

Youth Action Gathering (YAG) 2017

April 27 – 29, 2017 Winnipeg
Report

The Youth Action Gathering (YAG) was held from Thursday, April 27th until Saturday, April 29th at the University of Winnipeg’s Richardson College, in Treaty 1 territory on the traditional territory Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. The YAG was organized by the Youth Network (YN) of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) in partnership with the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), and was the 5th YAG to date.

The YAG brought together newcomer youth and allies to learn, share, network and collaborate on actions and strategies to address common challenges. This year, our theme was, ‘A Community by and for you: Creating your space and your place in Canada’. This ties in the purpose a YAG always serves in bringing newcomer youth together, with the Newcomer Civic Engagement (NYCE) project, of which the 2017 YAG was a key part. It allowed all the youth who have been working on the YN’s NYCE local projects across the country to come together with many other newcomer youth to talk 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 organizers worked hard to establish an anti-oppressive environment, making the YAG a safe, accepting, empowering and inclusive space for youth. Our slogan, which came from the Edmonton team’s NYCE project was ‘Newcomers are lit!’, capturing a sense of the empowerment that the YAG strove to create.

Nearly 200 participants from coast to coast, represented 8 provinces and 15 communities. 150+ were youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds, and 40+ were youth workers and allies. The 2017 YAG also had the largest representation of provinces of any YAG to date.



Photo by Ameer Ali

The event was youth-led in both organization and participation. The CCR’s Youth Network Core Group, the NYCE Youth Advisory Council and IRCOM’s Youth Group were instrumental at every step.

The members of the youth teams worked to organize the logistics of the conference, to find speakers and facilitators for the sessions, and to act themselves as speakers, facilitators, resource persons and MCs.

Program

The program consisted of plenary sessions with keynote speakers and workshop sessions for participants to discuss issues, share their stories and experiences, and propose solutions and actions. The participants also had the chance to get to know each other through the various events, as well as at social events on Friday and Saturday night.

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

“I left that conference so inspired! There was such ENERGY from the youth and such a welcoming atmosphere for all people. Such a desire to advocate and make changes. I left feeling re-inspired to do the same, so THANK you. Plus, we had great laughs and chats along the way, which was fun too.”

- Kathleen, YAG participant, Winnipeg, MB

What is the YAG?

The Youth Action Gathering (YAG) is the CCR Youth Network's annual conference by and for immigrant and refugee youth across Canada.

Outcomes

The participation of youth from across Canada led to an engaging, educational and inspiring weekend. The diverse group of participants learned from each other and made friends, animated discussions, and generated ideas and strategies to address challenges. The youth were not only participants here, but were also the primary leaders of the conference as a whole, and especially in determining workshop sessions and the overall content of the weekend. Everyone involved returned home empowered, with more knowledge and fresh motivation to work on key actions.

Throughout the YAG, participants discussed the common issues that affect them and developed strategies and actions to address them. At the end of the conference, they completed an exercise to select priority issues and actions to focus on after the YAG. The following are the most important issues and actions as chosen by the participants:

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

“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

Looking Back: YAG 2017

A platform for newcomer youth and allies to learn, share, network and collaborate on actions and strategies to address common challenges



Over 175 newcomer youth aged 18-25 gathered in Winnipeg



Youth represented eight Canadian provinces & 15 communities



88% better understand Canadian institutions as a result



81% learned new skills



89% feel their broadened network will support their efforts in their communities

YAG Participant, Edmonton, AB

Because of YAGs I have made ties with people who work in different organizations that offer services that I can not have access to in Edmonton, so now I can get help from them too

YAG Participant, Saint John, NB

Youth have terrific power which needs to be encouraged - the YAG involved youth at every stage of the planning and execution; they were guiding conversations and workshops and coming up with a variety of ideas to identify newcomer youth issues and address them

YAG Participant, Toronto, ON

When so much amazing talent and energy meet in one space, it can only go a long way to empower us, the youth, who will go back to our various local organizations and communities and spread the word. I am thankful for these spaces and being part of the CCR family

the YAG network continues to provide support by connecting youth to others across the country all working to combat similar challenges in various ways with various strategies

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

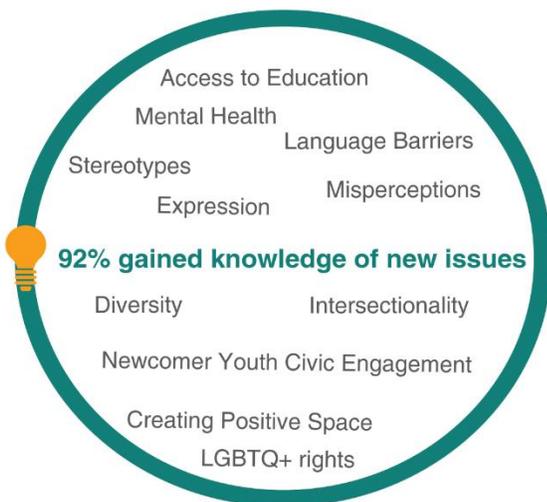


94% broadened their network at the YAG



98% thought YAG 2017 was a success

"it was enriching to be able to exchange experiences, knowledge, wisdom, hardships, issues, you name it. This sense of collectiveness further strengthens the faith I personally have in us. Thank you to all! We were indeed LIT!"



200

YAG Participants



All percentages come from survey responses rating each on a 1-5 scale; 1, 2, 3 = no and 4, 5 = yes



What did participants think of the YAG 2017?



When participants were asked about their experiences at the YAG, the responses were highly positive.

They felt that the YAG was rich, informative, inclusive and a safe space for immigrant and refugee youth. They enjoyed learning from each other, discussing important issues, and most of all meeting new people. They were inspired and motivated to use what they learned at the YAG by engaging their communities, planning advocacy initiatives, educating others, and working in solidarity with indigenous peoples.

In terms of improving the YAG, several participants shared that at future YAGs there should be more time to discuss and bridge the issues they face in their home communities.

This YAG focused on access to education, debunking assumptions about Islam and culture, creating inclusive spaces, Indigenous perspectives, sharing strategies to increase newcomer youth civic engagement and art based approaches to let youth voices be heard. At the next YAG, we would like to tackle mental health issues and access to those services for newcomer youth, and issues specific to refugee youth. We would also like to have more dialogue around cultural awareness while continuing to address the LGBTQ+ youth and Indigenous youth perspectives.

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

Humaima Asfaque, youth leader of the York University NYCE project

Want to get involved with the CCR Youth Network?



The CCR Youth Network is always looking for new members.

Join the YN to connect with other refugee and immigrant youth, participate in the YN's decision-making process, and be involved in activities such as the YAG, and an exciting new campaign to promote refugees in Canada.

Here is how to get involved:

- Sign up to the [CCRYOUTH listserv](#) to stay informed of the YN's activities
- Connect via email: yn@ccrweb.ca
- Like the YN on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ccryouth
- Follow on Instagram and Twitter: [@ccryouthnetwork](#)
- Consult the YN page on the CCR website: ccrweb.ca/en/youth/welcome

Acknowledgements

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Canadian Council for Refugees

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