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INTRODUCTION

In light of the spread of COVID-19, and the increased isolation and changes in services offered to newcomer youth as a result, the CCR Youth Network reached out to its members, and members of the CCR, to learn more about the impacts and response strategies of newcomer and refugee youth communities.

A survey was sent out on 6 April 2020, designed for newcomer youth (16 - 25 years old) and Youth Workers. Twenty-seven responses were received.

On 9 April a webinar was held on the “Impact of Social Isolation on Immigrant and Refugee Youth”. Fifty-two people attended the webinar.

What follows are highlights from the input received through the survey and during the webinar. The people who gave this feedback are youth workers and newcomer and refugee youth. There is representation from the different regions of Eastern, Central and Western Canada.

A. CHALLENGES

Mental Health

- Youth are experiencing a lot of stress. For some youth, this situation can remind them of previous experiences of war and displacement.
- They have lost support from their peers, mentors and youth workers.
- There is an increased potential for family conflict, particularly for large families living in small apartments.
- Some youth may be in unsafe living situations. Without their regular community supports, they do not know who to contact for help.
- With higher presence of police on the streets monitoring social isolation, youth with precarious status face greater difficulties. In addition, some refugees have had negative experiences with the police force in other countries, and as a result the current situation can generate anxiety and triggers.

Academic issues

- Youth are also feeling that they are losing their academic and language development because at home they do not have access to the same supports they had at school or opportunities to practice.
- Many newcomer families lack access to computers or the internet.
- There are a lot of difficulties navigating online classes due to lack of computer literacy.
- Parents may not have the academic or language background to help their children who are being homeschooled.

Shifting Rights

- Due to social isolation measures and new policies that are being created within the last few months, there is a spike in surveillance due to new social isolation measures.
- Racialized youth, in particular youth with precarious status who may not have a stable living situation are more vulnerable to this the negative impacts of these new policies.
- Youth with precarious status may have a difficult time in providing the proper documentation to police.
- As changes and policy shifts are happening within short periods of time, youth may not be informed about such policies and the consequences of violating them in a timely manner.

B. PROMISING PRACTICES AND RESOURCES

- One organization is twinning newly arrived youth with other youth, so that they can connect by phone and begin to build their social network in Canada, while they are still in isolation.
- Some youth workers have learned about how to help youth obtain new or improved internet access, through requests to internet providers.
- Organizations are quickly adapting their programming online and supporting youth through one-on-one calls.
- Organizations are currently collaborating, sharing resources and skills.

C. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN ORDER TO BETTER SUPPORT NEWCOMER YOUTH?

Improved accessibility

- Adaptation of resources for people who are English or French learners, as well as for people with limited literacy.
- Access to information and resources in different languages other than English and French
- Information and resources must also be shared in different ways, taking into account different learning styles. Newcomers should also have access to support workers who can guide them and ensure they understand the information.
- Better access to technology and internet for youth and their families
- Information about how to use online platforms in a secure way, protecting the privacy of the youth, their families and youth workers.
- Support for parents who are trying to guide their children with their studies, taking into account that parents may not have the language or academic literacy to be able to homeschool their children.

Mental Health

- Mental health support tailored for people who have experienced trauma is highly needed during this period of social isolation.
- Access to social workers, counsellors, youth workers and settlement workers is still highly important for youth and families.
- Group activities online that promote community building and address social isolation
- Education on activities that promote mental health.
- Information around the impacts of social distancing on the mental health of the families as well as healthy coping mechanisms.

Sharing best practices

- Opportunities for youth workers and leaders to share information, resources and promising practices.
- Regular webinars for youth workers with useful information on how to better support youth.
- Organize and advocate in different provinces for better accessibility to information, mental health and support workers who speak different languages

Ressources

The CCR team has created a resource section related to the pandemic.

On this page, you will find links to webinars, information on COVID-19 in several languages and Ideas for activities to do at home: <https://ccrweb.ca/en/youth/resources-0>