LISTENING.



ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of academics, service providers, community partners, and government agencies. We carry out research, promote best practices, and engage in knowledge mobilization on social integration, economic outcomes, education, and the mental and physical wellbeing of refugee children, youth, and families in Canada. CYRRC researchers are involved in 80+ research projects.

CYRRC prioritizes multiple disciplinary perspectives and engaging non-academic sectors, including people with lived experience, in creating and mobilizing knowledge.

To find more of our work around the collaboration, see our policy briefs and podcast series, *The Refuge: Policy Matters*, which brings together academics, community partners, and policy makers.

To hear more from youth with refugee experience, check out our podcast series, *The Refuge*.

Visit us at cyrrc.org

Follow us on Twitter [@cyrrcoalition](https://twitter.com/cyrrcoalition)



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