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IMPACT REPORT

A Path to Success: Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Youth Access to
Higher Education



2024



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project has taken place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), and Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) First Nations. We recognize that these lands have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial, and their wisdom, knowledge, and stewardship of these territories continue to guide and inspire us.

As settlers on these lands, we acknowledge the deep histories, cultures, and traditions that have shaped and sustained these communities. The resilience and strength of Indigenous peoples in preserving their ways of life, despite the ongoing impacts of colonization, offer invaluable lessons in community, perseverance, and justice.

We are deeply grateful for the opportunities to learn, work, and live on these lands, and we commit to engaging in this project with humility, respect, and a spirit of learning from the teachings that these lands and their peoples provide.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

This project has been co-led by Shogofa and Emilie, both of whom are of immigrant descent.

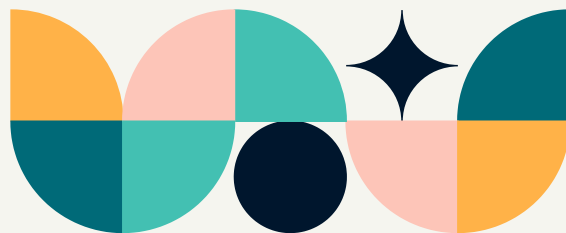
Shogofa is a first-generation immigrant of Hazara ancestry with a deep passion for supporting underserved communities, particularly refugees and immigrants.

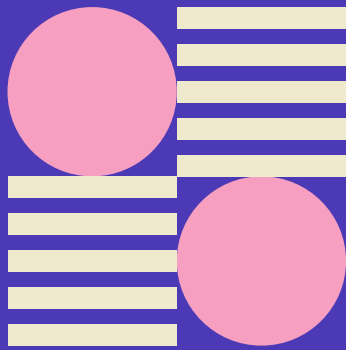
Her understanding of the intersectionality of race, culture, and identity in the Canadian context, especially as it relates to access to education and the preservation of cultural heritage, has shaped her approach to this work. She has also worked with immigrant and refugee communities across British Columbia, which has further strengthened her passion for advocating for equitable access to education and resources for immigrant and refugee youth, including her roles as a Research Assistant with the UBC Office of Regional and International Community Engagement and as a Program Officer at CANN SUCCESS.

Emilie has an overlapping Chinese-Canadian identity, as her family immigrated to Canada from Shanghai, China. She shares a similar dedication to supporting newcomer communities. Her family's history of migration and adaptation has instilled in her an awareness of the systemic barriers that immigrant and refugee families often encounter in navigating complex systems while striving to maintain cultural identity and resilience. She coordinated a series of health literacy workshops for newcomer women to offset health disparities, developing a curriculum with her team that was open to input and tailored to the needs of the women. Approximately 200 women participated in these culturally relevant and trauma-informed workshops, where participants learned about pathways to accessing healthcare, services available to them, recommended immunizations, and other programs.

Both Shogofa and Emilie are deeply aware of their positions as settlers on these lands and the privileges and responsibilities that come with them. We approach this work with a commitment to ongoing self-reflection, acknowledging the complexities of their identities and the importance of standing in solidarity with Indigenous communities in the broader struggle for justice and equity.

In this project, we aim not only to address the educational barriers faced by immigrant and refugee youth but also to honour the teachings of Indigenous peoples and to consider how our work can contribute to broader efforts toward decolonization and reconciliation. We recognize that true equity and justice in education cannot be achieved without acknowledging and addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, both on Indigenous peoples and on the newcomer communities we serve.





PROJECT BACKGROUND

The challenges faced by im/migrant youth in accessing higher education in Canada are multifaceted and deeply rooted in systemic barriers. These young individuals often encounter significant cultural, linguistic, and financial obstacles that hinder their educational pursuits, particularly in accessing some form of post-secondary education, whether through an accredited diploma, certificate, or bachelor's program.

According to the 2021 OECD Education Indicators, 19% of youth who arrived in Canada at age 16 or later are at risk of being neither employed nor engaged in education. The report also notes that tuition fees for bachelor's programs at public institutions in Canada rank among the highest globally, according to available data.

These figures underscore the urgency of addressing the educational needs of immigrant and refugee youth. Many of these young individuals arrive in Canada with the hope of building a better future, yet they often find themselves navigating a complex educational landscape without adequate support.

Refugee youth often express a strong desire to attain a university or college education, driven by their proactive approach to overcoming the educational limitations they encountered before arriving in Canada (Shakya et al., 2010). However, their ambitions for higher education are frequently overshadowed by the critical need to ensure that refugee children and youth receive primary and secondary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010).

On the policy front, Canadian refugee resettlement frameworks lack a formal commitment to improving access to post-secondary education for refugee youth (Ferede, 2010). As a result, Shakya et al. (2010) highlight that principles of justice, equity, and empowerment are often overlooked in Canada's mainstream humanitarian policies, which tend to prioritize the immediate survival of refugees rather than their long-term success. This gap has led to a deficiency in policy initiatives that would support refugees in their educational, professional, and political development.

On an individual level, the lack of awareness about available resources, such as mental health services and financial aid programs, further exacerbates their challenges. Our project is situated within a broader context of supporting newcomer youth, aiming to bridge the gap between existing services and the needs of these vulnerable populations. By raising awareness and fostering connections between settlement organizations and educational institutions, we can create a more inclusive environment that empowers immigrant and refugee youth to succeed in their educational journeys.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this project is to raise awareness about the existing support programs that assist youth in accessing and succeeding in higher education. This includes highlighting critical resources such as mental health services, financial aid programs, and academic support initiatives. By increasing awareness, we aim to ensure that immigrant and refugee youth are informed about the resources available to them, enabling them to make informed decisions about their educational pathways.

In addition to raising awareness, the project had several other key objectives:

- We engaged with immigrant and refugee youth to understand their unique challenges and barriers in accessing higher education. This involved community consultations and surveys through a comprehensive needs assessment to gather firsthand insights from the target population.
- Based on the findings from the needs assessments, we developed actionable recommendations for service providers. These recommendations focused on improving support systems for youth, ensuring that they are tailored to the specific needs of immigrant and refugee populations.

- The project culminated in a public needs assessment report that will be disseminated to community organizations and educational institutions. This report will not only highlight the challenges faced by newcomer youth but also provide a roadmap for enhancing support services.

By achieving these objectives, the project created a more supportive and informed environment for immigrant and refugee youth, with the aim of facilitating their access to higher education.



PROJECT METHODOLOGY

1. Literature Review

The project began with a literature scoping exercise to identify existing research and data related to the educational barriers faced by immigrant and refugee youth in Canada. This involved reviewing academic articles, policy reports, and case studies that highlight the challenges these populations encounter in accessing higher education. The literature scoping aimed to establish a foundational understanding of the current landscape, including the socio-economic, cultural, and systemic factors that contribute to educational disparities. By synthesizing this information, we were able to identify gaps in the existing literature and frame our project objectives accordingly.

We compiled a list of over 50 local programs in Metro Vancouver focused on serving newcomer groups and categorized these initiatives according to aims of providing support for leadership, employment, English learning, parenting, mentorship, outreach, and other types of informational or social support. Out of the programs, 24 provide support for leadership in some capacity, and 19 support employment, 14 focus on linguistic competency and literacy, 4 have parenting support, 15 have the theme of mentorship, and 10 have some community outreach component for accessibility.

The landscape of support services for newcomer youth in British Columbia reveals a complex interplay of resources aimed at addressing the challenges newcomer youth face in accessing higher education. However, the utilization of these resources typically requires further awareness and initiative on the individual to partake in these programs, and the needs of youth are often not prioritized, or newcomers often do not have awareness or sufficient community connections to build upon their knowledge of types of support in the community. The Vancouver School Board's "Resources for Newcomers" compiles essential information on various topics, including financial aid, healthcare, and education, yet the effectiveness of these resources is contingent upon the awareness and accessibility for the target population on a self-serve basis.

Moreover, community engagement initiatives like the Bridging the Gap program at UBC aim to raise awareness about the challenges faced by newcomers, fostering understanding and collaboration between educational institutions and immigrant communities, hosted by the UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning, and similar pop-ups and day events also are hosted in-community; however, they lack a longitudinal component of support. There could be a significant gap in the awareness and utilization of available resources among newcomer youth. Our project sought to address these gaps by conducting a thorough needs assessment and community consultations, aiming to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of existing resources, thereby empowering newcomer youth to successfully navigate their educational pathways in Canada.

2. Needs Assessment

To effectively identify the barriers faced by immigrant and refugee youth, we conducted a needs assessment that included interviews with service providers who work directly with these populations. The interview questions were carefully selected based on insights gained from the literature review, ensuring they addressed key themes such as access to information, financial constraints, language barriers, and cultural challenges. We collaborated with stakeholders to refine the questions, ensuring they were relevant and sensitive to the experiences of the youth. The interviews provided valuable qualitative data that illuminated the specific obstacles these young individuals face in their pursuit of higher education.

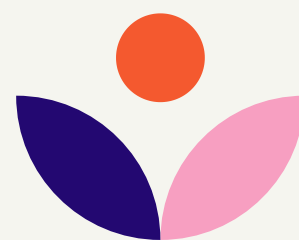
Anonymous interviews were conducted with service providers. The summarized findings are below.

Several service providers' experiences working with disengaged students highlighted significant barriers such as language and cultural isolation, which are exacerbated by the limited time school counsellors have to provide individual career guidance. It was emphasized that the complexity of navigating the high school and post-secondary systems contributes to this lack of engagement, and pointed out that newcomer youth often lack the necessary information relevant to their cultural context and tailored to their linguistic, sociocultural and socioeconomic needs to make informed decisions about their educational pathways at an early age, during their post-secondary education.

Our discussion with one support worker on the socio-economic difficulties that many immigrant and refugee youth face, such as balancing part-time work with academic demands, underscores the importance of providing more targeted financial support and resources. The effectiveness of ELL (English Language Learning) programs may be limited because while teachers are dedicated, the large class sizes and diverse learning needs make it difficult to ensure every student's success. This raises the need for additional funding and resources to better support ELL students, potentially at a school district level.

Through our interviews, there also emerged the theme of community collaboration rather than working in silos on the same issues, where one service provider suggested that stronger partnerships between schools, community organizations, and support workers could significantly enhance the support available to newcomer youth. Some have noted the significant systems gap between government-funded resources through the Ministry of Education, directly to schools, and the community-based, grassroots support programs. The lack of collaboration produces further gaps and overlaps that could be minimized, and a combination of these programs can produce better support for students.

Within schools, some support workers focused on recommending the need for more personalized support systems, such as peer-to-peer mentorship and individualized career planning, which could better address the unique challenges faced by newcomer youth. Cultural integration must happen not just for the youth, but for their families as well, and there is advocacy to be done for long-term, holistic approaches that consider the broader socio-cultural context.



3. Community Consultations and Youth Advisory Group

Our project took a comprehensive community-based engagement approach to understanding and reducing barriers to higher education for newcomer youth in the Lower Mainland of BC. The initiative was guided by an Advisory Committee made up of community ambassadors, who are im/migrant youth serving as community voices. These youth were interviewed through small focus groups on their perspectives on gaps and barriers to accessing higher education. They further collaboratively developed a community-based survey, which was disseminated into the community through snowball sampling methodology, for which we received 153 responses.

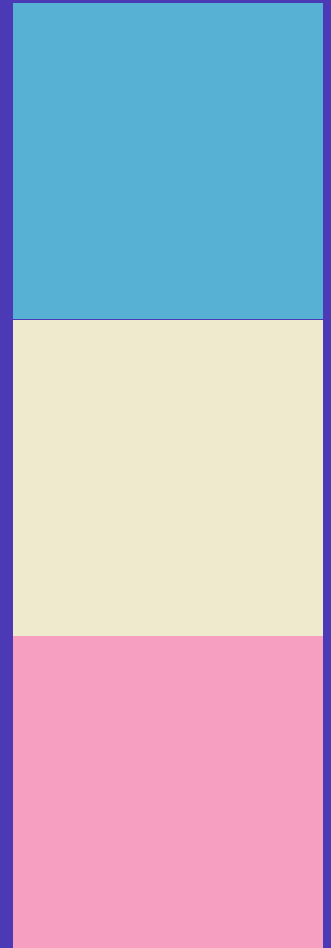
Survey responses collected through a snowball sampling method from newcomer youth in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia reveal a range of challenges they face in accessing post-secondary education. Participants shared how financial barriers, including high international tuition fees and limited scholarships, significantly impact their academic journeys. Many also noted difficulties with course availability and language barriers, highlighting the need for more inclusive academic resources. These reflections capture the real voices of newcomer youth navigating a complex system while striving for educational success.

The responses emphasize the importance of strong support systems, including community organizations, peer networks, and family involvement. Youth expressed a desire for programs such as mentorship opportunities, academic support services, and more robust social connections within their schools and communities. They highlighted the crucial role of teachers, who could provide not only guidance but also the understanding and accommodations needed to address the specific challenges of newcomer students. This underscores the value of community engagement in ensuring that youth feel supported both academically and socially.

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QUOTES FROM THE SURVEYS

- "Getting into a course was super hard and competitive. Plus international tuition fees being three times more than domestic puts the student to focus more on earning than studying."
- "I faced with lack of financial aid and scholarships [sic], academic support."
- "Giving equal opportunity and recognition to each individual and not categorising them on the basis of their immigration status."
- "Help them to get the PR and make the study payment less so they can study."
- "The stronger the wind, the stronger the tree."
- "It's all about coming together to make a positive impact."
- "[I] occasionally worried about being ostracized [sic]."
- "It is difficult to obtain accurate and timely information about higher education."
- "Language barriers, cultural differences, economic stress."
- "Cultural difference. For example, in learning, Canada pays more attention to all-round development and quality education, while the United States may put more emphasis on competition and performance."



We first recruited the Youth Advisory Committee. We facilitated a total of 3 community consultations with groups of 3 to 7 students per session on the Advisory Committee. Discussions were focused on the following questions:

1. From your experiences and observations, are you comfortable sharing any experiences or observations regarding challenges faced by newcomer youth in accessing post-secondary education in our community (lower mainland BC)? Why or why not?
2. Are there specific resources or programs that you believe would be beneficial for you in pursuing higher education? Feel free to list examples you have seen within the community and things you hope to see.
3. What kind of support systems (social, community, etc.) do you think are crucial for helping you overcome educational barriers?
4. In your opinion, what are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed in order to create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for these youth?
5. How can the community, including organizations, schools, and local government, collaborate to improve access to post-secondary education for newcomer youth like you?

The conversations that were guided by youth revealed several gaps. Notably, there are challenges in accessing higher education because of lack of school-based supports, a need for specific programs tailored to their needs, social supports such as through community connection, and a lack of equity in the information presentation.

Many newcomer youth find the transition to post-secondary education daunting due to unfamiliarity with the Canadian education system. They struggle with understanding how to choose the right subjects, courses, and programs. The process of selecting universities or colleges, understanding how programs work, and identifying suitable advisors is often overwhelming. This confusion is compounded by the lack of adequate guidance and support in high school, particularly regarding scholarship opportunities and the necessary steps to pursue higher education.

The Advisory Committee members expressed a need for more targeted resources and programs to help them navigate the education system. They suggested that more presentations or workshops by universities like UBC could be beneficial, particularly those that provide clear guidance on post-secondary pathways, scholarship opportunities, and the application process. They also emphasized the need for resources that address the unique challenges faced by newcomer youth, such as understanding the cultural and educational expectations in Canada.

The importance of connecting with peers and mentors who have gone through similar experiences was highlighted, as these connections can provide valuable advice and moral support. Additionally, participants noted the need for more comprehensive guidance from school counsellors and community organizations to help them make informed decisions about their educational journey.

Upon the conclusion of these community consultation sessions, we gathered data through a structured survey developed collaboratively by the Advisory Committee. This survey was designed to capture the experiences and challenges faced by newcomer youth in accessing post-secondary education and sent to multiple schools and networks of the Advisory Committee members.

Our methodology emphasized both divergent and convergent brainstorming techniques to ensure a thorough exploration of ideas and solutions. Advisory Committee members were encouraged to share their thoughts on existing support networks and resources, as well as their visions for what an ideal support system would look like. This process was not only about gathering data but also about empowering youth to take an active role in shaping the project's direction.

The community-based engagement approach was central to the success of this project, ensuring that the voices of newcomer youth were heard and that the solutions developed were rooted in their lived experiences. By involving the community at every stage, from survey development to project implementation, we aimed to create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for newcomer youth. The process also fostered a sense of ownership among participants, who were not just subjects of research but active contributors to the project's outcomes.

Engaging with the community was a critical component of our project methodology. We organized community consultations to gather input from immigrant and refugee youth, as well as their families and support networks. These consultations aimed to create a safe space for participants to share their experiences and perspectives regarding educational access.

To facilitate ongoing engagement, we established a Youth Advisory Committee composed of 15-25 immigrant and refugee youth aged 17-25. This group played a vital role in guiding the project, providing insights into the needs and preferences of their peers. The Youth Advisory Committee met regularly to discuss findings from the needs assessment, contribute to the development of project activities, and ensure that the voices of youth were central to our approach. Their involvement not only empowered the participants but also fostered a sense of ownership over the project outcomes, ultimately enhancing the relevance and impact of our initiatives.

4. Workshops on Post-Secondary Education

We facilitated a series of four workshops on a low-barrier, opt-in participatory model to increase access, with these workshops all open to the public. These four workshop recordings will also be featured on our website to increase access within the community.

The first workshop, "Craft a Winning Application," focused on guiding students in creating compelling applications and portfolios. The impact of this workshop was significant, as it equipped participants with the tools and knowledge to present themselves effectively to post-secondary institutions, addressing a critical gap in their educational journey. By the end of the session, students felt more confident in their ability to navigate the application process, which was a key objective of the project.

The second workshop, "Fund Your Future," explored various funding options such as student loans, bursaries, and awards. This workshop directly addressed the financial barriers identified by the advisory committee, especially for im/migrant youth who may have different financial circumstances and eligibility criteria for scholarships and government-funded grants and loans. The participants gained valuable insights into how to secure financial support for their studies, which was crucial for many who were unaware of the available resources. The workshop successfully met its goal of increasing awareness and understanding of financial aid, helping to alleviate one of the most pressing challenges faced by newcomer students.

The third workshop, "Minding Your Mental Health," focused on mental health resources and strategies for managing the stresses of transitioning to post-secondary education. Intersectionalities within this particular demographic were taken into consideration throughout the development of the workshop to ensure a trauma-informed approach. This workshop was particularly impactful as it addressed the often-overlooked aspect of mental well-being, which was identified as a key challenge by the advisory committee. The participants left with a better understanding of how to prioritize their mental health and access available resources, fulfilling the project's goal of promoting holistic support for newcomer youth.

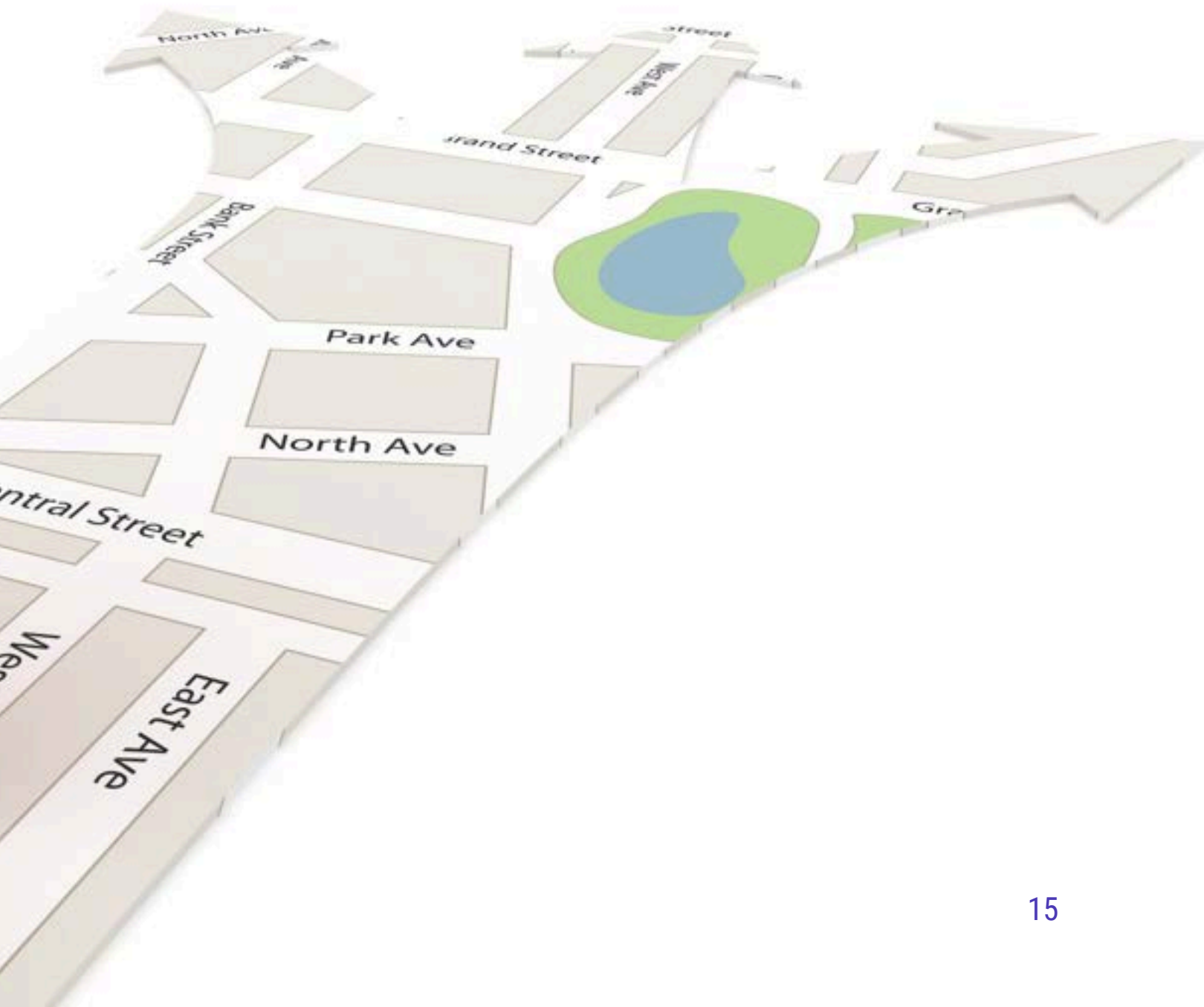
The final workshop, "Thriving in 1st Year," featured a panel discussion with students who shared their experiences and tips for a successful transition to university life. This workshop addressed the identified need for social and academic support during the critical first year. The impact of the workshop was evident in the participants' increased preparedness and confidence in starting their university journey. The session achieved its objective by providing practical advice and fostering a sense of community among the participants. This sense of community, mentorship, peer support, and knowledge passed down from previous post-secondary students who share similar backgrounds as many of the participants also serves to provide social support, a notable gap identified by the Youth Advisory Committee.



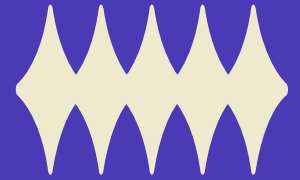


NAVIGATING

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KEY FINDINGS



Barriers Identified by Service Providers

Service providers working with immigrant and refugee youth have identified several critical barriers to accessing higher education. These barriers encompass a range of factors that impact students' ability to successfully transition from high school to post-secondary institutions.

1 Lack of Awareness and Accessibility of Existing Resources

Many immigrant and refugee youth face significant challenges in accessing available educational resources due to a lack of awareness. Service providers noted that students often do not know about the various support services and opportunities available to them. This lack of awareness is compounded by the complexity of navigating the educational system in a new country, where students must understand and utilize resources effectively to benefit from them.

2 Dispersed Nature of Support

The support available to newcomer youth is often fragmented and dispersed across different organizations and services, further separated through school-based and community-based programs when students have limited extra-curricular time to participate in programming. This dispersion can make it difficult for students to find and access the help they need. Service providers observed that the lack of a centralized support system can lead to confusion and delays in obtaining necessary assistance, exacerbating the challenges faced by students.

3 Lack of Streamlined Support

The absence of a streamlined approach to support services was another major barrier identified. Service providers pointed out that the existing support structures are not always well-integrated, which can result in gaps in the assistance provided. Students may encounter difficulties in receiving timely and coordinated support, which affects their ability to navigate educational and social challenges effectively.

Barriers Identified by the Youth Advisory Committee

The Youth Advisory Committee, consisting of immigrant and refugee youth, provided valuable feedback that highlighted additional dimensions of the barriers they face. Their insights underscored both the challenges and successes in the current support systems, as well as areas requiring improvement.

1

Cultural and Language Barriers

The Youth Advisory Committee emphasized that cultural and language differences significantly impact their educational experiences. Many students struggle with adapting to the Canadian educational system, understanding course requirements, and engaging with peers and educators. These barriers often hinder their academic performance and integration into the educational environment.

2

Lack of Guidance on Educational Pathways

Members of the Youth Advisory Committee expressed difficulties in navigating the educational pathways available to them. They highlighted a need for more personalized guidance and support in selecting courses, understanding application processes, and making informed decisions about their educational and career goals.

3

Interrupted Education

Many im/migrant youth have experienced significant gaps in their formal education due to the challenges of conflict, displacement, or migration. Extended periods without access to formal education can result in a loss of previously acquired knowledge and skills. This "learning loss" can be particularly pronounced in subjects that require continuous practice and building upon prior knowledge, such as mathematics and literacy. As a result, these students may struggle with even foundational concepts when they re-enter the education system. In many cases, schools may not have adequate resources or specialized programs to address the unique needs of students with interrupted education. Without targeted remedial education, these students may fall further behind, as the standard curriculum often assumes a continuous educational background.

4

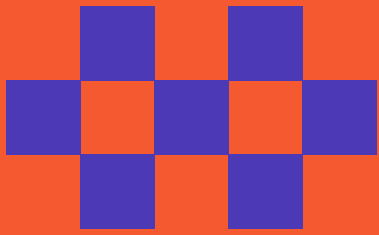
Lack of Mentorship

Mentors often play a pivotal role in helping youth navigate educational and career pathways, particularly in understanding the options and requirements in a new country. Immigrant and refugee youth who lack mentors may miss out on valuable guidance in applying for scholarships, understanding the education system, or exploring career opportunities. This can result in missed opportunities and a lack of direction, further compounding the challenges they face. Additionally, having mentors who understand their unique challenges—whether cultural, educational, or emotional—can significantly impact their personal growth and social integration. However, many of these young people lack access to such mentors, which creates several barriers. To address this gap, it is crucial to create mentorship programs that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and tailored to the specific needs of immigrant and refugee youth. Such programs can empower these young people to overcome the barriers they face, envision a successful future, and actively contribute to their new communities.

5

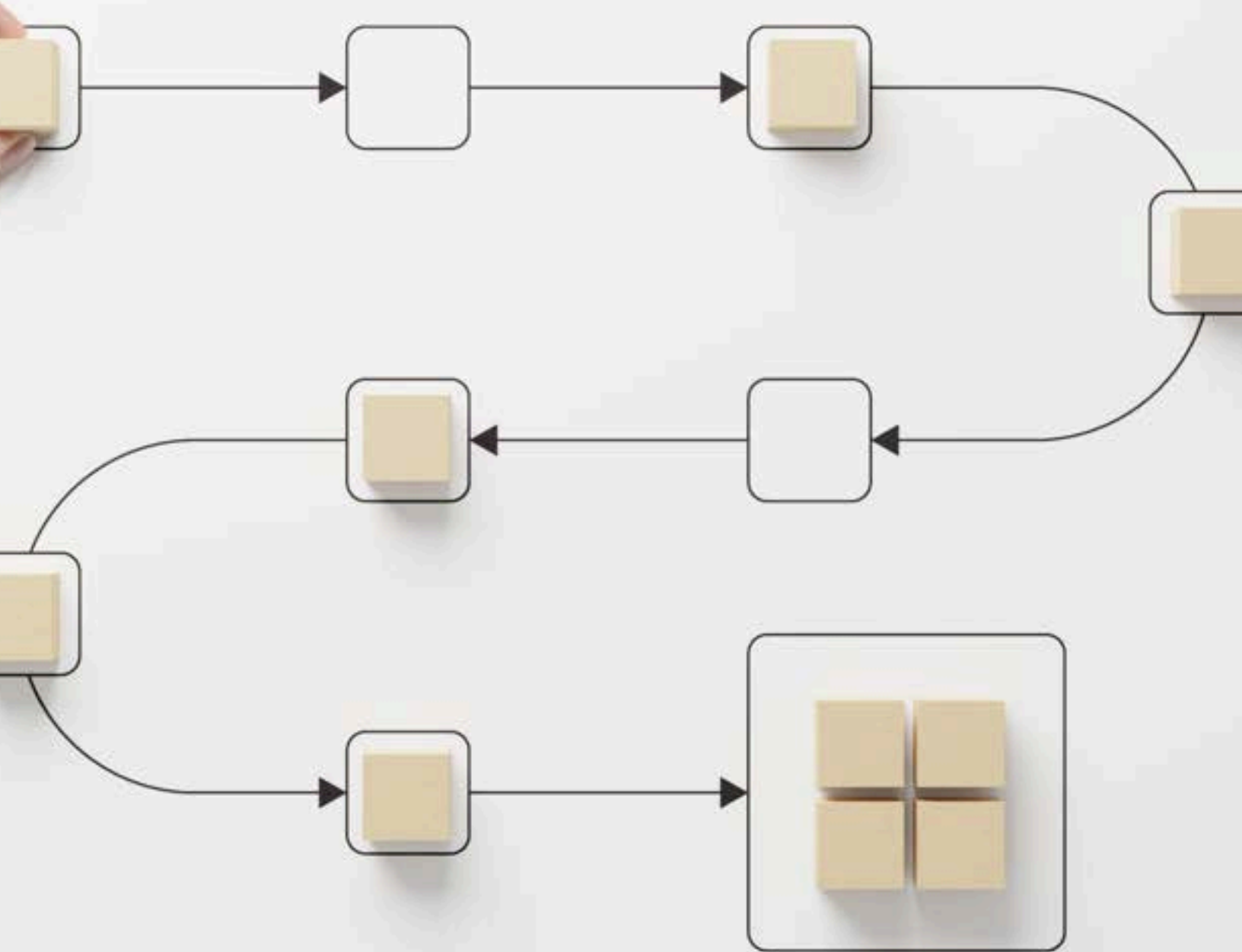
Navigating Cultural Adjustment and Identity

Immigrant and refugee youth often face the challenge of balancing differing cultural expectations at home and in society, leading to identity conflicts and stress. This struggle is further compounded in higher education settings, where these students may encounter institutional norms and social dynamics that differ significantly from their cultural backgrounds. The pressure to assimilate or conform can make it difficult for these youth to feel a genuine sense of belonging, affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. As they strive to succeed in an environment that may not fully recognize or accommodate their unique cultural perspectives, the resulting tension can create significant barriers to both their educational and personal development. This highlights the importance of creating inclusive educational spaces that acknowledge and support the diverse identities and experiences of im/migrant youth.



STREAMLINED

support means no more lost opportunities - every resource within reach.



The barriers identified by service providers and the insights from the Youth Advisory Committee highlight the need for improved awareness, coordination, and cultural sensitivity in supporting immigrant and refugee youth. While there have been successes in increasing awareness and providing community support, additional efforts are required to address the gaps in service delivery and enhance the overall educational experience for these students.

RECOMMENDATIONS & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. For Social Service Providers

a. Centralized and Accessible Information Platforms

Develop and maintain a centralized online platform or resource hub that consolidates information on available support services, educational pathways, and resources specifically tailored for im/migrant youth. It is also worth noting that this platform must be multilingual and easily accessible.

b. Culturally Sensitive Programming

Design and implement programs that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of immigrant and refugee youth. Provide training for staff on cultural competency, ensuring they are equipped to support students navigating cultural and language barriers.

c. Integrated and Collaborative Support Networks

Foster collaboration among schools, community organizations, government agencies, and other service providers to create a more integrated and holistic support system. This can involve establishing formal partnerships, shared databases, and communication channels that streamline the referral process and ensure that all stakeholders are aligned in their efforts. Such a system would allow immigrant and refugee youth to access necessary services more efficiently, ensuring they receive timely, coordinated, and comprehensive support that addresses their educational, social, and emotional needs. Regular inter-agency meetings and shared goals can further enhance the effectiveness of these collaborative efforts, reducing gaps in service delivery and improving overall outcomes for the youth.

2. For Policymakers

a. Policy Framework for Streamlined Services

Develop policies that promote the streamlining and integration of support services across different sectors (education, social services, health) to ensure a coordinated approach to assisting immigrant and refugee youth. For example, the establishment of “one-stop-shop” service centers where youth can access multiple resources in one place could significantly reduce the complexity and barriers they face in navigating the system. These centers would provide a centralized location for accessing educational guidance, social support, mental health services, and language assistance, making it easier for youth to receive comprehensive and timely care without having to navigate multiple, disconnected service providers.

b. Enhanced Funding for Targeted Programs

Allocate funding for programs specifically designed to address the unique challenges faced by immigrant and refugee youth, including language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and educational guidance. Ensure these funds support both school-based and community-based initiatives to reach youth in various settings.

c. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Implement mechanisms to regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of support services and educational programs for immigrant and refugee youth. The data collected can be used to inform policy adjustments and ensure that services are meeting the intended outcomes. Regular assessments should include feedback from the youth themselves, as well as from educators and service providers, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the programs' impact. By tracking key performance indicators, such as educational attainment, service accessibility, and youth satisfaction, policymakers can make data-driven decisions to improve and adapt services to better meet the evolving needs of these communities.



3. For Funders

a. Strategic Funding for Collaborative Initiatives

Funders may prioritize funding for initiatives that promote collaboration among various service providers and community organizations. This could include grants that require partnerships among multiple entities to create a more unified and effective support system for immigrant and refugee youth. By incentivizing joint projects, funders can encourage organizations to pool their resources, expertise, and networks, leading to more comprehensive and coordinated support. Such collaborative efforts can address gaps in service delivery, reduce duplication of efforts, and enhance the overall impact of programs designed to help immigrant and refugee youth succeed in their educational and social integration.

c. Investment in Capacity Building

Fund training programs for social service providers and educators that focus on cultural competence, language support, and the specific needs of immigrant and refugee youth. This investment in human capital will enhance the quality and effectiveness of the services provided by equipping professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to address the unique challenges these youth face. By ensuring that those working directly with immigrant and refugee youth are well-prepared, funders can help create a more supportive and inclusive environment, ultimately leading to better outcomes in education, social integration, and overall well-being for these students.

b. Support for Innovation and Best Practices

Funders can encourage and support projects that test innovative approaches to supporting immigrant and refugee youth. For example, they can provide resources for pilot programs that allow for the experimentation and refinement of new strategies, with the potential for scaling up if successful. By investing in these cutting-edge initiatives, funders can help identify and develop best practices that effectively address the unique challenges faced by these communities. The successful models and lessons learned can then be shared across networks, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring that effective solutions are widely adopted and adapted to meet the diverse needs of immigrant and refugee youth.

PROJECT IMPACT AND REFLECTIONS

Workshops & Youth Advisory Committee

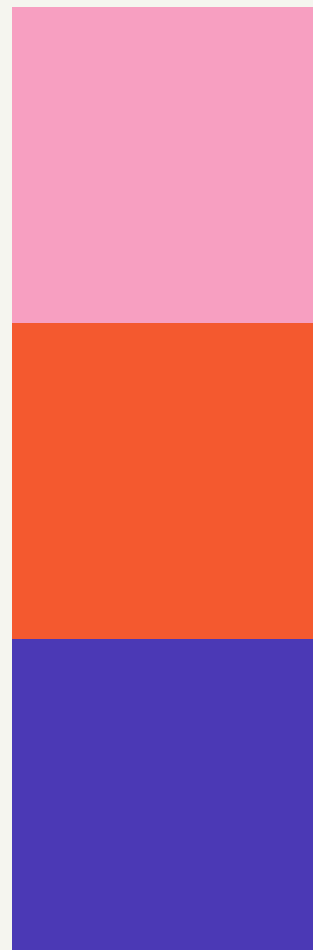
Beyond the immediate impacts of the workshops, such as developing youth's knowledge of the application process, financial resources, and mental health strategies, the series also led to several broader and longer-term benefits for both the participants and the organizers.

a. Youth Leadership and Skill Development

Two members of the Youth Advisory Committee, Kylie and Benafsha, played a key role in preparing, planning, and co-delivering these workshops. This involvement provided them with an invaluable opportunity to explore leadership roles, develop facilitation skills, and gain hands-on experience in event planning and community engagement. Their contributions not only enriched the workshops but also allowed them to grow personally and professionally, furthering their own development as leaders and advocates within their community.

b. Community Building and Networking

The workshops served as a platform for community building and networking among im/migrant youth. By participating in these sessions, students were able to connect with others facing similar challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. The panel discussion in the "Thriving in 1st Year" workshop, in particular, helped to establish connections between current university students and newcomers, laying the groundwork for ongoing mentorship relationships. This network of peers and mentors is likely to continue providing support long after the workshops have concluded, contributing to a stronger, more resilient community.



c. Enhanced Cultural Competency among Service Providers

The involvement of the Youth Advisory Committee in the planning and delivery of the workshops also had a significant impact on the service providers who attended or supported the sessions. By working closely with youth who have lived experiences as immigrants or refugees, the service providers gained deeper insights into the unique challenges and needs of this demographic. Such collaborations and the knowledge gained as a result could help enhance the cultural competency of the service providers, making them better equipped to design and deliver programs that are more relevant and effective for im/migrant youth.

d. Empowerment through Peer-Led Learning

The workshops, co-delivered by the Youth Advisory Committee members, empowered participants by offering peer-led learning opportunities. The youth felt more connected and engaged, knowing that the sessions were facilitated by individuals who shared similar backgrounds and experiences. This peer-led approach helped to create a relatable and supportive environment, encouraging more open discussions and active participation. As a result, participants were more likely to internalize the information and apply the skills they learned in their own educational journeys.

Long-Term Project Potential

The long-term potential of this project is profound, with impacts that extend well beyond the immediate outcomes of the workshops and the overall initiative. The groundwork laid by this project can serve as a crucial foundation for enhancing access to higher education among refugee and immigrant youth.

A key outcome of this project is the generation of insights and data that can significantly inform future policy and program development aimed at improving educational access for this population. By meticulously documenting the challenges, successes, and participant feedback, this project creates a robust evidence base that can be used to advocate for more comprehensive and tailored support services. This data will help policymakers and educational institutions better understand the unique barriers faced by refugee and immigrant youth, enabling the development of more effective and targeted interventions that can bridge gaps in access to higher education.

Moreover, the lessons learned from the workshops can establish best practices that can be adapted and implemented in similar initiatives across other communities. As these practices are shared, they can contribute to a broader effort to create more inclusive and accessible educational systems. By replicating the project's success, other organizations can ensure that more youth across different regions have the opportunity to pursue higher education, benefiting from the insights gained here.

Furthermore, the leadership skills developed by the Youth Advisory Group members can empower them to become advocates for educational access within their communities. This experience not only enhances their capacity to lead but also equips them to take on new challenges with greater confidence. As these young leaders grow, they can play a pivotal role in advocating for improved educational opportunities for their peers, driving positive change and fostering a more supportive environment for refugee and immigrant youth seeking higher education.

Ultimately, this project has the potential to create a lasting impact by informing policy, shaping best practices, and empowering the next generation of leaders to champion access to higher education for refugee and immigrant youth. The foundation laid here can be a catalyst for ongoing support and advocacy, ensuring that the aspirations of these young people are recognized and supported in the pursuit of their educational goals.



COLLABORATION

among stakeholders is key for providing streamlined and centralised resource hubs.



CONCLUSION

Summary of Takeaways

This project has shed light on the significant challenges faced by immigrant and refugee youth as they navigate the path to higher education. Key barriers identified include a lack of awareness and accessibility of existing resources, the fragmented and dispersed nature of support services, and the absence of streamlined, culturally sensitive support systems. Additionally, cultural and language barriers, along with a need for more personalized guidance on educational pathways, were highlighted by both service providers and the Youth Advisory Committee.

In response to these challenges, the project implemented several strategies to empower these youth. A series of workshops were developed to address critical gaps, focusing on practical skills like crafting applications, securing financial aid, prioritizing mental health, and transitioning successfully into post-secondary education. The workshops not only provided participants with essential knowledge but also fostered a sense of community and belonging, supported by peer-led learning and mentorship.

The project also emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders. Social service providers were encouraged to create integrated and collaborative support networks, policymakers were urged to streamline services and establish centralized resource hubs, and funders were advised to prioritize investments in capacity building and innovative, collaborative initiatives.

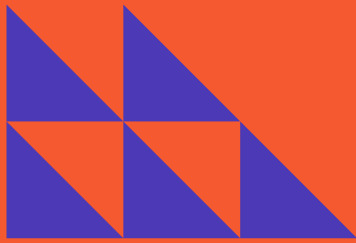


Final Thoughts

This project has illuminated the significant challenges that im/migrant youth encounter as they strive to access and succeed in higher education. Among the most pressing barriers are a widespread lack of awareness and difficulty in accessing existing resources. Many of these youth are unaware of the support systems available to them or find them difficult to navigate, further complicated by the fragmented and dispersed nature of these services. Without a centralized, streamlined system, students often face confusion and delays in receiving the help they need.

Moreover, the absence of culturally sensitive, integrated support systems exacerbates these challenges. Im/migrant youth often struggle with cultural and language barriers that make it challenging to engage with educational institutions, understand course requirements, or fully participate in their academic environment. These barriers are further compounded by the need for personalized guidance in navigating educational pathways. Many students require tailored advice on selecting courses, understanding application processes, and planning for future educational and career opportunities—resources that are often lacking or inaccessible.

These challenges highlight the critical need for more cohesive, culturally competent, and accessible support services to ensure that im/migrant youth can successfully transition into higher education and thrive within it. Addressing these gaps is essential to creating a more equitable educational landscape that supports the unique needs of this demographic.



DECISION-MAKING

opportunities that empower im/migrant youth and give them a voice in the programs designed to support them are invaluable in creating relevant and effective services.



A FEW PROFILES OF THE Youth Advisory Members

Benafsha

Benafsha is a youth advisory member who recently graduated from South Hill Education Centre. She is set to begin her post-secondary journey in September 2024 at Vancouver Community College (VCC) in the Pathway to Health Sciences program, with aspirations to transfer into the Dental Hygiene program. Benafsha hopes to continue pursuing her passion for education and community involvement during her time at VCC.

She has already made a significant impact by delivering workshops on financial aid and mental health, where she supported her peers in navigating the challenges of academic life and personal well-being.

Freshta

Freshta is an active and engaged student leader, currently entering her senior year at Burnaby North Secondary School. She has served as the vice president of the Embrace Club, a student organization at her school dedicated to supporting international students as they adapt to a new educational and cultural environment. Freshta's leadership in the club reflects her passion for fostering inclusivity and providing a welcoming community for students from diverse backgrounds. As she approaches her final year of high school, Freshta continues to advocate for the needs and well-being of her fellow students.

Kylie

Kylie immigrated to Canada from China and recalls the impact of those who supported her through the challenges of transitioning to a new environment. Now, as a Computer Science major at the University of British Columbia, she is dedicated to helping others navigate their transitions, particularly students facing the complexities of post-secondary education.

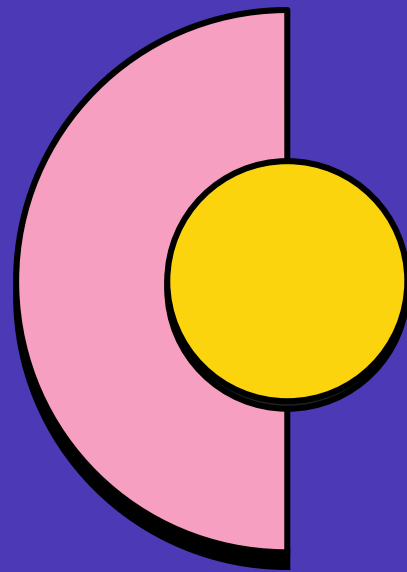
Kylie's passion for coding is complemented by her love of outdoor activities, such as snowboarding, which allows her to balance her academic pursuits with a connection to nature. Her experiences have deepened her commitment to giving back, just as she was once guided through her own journey.

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A special shout-out goes to the youth in the Advisory Committee. Your voices, ideas, and lived experiences have been at the heart of this work. You have not only shaped our approach but have also ensured that our efforts genuinely reflect the needs and aspirations of immigrant and refugee youth. We are deeply appreciative of the time, energy, and commitment you have brought to this project.

Lastly, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the UBC Community-University Engagement Support (CUES) Fund for making this project possible. Your support has been instrumental in bringing our vision to life.



**EMPOWERED YOUTH LEAD THE WAY -
WHEN THEIR VOICES GUIDE US, THE IMPACT IS
TRANSFORMATIVE**