Breakout Workshop D: Newcomer and Refugee Youth – program development
Welcome

Melissa Jay
AMSSA
Housekeeping

• Cell phones – turn off ringer / turn on vibrate, take calls outside.
• All meeting documents will be sent out electronically after the meeting
• Recording Sessions
Syrian Refugee Youth Programs and Services

Thanh Lam & Iman Alsallal

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH)
SYRIAN REFUGEE YOUTH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

Iman Al-Sallal
Child & Youth Settlement Worker (Arabic)

Thanh Lam
Youth & Settlement Services Team Lead
The journey so far

- Since **February 9, 2016** – welcomed over **80** Syrian youth and children
- Developed programs based on needs assessments of participants.
- Offered 5 programs which focused on welcoming and assisting newcomer Syrian refugees:
  - Partnered with ISSofBC to offer weekly dialogue circles for women and their teenage daughters
  - Offered weekly Information and Orientation sessions at MPNH
    - Accompanied participants from ISSofBC location to the neighbourhood house in order to show them the way
  - Weekly English Conversation classes
  - Biweekly topical workshops
  - Community resource tours to introduce them to different community services and popular/cultural landmarks around the city
English Conversation Club

- Held weekly classes to introduce the English language to youth and preteens
- This was done through small study groups and with the help of a volunteer
- Teaching was done through reading, writing and speaking

Challenges:
- Due to wide age gaps in some classes, it was difficult to navigate between participants and maintain overall focus and attention
- Most youth who attended had no knowledge of English
- Due to youth being out of school for a long period of time, it was difficult to maintain their attention and commitment during class

Successes:
- Based on feedback, youth enjoyed and benefited learning the basics before enrolling in school
- Based on feedback, youth created folders at home containing learning material from program
- Dividing youth into smaller, quiet, age-based study groups helped them focus and learn better
Topical Workshops

• Held biweekly topical workshops to introduce youth to different topics that would help with their settlement in Vancouver and the Canadian society

• Some topics include: Different forms of ID, Healthy Snacks for School, Transportation System in Vancouver, Meaning of Cultural Events/Holidays such as Halloween

• Teaching was done through class-based or outdoor based instruction (going on trips)

• Challenges:
  • Sometimes it is difficult to maintain youth’s attention and commitment during class

• Successes:
  • Based on feedback, youth enjoyed and benefited from learning about basic settlement topics that would help ease their daily life tasks
  • Having hands-on or outdoor based learning is much preferred by youth
  • During workshops, youth love to volunteer and help summarize the session or instruct their peers
Community Resource Tours

- Held monthly resource tours to introduce youth to different community services/events and popular/cultural landmarks around the city
- Trip locations included: Mount Pleasant Community Centre, ISS of BC, Vancouver Public Library, other neighbourhood houses
- During trips, youth learn more about the city of Vancouver and what makes it unique, such as small neighbourhood libraries

- Challenges:
  - At the beginning, it was difficult meeting youth offsite or explaining the routes back to their homes due to their lack of knowledge of the city and transportation system
- Successes:
  - Based on feedback, youth enjoyed and benefited from learning about their new city
  - Youth quickly learned how to navigate from one part of the city to the next
Program strengths

- **Resiliency of Syrian refugee youth.** They bring so much with them: a cultural richness, adversity, resiliency and humour when they have faced so much. They definitely know how to joke!

- **Our goal was to create programming that would build on the youth’s strengths, but which would also address their unique needs in a trauma-informed manner.**

- **Our other goal is one of fostering connectedness to the community and to the neighbourhood house – not exclusively promoting our settlement programs.**
Program strengths

• Our approach to intercultural programming is our strength at MPNH.
• In addition to our settlement programs, we offer non-settlement programs, which all youth are welcome: Aboriginal, longtime Canadians, Canadian born youth, immigrant youth and of course, refugee youth.
• Having programs that are not based on status allow youth to connect with other youth of diverse cultural backgrounds.
• It allows Syrian refugee youth to create intercultural relationships and develop their communication skills, making them active members of society.
• It also alleviates the pressure of being a “Syrian refugee”. Our youth sometimes just want to participate as a youth.
Challenges

- **Addressing very unique needs.** They also face many challenges: language barriers, gaps in their education, adjusting to a community that does not have experience or the skills set to work with Muslim refugee youth, etc.

- **Ensuring that our youth practice is trauma-informed.** Not all youth workers have trauma informed training and it was important to make sure that our staff was well trained.

- **Cultural competency.** Educating our staff on how to work with refugee participants who are Muslim and who have a different culture. Learning how to truly create an inclusive and culturally sensitive space.

- **Physical literacy.** Connecting youth to recreational activities. Physical literacy is a key component to healthy development. We successfully sought additional funding to supplement our existing settlement programs, which currently do not allow for recreational and physical education opportunities.

- **Not duplicating services.** There are many settlement programs targeting Syrian refugee youth. A challenge has been to help Syrian refugee youth find out which program is the best match for them, while balancing other components of the life: family, school, work, free time, etc. They also express feeling torn by the many program options. It is essential as youth workers to support the youth to make their own choices, rather than pressure them to attend our own organization’s programs.

- **Ensuring that Syrian refugee youth are not exploited.** Because many people want to help, it is overwhelming for our youth. They want privacy and do not want to become spokespersons and at times, have expressed feeling exploited or constantly singled out.
Our approach to youth engagement

• Our approach to youth engagement is based on youth decision-making, transparency, inclusion, interculturalism and more importantly, fun.
• We value each youth’s unique migration story, but we also want them to see themselves a member of the neighbourhood and community.
• It is about recognizing their individual strengths, but challenging them to think about how they relate to others.
• It is also about fun: a lot of refugee youth are pressured to participate in leadership programs, to volunteer, to develop their pre-employment skills, but first and foremost, they need to have fun and to find ways of destressing.
• Service providers need to be aware of the impact we have. We have our own program targets to meet, but we have to ask ourselves:
  • Does the program address youth’s needs?
  • Is this what they want to go?
  • Am I engaging youth in the process?
  • Do they have a say?
  • Do I respect their right when they say no?
  • Is my approach trauma-informed?
Conclusion and best practices

• It has been a highly rewarding experience working with Syrian refugee youth and our staff have learned so much!
• We are so delighted to see them joining after school clubs, sports teams, volunteering, and making friends with youth of all backgrounds.
• Their English has improved so much and we admire their academic and professional goals.
• We also encourage them to connect to other community organizations and find family-friendly events so that they can have quality family time as know parents are very busy with English classes and with finding long term housing and employment.
Conclusion and best practices

• **Be patient.** Being patient with the youth and allowing them to learn and build trust at their own pace without pressure, keeping in mind the tough circumstances they've been through and the trauma they've experienced.

• **Experiential learning.** Allowing them to have fun, learn through hands-on and trip-based experiences, express their voices and opinions, all without feeling they are in a strict environment.

• **Building positive spaces.** Providing them with a safe space to connect with their Syrian/Arabic speaking peers and youth workers, speak their own language, share their own unique talents (such as singing, photography, dancing) and hobbies amongst themselves and with other youth from multicultural backgrounds.
Q&A Session

Melissa Jay
AMSSA
Fresh Voices from Long Journeys: Insights of Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Nada El Masry

*Fresh Voices Initiative of Vancouver Foundation / Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS)*
Fresh Voices From Long Journeys: Insights of Immigrant and Refugee youth

February 27th, 2017

Nada El Masry - Youth Advisory Team Member
Fresh Voices Initiative - Vancouver Foundation
The Fresh Voices is an initiative of Vancouver Foundation. We strive to increase the meaningful participation of racialized immigrant and refugee youth in creating and improving systems and policies that impact their lives.
Fresh Voices…

• Began in October 2011 as a partnership with the BC Representative for Children and Youth.

• We offer a way for immigrant and refugee youth from across B.C. to engage in dialogue and action to identity and remove barriers to their success.

• Events for dialogue and action at the local, regional and national level.
The YAT – The Youth Advisory Team
Roger Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation

Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making
Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed
Rung 3: Young people tokenized*
Rung 2: Young people are decoration*
Rung 1: Young people are manipulated†

*Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Youth Engagement for the Fresh Voices Initiative

Members of the immigrant and refugee community have said that in order for them to be involved and meaningfully represented, they need safe spaces where they can articulate their own experiences and realities. That is why throughout the planning and facilitation the focus was on engaging immigrant and refugee youth.
Fresh Voices Values

• Every young person has a journey that needs to be supported in regards to: Culture, Spirituality, Employment and Family

• Valuing and celebrating differences; diversity is a strength

• Ensuring that young people are provided opportunities to give back to the community

• A commitment to systemic change
Other elements of the Fresh Voices approach:

- Youth-Adult Partnership
- Coordinator/Facilitator with Strong Community Connections
- Local Partnerships
- Grassroots and Institutional Partnerships
- Taking a risk
- Ensuring diversity in terms of immigration journeys, race, gender, sex, more...
Having young people at the center makes policy fun!
Fresh Voices Forum
Fresh Voices Reports
The Syrian Youth Refugee Consultation
#WhoWeAre: Syrian Youth Refugee Consultation
Summary Report
Impact of Fresh Voices on youth
Any questions?

Thank you/ Nandri / Shukran / Ta blu / Tashakor/ Gamsahabnida/ Xie Xie / Gracias / Cam On

Social media: @freshvoicesca
Website: www.freshvoices.ca/
Q&A Session

Melissa Jay
AMSSA
Key Insights and Wrap-Up

• What will you take back to your organization today from today’s presentations?
• Do you think some of what was presented today can be applied to programming at your organizations?
• What was a key learning from today’s session?