

TALK TO ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The CCR Youth Network Talk to Action Sessions took place from November 2020 to March 2021. This new initiative was designed to foster dialogue among newcomer and refugee youth (ages 16-25) while accommodating to the new socially distanced, virtual reality. The specific topics discussed were mental health, racism, youth leadership, education and professional development. The conversations that took place amongst the youth were focused on the challenges youth face related to the topics mentioned above. These sessions provided a safe and comfortable space for youth to talk about the current strengths and barriers, as well as the systemic changes needed in order to improve the lives of newcomer youth.

15 organizations from the cities below participated in these discussions - with an average of 10 youth attending from each organization.

- Calgary
- Victoria
- Leamington
- Sherbrooke
- Kitchener-Waterloo
- Kingston
- Toronto
- Saint John

As well as 2 organizations who connected with youth in different cities within these provinces:

- New Brunswick
- Quebec



WHAT WAS DISCOVERED?

Our main objective with this project was to understand the way these topics and challenges are interpreted and viewed by newcomer/refugee youth in order to understand how it impacts their life. The following information highlights what was discovered through these sessions.

RACISM

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Youth discussed how racism is very prominent in their communities - especially in the school system. This is especially challenging as school is a big part of their everyday life and their first Canadian experience as newcomers.
- Youth are often ignored by authority figures - their perspectives are not heard
- Resources being unfairly allocated in marginalized communities (e.g. resources like legal aid)
- Systemic biases which create disadvantages over others based on race.
- Newcomer youth face microaggressions that are often overlooked - this perpetuates the issue and does not allow for change as there are no consequences.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Better education for school social workers and counsellors to ensure cultural competence.
- Raise awareness about everyday racism and how it affects newcomer/refugee youth.
- Create spaces for youth to share their experiences where they feel comfortable.
- Have bystander training in schools so that youth can support each other when they encounter racism.
- Advocate for governmental policies which support BIPOC folks



MENTAL HEALTH

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Discrimination - the effect it has on newcomer youth's mental health and their self-identity.
- The stress of experiencing culture shock as newcomers as well as isolation.
- The concept of mental health is a western idea that is often unfamiliar/taboo to newcomer families.
- Youth often have a hard time finding help tailored to their needs/experiences. For example, refugees have a hard time finding mental health services specifically for them and their experiences.
- Inaccessibility - financial barriers as well as a lack of services provided in their communities.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Increased awareness of mental health - destigmatisation.
- Offer culturally competent support
- Increase awareness of mental health services available and make them more accessible.
- Create spaces for youth to build community and support each other.
- Offering more volunteer opportunities for youth to connect with others



EDUCATION

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Lack of resources tailored to the needs of newcomer/ refugee youth in schools.
- Lack of connection between newcomer youth and Canadian born youth - this makes newcomer youth feel excluded and isolated.
- Lack of support in mainstream classes
- There is not a strong orientation provided when they start school.
- There is not enough follow up with newcomer/refugee students to guide them and make sure they are on the right track and that their needs are met.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Creating a strong orientation process
- Creating supportive systems where Canadian born students can interact with and support newcomer & refugee youth which creates more inclusion and eases the process of adapting to Canada.
- Providing more EAL faculty as resources and support in mainstream classes.
- Promoting newcomer/refugee youth engagement in schools.
- Being more attentive with newcomer & refugee students to ensure academic success.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Newcomer/ Refugee voices often go unheard
- Lack of representation of newcomer & refugee youth in positions of leadership.
- Newcomer/Refugee youth are often overlooked and are not given the opportunity to speak up and take up space.
- Facing discrimination in spaces of leadership

SYSTEMIC CHANGES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Encourage students to support and uplift one another.
- Create school clubs that include newcomer/refugee youth where their skills and experiences are valued.
- Bringing awareness in schools to the challenges newcomer/refugee youth face to better understand their experiences and better support them.
- Hosting forums that foster dialogue in a safe space for youth.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Lack of education in regard to finances.
- Difficulty accessing the existinf resources in the community
- Very often, newcomers must take jobs in order to survive without the opportunity to access resources and education.
- Lack of guidance for newcomer & refugee youth when it comes to choosing the career path that works best with their interests and skills.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Free access to services
- Services that are available and inclusive for all immigration statuses.
- Educational workshops related to the job market, professional development and financial literacy for newcomer & refugee youth.
- Promote events made by youth for youth - this allows newcomer youth to expand their network and create a support system.



TALK TO ACTION EVALUATION RESULTS



LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH TALK TO ACTION SESSION:
66.7% of participants indicated they were very satisfied.



**INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN MORE OPPORTUNITIES OF
ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CCR YOUTH NETWORK:**
66.7%

CHALLENGES

With the current COVID-19 situation, Talk to Action was our first series of gatherings to take place completely virtually. We had to adapt quickly to this new online platform. As a team, we focused on training participants on how to navigate using online tools so that they were comfortable and confident during the sessions.

Participants indicated that our resources could be improved by adapting to the language levels of the youth in order to facilitate their participation.

NEXT STEPS

As online programming becomes more relevant due to our current reality, our network is looking to become stronger and more adaptive to meet the needs of newcomer youth and encourage youth engagement despite the circumstances.