

# Newcomer Youth Civic Engagement

Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network  
Report

## What did the project consist of?

The **Newcomer Youth Civic Engagement (NYCE)** Project took place from October 2017 – May 2018. The project objective was to engage newcomer youth in addressing issues in their community. 13 communities across Canada participated in the project, each running their own local project. The second part of the NYCE project was the **Youth Action Gathering (YAG)** which allowed all the youth to come together to share their work.



Montreal, NYCE project



Ottawa, NYCE project

## How did NYCE happen?

The NYCE projects and the YAG were youth-led, with youth leaders involved at every step of the process. The project's aims were embedded in the CCR Youth Network's principles, focusing on offering newcomer youth an opportunity to be leaders in their communities and tackle issues that affect them. The project helped newcomer youth from across Canada to connect and engage with their communities, and with one another. The NYCE initiative did this by helping youth to identify and focus on key issues in their communities and supporting them in exploring ways to address those issues.

## Who offered support?

In addition to prioritizing youth-leadership, the project provided the youth involved with the opportunity to develop leadership skills. Each local project worked with a local community organization able to offer resources and guidance to the newcomer youth.



Montreal, NYCE project

# Newcomer Youth Civic Engagement

The NYCE initiative identified and focused on key issues for newcomer youth, providing support in exploring ways to address these issues within their communities

449 newcomer youth participated in projects across the country

6 provinces were involved

13 projects addressing issues for newcomer youth in their own way → 12 projects represented at the Youth Action Gathering

94% of youth participating in the projects were satisfied

The YAG is the CCR Youth Network's annual conference by and for immigrant and refugee youth across Canada



## Newcomers are Lit!

Through practicing art with music and spoken word, Edmonton youth went on to make a video to raise awareness about youth issues



## Making a Change!

Vancouver youth created a video about newcomers' experiences and presented it to their principal, also addressing issues with ELL classes and their school committed to implementing the youth's recommendations



## Adversity 2 Action

Toronto youth developed resources outlining national, provincial and local organizations working in their communities to address issues, and partnered with a city councillor who will help them continue the project

## Tearing Down the Walls

Toronto youth presented the problems of precarious migrant youth accessing education system to Toronto District School Board who were eager to make changes



## Crossing Borders

Youth in Kitchener made plans to create an ELL Buddy System, and a video to educate teachers about the struggles ELL students face in the classroom



## Stories of Newcomer Youth

London youth focused on the topics and themes of friendship, the importance of safe spaces for young refugees and newcomers to Canada, and their first impressions of the country in order to weave their stories together in the creation of their video and infographics



## Newcomer Youth Voice

Ottawa youth used drama, and video to have newcomer youth voices heard - they performed their skit and showed their video to increase awareness



## Together in Action

Joliette youth realized the need for a positive space and are in the process of creating a house for youth



## Conver-Station FM

Montreal youth opened dialogue between local government representatives and youth, conducted interviews to create a provincial francophone youth network.



## Fredericton Youth

Opened the dialogue with teachers and school board to implement programs such as "buddy system" that focus on exchanging cultures between newcomers and Canadians



## Facing Issues & Barriers

Saint John youth created tools to tackle problems and to reach out for help by meeting with the school board, settlement workers and youth workers

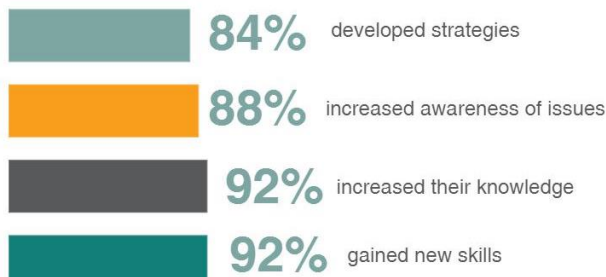


## The Unexpected Journey

Youth in Windsor filmed, wrote, edited and acted in a video filmed around Windsor depicting issues newcomers face when arriving, and their video is now being shown around schools

88% expanded their network

90% feel the expanded network supports them in their projects



YAG 2017, a key part of NYCE, had more participants than ever!



2013 2014 2015 2017



## The Local Projects

Through the local projects supported by the NYCE project, newcomer youth working at a local level were able to collectively choose an issue and work together to communicate the issue to stakeholders by some creative means (such as video or art work). Examples of issues explored include language barriers, newcomers' struggles in school, lack of job opportunities, lack of youth-only spaces, and limited opportunities to be involved in collectively as newcomer youth.

### Issues

Some of the gaps identified by the youth throughout the project (at local, provincial or national levels) are:



Youth in Windsor create a video to be shown around schools which addresses key challenges newcomers face

A **need for initiatives and spaces** that aim to foster dialogue between newcomer youth and other youth.

Youth found that without this dialogue, there is *“the feeling that while living in the same city, you still are living in parallel worlds”* (Hicham, Montreal youth leader).

The Joliette project made plans for a house where newcomer youth can get together and feel at home – this will allow them to engage with their community by hosting events for other newcomers, and tackling issues together, as well serving as a space to invite non-newcomer youth to create connections with them too



Saint John youth present on barriers they face to brainstorm strategies

A **lack of opportunities** for newcomer youth to get involved in school activities and particularly outside of school:

Schools offer many different groups, clubs or programs but they are not adapted to newcomer youth or are not necessarily inclusive of them:

*“Every school needs a youth leadership program for newcomer youth. Leadership should be accessible even if you don’t speak the language. Youth-led events are rare, and this model is important to have youth advocate for what they need”*

(Ameer, Edmonton youth leader)

Opportunities outside of school are even fewer, and those that are available are often not promoted enough for youth who would be interested in taking part.





**Language barriers** have a huge effect on the extent to which a place can feel like a home – it makes both school and work hard, as it is difficult to integrate when one is not familiar with a language. This makes it very difficult to communicate one's skills, and in turn, to build a community.

*"I feel like the reason why many of the youth find it hard to adapt in schools and find it even more difficult to share their stories is truly based on communication; it's extremely frustrating for someone to have so much to say but not be able to say it"*

(Sally, London youth leader)

The Kitchener youth, pictured above, made plans to create a buddy system for newcomer and non-newcomer youth to help surmount the language barriers, and increase familiarity and sharing on both ends. They also made an educational video talking about the struggles ELL students face in schools, in terms of a lack of understanding of their language backgrounds, and difficulties that arise due to a lack of familiarity with English or French.

## FLUENT IN 3 LANGUAGES: KIRUNDI, KINYARWANDA AND SWAHILI



## STRUGGLES WITH ONE: ENGLISH



Issues faced by newcomer youth in relation to language barriers are some of the most difficult to tackle – not only does it affect integration within social spheres, it also affects perceptions others have of you, and your ability to navigate that which might appear simple to others – it adds an extra step to actively taking part in society.

The youth in London were a group of Syrian women. By sharing their stories they tackled the language barrier that so often exists – by recording their testimonies in Arabic and having subtitles in English, they could express themselves and their experiences freely and accurately while still communicating to non-newcomer youth, helping to create connection and deepen understandings of the newcomer experience.



This relates directly to **access to education** – success academically becomes incredibly hard when it is in a second language, but the barriers newcomers face in accessing education are not limited to language.

There are huge problems related to recognition of foreign credentials, because they are not understood, or because in some cases newcomers do not have access to the correct documentation. There are also problems relating to getting credit for English Language Learner (ELL) classes that are taken, as well as a lack of clarity on how the education system works in Canada, and how newcomers can navigate it.

Youth in Vancouver held a meeting with their principal to offer their recommendations about how to better accommodate newcomer youth, especially in relation to ELL classes



Winnipeg youth addressed issues pertaining to access to education by meeting with the superintendents of their school board to give recommendations about ELL classes, and aiming to have more diversity among teachers.

Winnipeg youth were also the hosts of the Youth Action Gathering 2017

The youth from Montreal also worked on issues pertaining to recognition of credentials through creating dialogue with government officials – by recongising newcomer credentials, accessing education becomes easier as newcomers can then access the appropriate level. They further tackled this issue by gathering and sharing stories about newcomer youth, to increase awareness about the difficulties they face. They had meetings with close to a hundred local stakeholders, and youth, creating a dialogue between the two groups. By doing this, they also were addressing **racism and discrimination**, specifically by debunking stigma and dehumanization surrounding refugees to show the richness and deepness within each and every person.



Montreal Youth at Radio-Canada to share newcomer's experiences

Newcomer youth face **racism and discrimination** because often there is a lack of understanding of newcomers' differences and as a result a reproduction of certain racial, cultural, ethnic or religious prejudices:

*"Newcomers felt that they were being asked insignificant questions such as: If you're African, why aren't you black?"*  
(Noussaiba, Fredericton youth leader)

The Fredericton project created dialogue with teachers in their school in order to create a buddy system, which allows for newcomers and non-newcomers to share their cultures with one another



Youth at York University in Toronto developed resources to help navigate organizations committed to helping newcomers at every level of government – as well, at the YAG the group educated other youth on how to be involved with government, lobby MPs, and allow their voice to be heard

**Access to services** also represents a significant challenge for newcomer youth. Often, there is not enough information given to newcomer youth concerning the way services work and how they are provided in Canadian society:

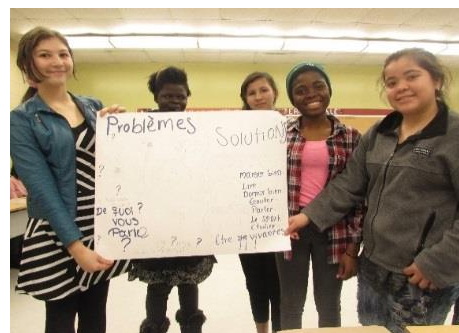
*"The government [puts out] the idea that the services are accessible for newcomers but it is not the case when looking from the participants' perspectives"* (Humaima, Toronto youth leader).

Newcomers with certain immigration statuses are still not granted some basic services, especially in relation to mental health. This problem presents itself in many spaces – from accessing healthcare, to understanding and being able to use transportation systems in remote areas.

The issues related to access to services often relate to an understanding of **Canadian institutions** – the systems and institutions of Canada which are intuitive to those who grew up with them may not be, clear or easy to navigate for those who are new to Canada.

*"The Ministry of Education does not recognize how the barriers that newcomers face affect their education - they still have the same expectations of newcomers and local youth."* (Narges, Vancouver youth leader).

The Toronto FCJ group also worked on this by meeting with their school board to explain the unique situation of precarious migrant youth and the difficulties they face in navigating services and finding a voice.



Joliette youth in workshop session

## Project & Organization List

| Youth Leader  | Project                   | Location            | Supporting Organization   |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Narges Samimi & Tenzin Phantok                                    | Making a Change!          | New Westminster, BC | Immigrant Services Society of BC                                      |
| Naol Kassa  | Newcomers are Lit!        | Edmonton, AB        | Multicultural Health Brokers  |
| Saleh Alimasi   | Your Ideal Winnipeg       | Winnipeg, MA        | Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba              |
| Obada Baghdadi  | The Unexpected Journey    | Windsor, ON         | YMCA of Western Ontario   |
| Sally Hammad  | Stories of Newcomer Youth | London, ON          | Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration               |
| Huda Al'Obaidi and members of Crossing Borders                    | Crossing Borders          | Kitchener, ON       | Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support                               |
| Julia Salmon  | Tearing Down the Walls    | Toronto, ON         | FCJ Refugee Centre  |
| Humaima Ashfaque  | Adversity 2 Action        | Toronto, ON         | York University Centre for Refugee Studies                            |
| Keshav Bajgai   | Newcomer Youth Voice      | Ottawa, ON          | Youth Program of the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization |
| Hicham Khanafer   | Conver-Station FM         | Montreal, QC        | Centre Social d'aide aux immigrants                                   |
| Justine Dangbe, Rene Rukundo, Arnaud Kazamwali and Pierre Dushime | Together in Action        | Joliette, QC        | Lanaudière Regional Committee for International Development Education |
| Noussaiba Dehimi  | Fredericton Youth         | Fredericton, NB     | Multicultural Association of Fredericton                              |
| Milia Aidemouni   | Facing Issues & Barriers  | Saint John, NB      | YMCA of Greater Saint John  |

Read more about these projects here: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/youth/local-nyce-projects>



## The Youth Action Gathering 2017

### Outcomes



The YAG was held April 27 - April 29 at the University of Winnipeg's Richardson College. It provided a space for all the youth who had been working on the NYCE local projects across the country to come together. The CCR Youth Network and the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) jointly hosted the conference. Youth were able to speak with each other and many other newcomer youth about the best ways for newcomer youth to be involved in their communities, and to share their experiences and challenges faced along the way.

The participation of youth from across Canada led to an engaging, educational and inspiring weekend. The youth were not only participants, but also the primary leaders of the conference, including determining workshop topics and the overall content of the weekend. Everyone involved returned home empowered, with more knowledge and fresh motivation to work on key actions.

#### The YAG

175 Newcomer youth aged 18-25 gathered in Winnipeg exploring common issues under the theme:

A community by and for youth: Creating a space and a place in Canada

### Workshop sessions

- Creating positive space for newcomer youth
- My world in a thousand words
- Raise your voice: make it a reality
- The truth about Muslims
- Access to Education: Overcoming barriers at a national level
- Unity in Diversity
- Canada 150: Living on a land that isn't ours
- Life through dance
- Creating diversity in the workplace

"Unless we raise  
our voices,  
we will not be  
heard"

Humaima  
Asfaque, youth  
leader of the York  
University NYCE  
project





“My experience at the YAG was magical. Seeing all these young people coming from all across Canada representing their provinces but also their countries and willing to defend the rights of newcomer youth with so much passion and love made me realize how strong we can be if we work all together”

- Hicham Khanafer, YAG Participant, Montreal, QC

### Priority Issues

- Refugee Youth
- Cultural Awareness
- Access to Education
- LGBTQ+ Issues
- Indigenous youth perspectives

### Priority Actions

- Develop youth engagement/leadership
- Create dialogue surrounding culture to increase awareness and understanding
- Advocate for recognition of the many issues faced by newcomer youth in education in each province
- Create more inclusive spaces

## Lessons Learned from Youth Leaders



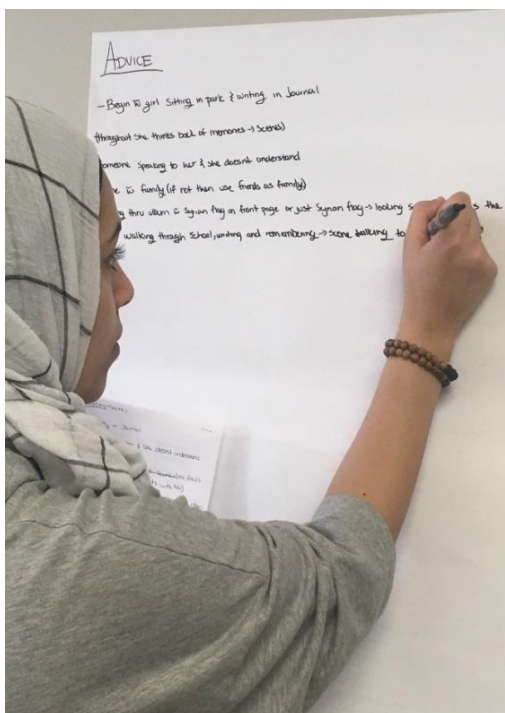
The Ottawa youth team used theatre to help youth find their voices

Youth leaders from the NYCE Projects and the YAG were able to come together to work on a variety of issues faced by newcomers face.

“Always believe that you can contribute to change. You can change lives and educate minds no matter your age, sex, culture and status” – Julia Salmon, Toronto Youth Leader

An example of a major lesson learned: there are many ways to find your voice. You can lobby a MP, be an activist through graffiti, dance to express yourself, speak to share your experience, make videos, make presentations, and the list goes on – once you are aware of all the ways to create a voice, change can really start to happen.

## Recommendations



These initiatives **were very popular and successful for the following reasons:**

- The focus on artistic creation gave all youth an opportunity to express themselves.
- The local projects were all supported by a local organization ensuring the youth had access to expertise, training, mentoring, material and a space to meet, as well as access to a network for promotion purposes and relationship-building.
- The youth leading each local project had access to a national platform through the CCR Youth Network that connected all youth leaders and mentors and ensured they could exchange information on their respective local projects whenever they needed to.
- The projects were local and time-limited, making them manageable.
- The YAG provided a national face-to-face meeting that offered a space for youth to reflect on and share learnings from the local projects.

Supporting the youth-led projects and the YAG allowed us to reach new groups, including smaller communities across Canada, and to create new partnerships, expanding the national network. Many more people have now expressed interest in participating in our future activities to support newcomer youth engagement. This also helped us identify existing community needs across the country.



## More Resources

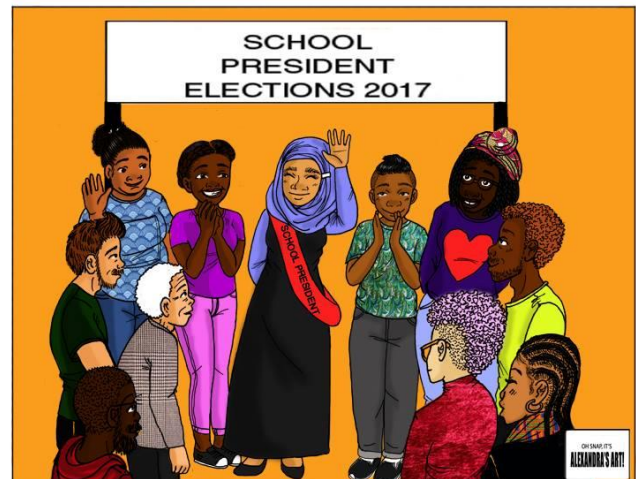
### WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES, WE WORK TO OPEN OTHERS



Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés  
Canadian Council for Refugees  
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### WHEN THEY PUT YOU IN A BOX BUT YOU DON'T LET THEM



Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés  
Canadian Council for Refugees  
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To access more of these resources, please go to: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/youth/local-nyce-projects>  
Find the full report of the YAG here: [http://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/yag\\_report\\_short.pdf](http://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/yag_report_short.pdf)

## Thank you!

We would like to thank the Government of Canada, and our many other funders and supporters, who without the NYCE project would not have been possible!

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