

IWYS

**Immigrant women,
youth and seniors**

A Research and Knowledge Mobilization Project on the
Settlement Outcomes–Services Nexus

Immigrant Youth, Settlement, and Resilience: A Qualitative Examination of Newcomer Youth and Settlement Services

Primary Research Report

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FOREWORD

This report, along with thematic reports on immigrant women and seniors, and a composite report, is an output of Phase 2 (2018–2019) of the IWYS project that aims to document the settlement and service experiences of the three groups, as well as proposing new intervention strategies. Building on Phase 1 (knowledge synthesis), we conducted primary research in three Ontario communities—Ottawa, Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton, and Windsor—to inform strategies for service innovation that are scalable across the country.

We hope that this report on Immigrant Youth, Settlement, and Resilience provides service providers, policymakers, fellow researchers, and the general public an opportunity to consider the settlement needs and outcomes for immigrant youth. Readers are encouraged to share the report by downloading or citing an electronic version available at: www.iwys.ca.

We would like to thank our partners, volunteer members of the National Advisory Board, and staff at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and York University as contribution agreement partners.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to shed light on current immigrant youth settlement challenges and the settlement services available to them. It draws upon the “lived experience” of immigrant youth in Canada and on the knowledge of both settlement workers and key informants in the immigration field. The report is part of the second phase of the IWYS study, which consisted of field research conducted in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Hamilton, Ottawa, and Windsor. Also, this report is informed by a comprehensive analysis of academic and grey literature on settlement services and settlement experiences of immigrant youth conducted on the first phase of the IWYS study.

Major Themes and Findings

Central to our findings was the capacity of immigrant youth and settlement workers to overcome barriers and adapt, adjust, and innovate in the context of adversity. Thus, we found the concept of resilience to be an overarching theme that set the context of our work, as well as demonstrating how resilience is a hallmark of the overall Canadian settlement system. We also found, however, significant challenges related to the overall funding structures of non-profit settlement organizations and the competitive dynamics upon which the funding model is based which often makes meaningful cooperation between settlement organizations more difficult. The non-profit settlement sector finds itself finely balanced between resilience and precariousness.

The report documents the numerous challenges confronted by immigrant youth, including those related to employment, language acquisition, culture shock, balancing family responsibilities with school and work, access to mental health services and higher education. It also shows the individual resilience of migrant youth and the value of the settlement services offered through non-profit agencies. Such services help to connect youth to the broader community and offer them skills and strategies that help them navigate their settlement journey.

In terms of issues and recommendations around settlement services, we found, among other things, the need for greater newcomer youth input into the development of the services they receive; the value of the personalized service touch offered through agencies; the necessity of culturally and family-centered approaches to service; the need to broaden settlement service eligibility; the importance of social media as an outreach tool; the advantage of adopting focused pre-arrival services directed at newcomer youth; how immigrant youth act as unacknowledged settlement agencies in their communities; and the power of newcomer youths’ own stories in building connection and self-empowerment. The settlement sector is a dynamic and innovative agent that fosters social resilience that is necessary for successful newcomer youth integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report offers an examination of immigrant youth settlement experiences and services. Based on qualitative interviews and focus groups with immigrant youth, settlement practitioners, and key informants, we draw upon the actual voices, observations, and experiences of those closest to the actual settlement processes and practices. From this qualitative evidence, we are able to identify numerous issues, themes, and settlement service practices that provide insight into the dynamics of Canadian immigrant youth settlement. One overarching theme that emerged is resilience – the resilience of immigrant youth and of the publicly supported non-profit settlement service system. The ability of newcomer youth and settlement organizations to adjust, adapt, innovate, and even thrive in the context of adversity is a hallmark of Canadian immigrant settlement.

Immigrant Youth in Canada: A Literature Review of Migrant Youth Settlement and Service Issues (Shields and Lujan, 2018), produced during the first phase of this project, provides the broad literature review of this subject matter, and should be read in conjunction with this report. Given the previous literature documentation, we will keep external references to a minimum. The literature review is consistent with many of the findings and issues identified in this report but it also revealed that little academic analysis has been conducted to date regarding the range, operation, and impact of youth services on settlement. We give emphasis to this dimension of youth settlement to help fill this knowledge gap. While there are many institutions and actors engaged in the immigrant youth settlement process, such as schools, the family, the health and social services systems, and faith organizations, the foci in this report are immigrant youth themselves and the role that settlement agencies and their programs play in the settlement of this newcomer population. While the interviews and focus groups for logistical and resource limitation reasons were restricted to Ontario, the themes and issues identified speak more broadly to immigrant youth settlement across Canada.

2. RESILIENCE AND NEWCOMER YOUTH SETTLEMENT

Resilience:

... is about capacity building, successful adaptation, and sustained competence in the face of stressors and risk taking [like migration and settlement]; it involves building assets and mobilizing strategies to enhance signs of thriving in the everyday lives of vulnerable youth who have had to deal with stressors, threat, adversity, and trauma (Grace 2015: 27).

Much of the dominant discourse on resilience is focused on the individual's and/or the family's ability to bounce back from adversity and adjust to new circumstances and over time even prosper. The shock of migration and adaptation to a new country, culture, and language requires significant personal effort, emotional character, and utilization of individual and family resources. These individual and family strengths are central to successful settlement and we found ample evidence of the resilience of newcomer youth in their ability to bounce back from culture shock, learn a new language, navigate a foreign education system and job market, and more generally find their place within Canadian society. Resilience is about "not losing hope", and "about taking things in your own hands" (Key Informant (KI)1). Refugee youth, in particular, often struggle with trauma and their adaptation process is longer and less certain. Nonetheless, the refugee youth we interviewed showed tremendous movement towards successful adaptability. As a key informant noted, immigrant youth are "so resilient already." There is a "need to recognize this" (KI2).

There is a requirement, however, to move beyond individual and family dimensions of resilience to a recognition of the importance of social resilience. Social resilience points to the role of social institutions and the value of collective resources in supporting groupings such as immigrant youth in the adaptation process (DeVerteuil 2016: 25). Settlement agencies have a special place in helping to foster resilience among newcomer populations by offering such things as skills training, orientation, leadership and mentoring programming, providing connections to community and employers, offering strategies to help in the navigation of settlement goals, and much more. Non-profit settlement organizations help to speed up the integration process (KI1). Larger urban centres like Toronto carry the advantage of hosting many agencies which come to constitute a "service hub" providing dense networks of supports for newcomers that smaller centres or suburban areas are generally lacking (DeVerteuil 2016) creating an inherent geographical unevenness in settlement supports.

Settlement agencies provide connections to other youth, and professional and social supports. As noted by a key informant, it is “hard to be resilient when you are isolated” (#2), and agencies help break the isolation by providing belonging, connections, and supports. As another key informant observed: “the key to building immigrant resilience is the same as building resilience in all of us: providing a deep sense of connection – connection to other people and to the community,” and it is such connection that many newcomers lack upon arrival (KI6). Resilience is far more than an individual affair; it is a broader social process greatly aided by a social infrastructure offered by settlement agencies and the government programs that are provided through them.

One key informant articulated the business case for settlement service investment in social resilience:

The role of services in assisting to build resilience among newcomer youth is essential because in the absence of programming that promotes resilience in a sustainable manner, there is likely to be little or no return on investment. A lack of positive self-esteem will often result in behaviours that are not conducive to workplace productivity. It follows that building resilience among vulnerable job seekers ... serves as the foundation to not only their ongoing success in the labour market but also to economic development across communities, whereby such programs contribute to creating labour markets that are equally robust and resilient (KI3).

In order to sustain settlement service organizations that are needed to deliver programs, however, they must also be resilient. Non-profit organizations acknowledged abilities over time “to do more with less” is an excellent testimony to their capacities to adapt and sustain valuable programming in an environment featured by increasing demand and the challenge of austerity (Low et al. 2017). Our key informants and settlement workers tell us that the sector remains flexible and responsive to clients’ needs. Resilience is further enhanced in the sector when it is able to exercise the power to take leadership and innovate (for example, through the use of pilot programs), take managed risks and learn from mistakes to build creative organizations. Resilience is really, as one key informant stressed, “a sector competency” (KI2) helping to organizations on mission (KI10). Another noted that “resilience also comes from the people you serve,” they help to “energize” the staff who “feed off their success” and organize around their mission to serve newcomer youth (KI1).

Resilience in the sector, however, is challenged by funding insecurities and rigidities and the precariousness of its labour force due to its lack of competitive compensation and benefit structures (Shields et al. 2017), and often resource challenges in its ability to provide adequate staff training and development. When strong employment structures are in place, they “collectively create safe places for employees to innovate and create” (KI3) nurturing resilience. The challenge for non-profit settlement organizations is tellingly articulated in the following observation:

Non-profit providers are constantly dealing with “stress” (the unknown, frequent change, challenges to attract and retain the right talent, etc.), and their survival often depends on how agile they can be. Again, the outlook of the organization’s leadership, their ability to innovate, keep updated and responsive is critical. I believe that a service organization is as good as the people that they employ. Keeping employees motivated, engaged in the mission, informed, listened to/cared for are all steps to help an organization to maintain resilience (KI4).

In terms of the inadequacy of wage compensation in the sector and the challenge of making it an attractive place for employment (see CISSA and OCASI 2018), a female settlement worker in Ottawa noted that:

... one of my youth made fun of my salary here. You are that age and you are making that much money, I can make more than you. So it’s not that this service is super appealing for a lot of youth of the new generation because of the lack of funding, the lack of money and things like that (Ottawa Settlement Worker (SW)/ Focus Group (FG) 2.1).

Government austerity measures that have often resulted in cuts to training budgets and limited agencies’ ability to raise wages were identified as issues that placed constraints on agencies’ ability to retain staff and hence threatens their resiliency. Human resources are the backbone of settlement services and precarity threatens this (Baines et al. 2017).

Fostering resilience among immigrant youth clients and building social and organizational resilience in the settlement sector is increasingly seen as vital in promoting successful newcomer integration and, hence, resilience serves as an overarching theme for this study. There is a sense that some government funders are now starting to recognize:

... the importance of embedding resilience-building tactics into program design; however, there is not yet a standard language or message, and this [in] turn downplays the expectation of incorporating resilience building as an essential component of program design. That said, terms such as: wrap-around supports; soft skills; essential skills; empowerment; and client centric, are now more common across proposal calls and as such, attempts at stressing their significance are occurring, but a prominent attempt at defining resilience and prescribing proven practices that facilitate the development of resilience is still lacking (KI3)..

3. PROJECT APPROACH AND SCOPE

We make use of a grounded approach to our research and analysis, allowing immigrant youth, settlement workers and key informants in Ontario to reveal their own experiences and reflections on immigrant youth settlement. The “lived” experiences of those settling, working with, and closely observing newcomer youth provide the primary data upon which our study is based. This approach enables a “bottom up” rather than imposing a “top down” orientation to this work. While our examination is informed by the academic literature (see Shields and Lujan 2018), the analysis is reflective of the lived experiences of our interview and focus group sample.

Interviews and focus groups provide the core basis of qualitative evidence upon which this report is constructed. We received approval from the Ryerson University Ethics Board to undertake this work. The interviews and focus groups were conducted between November 2018 and August 2019. The interview/focus group sessions lasted between a half hour to an hour and forty-five minutes in length. These sessions were tape-recorded, with the permission of participants, and subsequently transcribed. The participants were drawn from a number of locations in southern Ontario: namely, the City of Toronto, the suburban area surrounding Toronto, Ottawa, and Windsor. The sessions were guided by a standard set of questions but there was ample opportunity for participants to move beyond the set questions and for the interviewer to follow up to pursue lines of inquiry – a semi-structured interview/focus group question guide.

Questions focused on issues such as what is successful immigrant settlement; what are the challenges of immigrant youth in settlement; the role of services in youth settlement; strengths and weaknesses in settlement programming; identification of best service practices; and, what should be the role of government in settlement and the place of other actors, including immigrant youth themselves. We carefully read each of the transcripts and coded for core themes, issues and other observations that together with our knowledge of the literature guided the paper’s structure and analysis. The individual interviews and focus groups provided an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of these newcomer youth, settlement workers, and key informants from the settlement sector. This qualitative study enabled the development of a rich and deep level of analysis that quantitative surveys are not able to uncover.

The definition of who qualifies as an immigrant youth varies considerably and each settlement program has specific age ranges that cover their operations. In general, however, the age spread is between 15 and 24. Most of our interviews with youth were centered on those 18 and above, except for one 17-year old who was about to turn 18.

In the case of the immigrant youth interviewees, each was given a small remittance of \$40 for their participation; other participants were not financially compensated. In total 66 participants took part in the sessions. In 3 focus groups and 13 individual interviews 34 immigrant youth were engaged. They ranged in age between 17 and 23 and were nearly

equally divided between males (17) and females (16) (one case of missing data). Refugee youth numbered 22 and non-refugee newcomer youth 12. These youth represented a wide range of countries of origin: 11 coming from the broad Middle East (including 5 from Syria); 9 from the Indian sub-continent; 7 from Africa; 3 from South America; 2 from China; and one unidentified.

Among the frontline service providers, 21 took part in 3 focus groups and 3 individual interviews. Of these 4 were male and 17 female reflecting the female domination of settlement service work. Among the 11 key informants 1 was male and 10 were female. The key informants were drawn from senior positions in the non-profit settlement sector and city government and were drawn from each of our sampled geographic regions.

By the end of our collection process we were not picking up significant new information but rather were having themes and issues previously identified reiterated and reinforced. This suggests that we had reached the interview saturation level signaling that we could end data collection.

4. WHAT IS SETTLEMENT? THE ROLE OF SERVICES

What is successful newcomer settlement and what role do settlement services, broadly cast, play in this process? These questions were put to settlement workers and key informants and there was broad agreement on the answers they gave. It was agreed that settlement is about newcomers, including youth, coming to be firmly attached to the wider community and actively participating in its institutions – be they schools, professional, faith, and cultural organizations – and having meaningful access to decent employment, education, healthcare, housing, and recreation. The difference settlement makes is that it helps “to bridge the gap between youth and the community” (Windsor-SW1). In essence, settlement workers often serve as “adaptation brokers,” workers who are “involved in the community’s institutions, providing advice, finding resources, and helping children and youths to connect with peers.” Adaptation brokers play central roles in newcomer youth adaptation and development, serving as “reference points that enable [youth] to engage with local institutions”; they “can trigger a chain of relevant support mechanisms” (Valade and Tyyskä 2019: 217).

The community attachment notion was expressed this way:

... the community is the destination point ... getting them into the community feeling confident, having accountability, and taking ownership ... So whether that’s creating community connections, generating networking opportunities, both social and professional, and ensuring civic engagement opportunities that are relevant to them, that’s the focus (KI5).

As with newcomer adults, achieving meaningful employment is identified as an important and concrete indicator of success not just because it is a career-based achievement but also because of the financial stability it provides that is necessary for meaningful integration (KI2). A core problem facing newcomer youth was put simply as: “The barrier is money” (Ottawa-SW/FG1.1). For youth, positive employment outcomes are closely connected to prior educational goal attainment.

What success looks like for newcomer youth is also closely linked to providing long lasting personal resilience skills/capacities that are employed to facilitate the integration/inclusion process.

It means a client having confidence to shake somebody’s hand, to hand in a resume. ... Sometimes it is very simple like, is this outfit appropriate for an interview? Or how can I practice my introduction? ... I am giving you the confidence that you need to get there and to speak out for yourself and to integrate (Ottawa-SW/FG1.5).

Having skills that can be used to deal with a host of circumstances that are needed to navigate Canadian society are critical.

The value of sustaining community support was also noted as necessary to support and help build the capacity of settlement organizations themselves. “We will not be able to do our work alone if we don’t have the support from all the community” (KI10). Settlement supports could be further enhanced by more and better communication and coordination between organizations providing similar services” (Windsor-SW1).

Respondents, moreover, identified various issues, problems and limitations confronting non-profit settlement agencies in doing their work. The common refrain was with challenges related to funding structures, levels and duration of financing, and the competitive funding model that makes meaningful cooperation between organizations more difficult. As a Toronto settlement worker put it:

[A]... major frustration, we need partnerships, we need collaborations, people don’t want to actually and genuinely want to partner with us because they are very protective of their client base and they think that oh if I send a client over to you, you are stealing that client and they are not going to come back. (Toronto-SW/FG1.2)

One respondent expressed the limitations of the non-profit settlement sector as being of a more fundamental structural character:

... we don’t have power to tackle the roots of the problem. And that’s one of the big weakness of Settlement Services. [The sector acts as] a band aid for the government or for the system ... so if a child is broken, they will send it to us. ... You don’t have a voice, you don’t have a lot of power. ... [L]ike, yes, we support, we do our best to fix issues when they appear, but then these issues, we are not preventing these issues from necessary repeating themselves. Because in order to do that, we need to have a voice. We need to have some power ... (Ottawa-SW/FG2.1).

So while the non-profit settlement sector is viewed as doing core work that is key to newcomer youth integration, these organizations work within a larger system that places definite constraints on their ability to act. A goal and wish for the sector is to build meaningful partnerships across sectors where the voices of newcomer youth and the agencies themselves are heard and acted on. This, of course, requires a shift in relations of power between settlement actors.

5. THE IMMIGRANT YOUTH SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Our participants identified numerous issues and experience that have framed the immigrant youth settlement experience. Newcomer youth and settlement workers have been impacted by the rise of right-wing anti-immigrant populism which has been most pronounced in Europe and the US and the related decline in social cohesion (Ipsos 2019). While Canada has not as yet felt the extreme edge of this, youth are very aware of the shifts in attitudes and according to one key informant, it is having a chilling effect and beginning to dampen the sense youth have of the “warmth of their welcome” (KI2). This serves as a reminder of the importance of the overarching social and policy environment that shapes settlement. In the absence of a favourable public climate, meaningful integration becomes much more difficult (Barrass and Shields 2017; Valenzuela Moreno et al. 2018).

Stress faces newcomer youth on many fronts. They are pressured both from society and from parents/family. At home there is the expectation that they will abide by their ethnic cultural norms but there is also pressure to adapt to the so-called “Canadian” value system. This can be especially difficult on females. The ability to successfully navigate this “mosaic of culture pressures” is among the greatest challenges they confront.

Youth often put high expectations on themselves to “succeed” and there is often information overload. But, as an Ottawa settlement worker notes, these stresses can build over time:

... settling in the first year is what we call the honeymoon year or the year they get all the services, they get all the support, but then coming the second year to third year, here's where the expectations and pressures starts to pour into the youth. And I feel with the settlement of a family, the youth are the weakest link that takes the most pressure because they are the ones who get the language and they're the ones who get the culture of the street or the workplace faster than the parents. So they have to start working, to get the support to the family. And so they have a lot of pressure (Ottawa-SW/FG1.2).

Newcomer youth, of course, are not monolithic and they each experience settlement differently. For some there is a tendency to isolate themselves in their own ethnic groupings and resist reaching out. This has been termed as “clumping” (Windsor-SW1). Generally, however, this is a path that leads to ethnic ghettoization and economic marginalization. The need to reach beyond is forcefully illustrated in terms of employment where there is a need for youth to build their own job networks that bridge into the larger community. As noted:

... from a specific employment lens, with the lack of community and the lack of sense of belonging, I found that newcomer youth find it hard to build their own network here, especially in regards to employment networks, minimizing the opportunities they are able to seek in the community and not knowing where to go, along with facing difficulties in accessing services in areas such as mental health, facing some of the anxieties about coming to a new country on your own (Toronto-SW/FG1.6).

One of the foremost values of settlement agencies is that they help to build those networks and break the isolation.

Often part of the breaking of isolation is the need to connect newcomer youth with peer groups who are experiencing similar challenges:

... because of their age they need to connect them with a group of people of the same age, they need friends, and they need to get included in a group of people that experienced the same challenges. They need to connect maybe with the people of their same background or the same ages that help them to deal with their mental health for those stress moments (Toronto-SW/FG1.7).

Additionally, individual attention by settlement workers is also very important to the process of connecting. “We are caring adults that they can build relationships with and that is so important because so many youth don’t have that ... one strong relation with a non-family adult and that is so important for doing well in life ...” (Toronto-SW/FG1.2). Breaking the isolation requires connecting at multiple levels, with the ethnic and larger community, with peers and friends, and with individual workers.

A common issue participants identified is the lack of awareness of available programming and challenges in the ability to access them. Youth often are not engaged in the circles to hear about the work done by settlement agencies. This suggests the need for better advertising of programs in venues that newcomer youth access. Or sometimes youth are simply overwhelmed by the volume of information and programming available which can make decision-making around it difficult. Moreover, some of the services are not specifically targeted to youth – not youth sensitive – and the hours in which they are offered may conflict with youth work and school schedules. With multiple commitments youth can be so time pressed that it can be hard to access services (Ottawa-SW/FG1.2). Yet the programming and information can be a positive frame that is transformative for youth:

We can change their lives by giving them the accurate information to help them make the best decision for them. We are not in the business of making decisions for people. We’re in the business of helping people to make the most informed decision (Ottawa-SW/FG1.5).

Language challenges, newcomers tell us, stand out as one of the biggest issues they must deal with and this intersects with educational, work and other issues.

If they don't have the appropriate language skills they will not get employment or they will get only entry level employment working at Tim Horton's or customer service because they don't know, they don't need much English. Right. So all of them are tied up in order for them to have that successful integration because of all those challenges (KI10).

Learning a new language and the subtleties associated with it is never easy. While LINC and ESL in schools are seen as valuable assets and heavily utilized by youth, 3-hour sessions were often viewed as not intensive enough learning opportunities.

The language issues intersect with other challenges like education. "[F]or those that do not speak the language, it is really hard to understand, you know, all the different levels of education ... four boards of education, English, French and Public, and Catholic. Which school is better?" (KI10). The primary and secondary education system in Canada is not well suited to having newcomer youth bring their own knowledge into the school to meaningfully interface with the curriculum. Rather the system is "only adapted for newcomer youth to absorb the knowledge from here, absorb the culture from here. So it's not two ways. It's only one way" (Ottawa-SW/FG1.1).

Also, navigating the higher educational system and finding the finances to be able to take advantage of it is an issue (GTA-Immigrant Youth (IY)/FG1.2). Language can restrict newcomer youth ability to access higher education.

Many social service organizations are knowledgeable about the education system and help youth to navigate it. As a Windsor settlement worker commented: "we have good relationships with the university, with the college, we'll take them to open houses, we'll get them to meet professors, we'll help them with their application process, and we'll make sure that they're ready once they step out of here" (Windsor-SW1).

Clearly, employment is a core issue for newcomer youth in terms of both securing a first job opportunity while still in school and the transition to long-term career-based employment. Persistently high levels of unemployment and precarious work rates for immigrant newcomers and youth combine to make the path to meaningful work more difficult. Overcoming employment barriers is multifaceted venture. As noted, building job networks is one key part of this but other settlement service supports are also often effectively utilized by youth. These included such things as pre-employment skills like resume, interview and Canadian employment culture development and volunteering and co-op opportunities.

Paid internships are seen to be particularly effective at building Canadian job experience and bridging youth to better job opportunities. But government austerity measures have cut many of these programs. Moreover, we were informed that too many employers lacked an understanding of newcomer youth and are failing to provide accessible

workplaces and work opportunities. Educating employers of the advantages of tapping into the talent pool of newcomer youth should be a priority and one that will become increasingly important for them as the workforce demographic continues to age.

Newcomer youth work issues are often tied to addressing family service and financial needs which includes adult responsibilities placed on youth to provide care for family members including younger siblings, family language translation roles, and the like, as well as the need for youth to work to bring in income to help support the family. Immigrant youth work in the family to assist in their integration goes a considerable way in helping to strengthen migrant family resilience (Parada et al. 2019: 209) and to develop their own capacities. However, the extent of such responsibilities can create burdens and barriers to quality employment in the future as well as negative impacts on educational and personal development.

The value of advancing education over survival jobs is forcefully expressed by an Ottawa-based immigrant youth:

You need people here to just focus [on] study because if we get a good education we will help this country. If we do not study we do little jobs just to survive and that is not good because I came here to make my dreams true (Ottawa-IY3).

An issue that we heard about consistently was the problem of mental health among newcomer youth. The stresses associated with migration, especially in the case of refugee youth, magnify this issue, one which is already high in the case of native-born young people. Mental health issues carry heavy stigma for many cultures and for this age group, so seeking services is challenging. An Ottawa refugee youth noted that:

... when you are an immigrant and you leave your country you can face the issue of mental health. I have a friend he is a new immigrant and his brother has some mental issues. Now, their feeling is that they are more part of the community and also they cannot use healthcare because they don't speak the language, some service on that would be helpful. Also, most community centres do not have mental health services, and someone who was not feeling very good may end up being homeless or something like that (Ottawa-IY3).

There was a strong expression that more services for mental health better connected to settlement agencies were necessary and that they needed to be more tailored to the cultural realities of youth newcomers and to the needs of refugees from war zones (Ottawa-SW/FG1.2).

Especially in the case of smaller cities and suburbs the question of accessible public transportation was raised as a barrier. Settlement agencies work under strict guidelines in terms of what they can offer youth clients in this regard. Sometimes they have bus tickets they can provide but they do not have the resources to provide taxi money nor are agency workers allowed to offer youth rides for safety reasons. The bus system in cities like Windsor and suburban areas are often limited, often making access to agency services highly problematic (Windsor-SW2).

Refugee youth are particularly vulnerable. They, of course, identified many of the same challenges noted above but also drew special attention to other issues which included affordable housing, the absence of childcare, and the need for programming for youth to better understand the police in Canada. Two of the voices said the following:

My mother now cannot go to school because there is no childcare there. The challenge me and my brother faced here in Ottawa is renting, it is very expensive. A big chunk of the money we received goes to pay the rent. With the money we use for eating we buy the cheapest food, not because we like it but because we do it to survive (Ottawa-IY2).

Many youth have bad experiences with police and they may have the perception that the police is bad and they may have a bad perception of the police and the police may look at this youth as suspicious. So I think the government should support places like the [name of the organization] that can help youth to get rid of the immigrant bad perceptions of the police (Ottawa-IY3).

While refugee youth and their families struggled with settlement, they were unanimous in their expressions of happiness to have found refuge in Canada and for the supports from the government and community they were receiving and that their basic needs were covered. They were optimistic about the future and had adopted resilience strategies to adjust to their circumstances. One refugee youth noted the value of sharing costs to stretch dollars and the value of motivation:

To better integrate someone, you need to provide him with motivation to attend the school or attain the language. When someone attends the language training they make friends and the more friends you have the easier life is (Ottawa-IY2).

While another spoke to the role of self-help: “Do not wait for people to wait for other people to help you, help yourself and always work hard” (Ottawa Youth Focus Group#5).

Finally, other issues were also raised; these included the special challenges confronting LGBTQ youth and the need for more programming for them (Ottawa-SW/FG1.7). As well the issue of layered discrimination:

We sometimes forget that barriers and challenges for newcomers are also layered according to gender, according to ethnicity, according to if she is wearing a hijab or not, according to their colour, according to beard or no beard. It's all there and it all increases according to that (Ottawa-SW/FG2.3).

6. KEY THEMES IN SETTLEMENT SERVICES: PROGRAMS, PRACTICES, OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on *Improving Settlement Services in Canada* makes note of the substantive investment the federal government has made in settlement services with \$715 million in 2017-18, funding over 500 organizations with some 460,000 clients in 2018-19 (2019: 13). Other levels of government have also more recently engaged in settlement support activities as well (Praznik and Shields 2018). These valuable investments smooth the settlement transition for newcomers and “is recognized around the world as a model that has a proven track record (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration 2019: 11; Valenzuela Moreno et al. 2018). Nonetheless, there is the need to continuously evaluate and critically examine settlement services to encourage continuous improvement. The themes and issues raised here seek to contribute to this process.

6.1 The Importance of Immigrant Youth Voice and Representation

One theme that came through strongly was the need for newcomer youth input into the services they receive. “We have to know what it is that they need and what it is that they want. So, it’s a lot of their voice and their opinion that has to be brought into it, because we could have these great ideas and these great programs, but if it’s not relevant and it’s not helpful, it’s a waste, right?” (Windsor SW#1). A key informant put it this way: “... it’s really about listening to the client, what is relevant to them, what is meaningful to them” (KI5). Of course, it is not good enough that youth voices are expressed but they must also be heard, acted upon and have impact on policy and programming. This message is being received by IRCC as it recently has established a youth advisory council to provide input. An evaluation of its effectiveness would be useful. At the settlement agency level there seems to be awareness of the importance of youth voice and the willingness to act upon it within the limitations of their funding obligations. One best practice by an agency has been to use former youth leaders from their programs to evaluate their youth service to determine what works and what doesn’t (KI10).

An additional related issue relates to agency staff and the necessity to employ staff that are reflective of the diversity of the newcomer youth. “If you are targeting youth you should have a youth staff member, if you are targeting a black youth, you should probably think of having a staff who is a black youth” (Ottawa-SW/FG1.2).

6.2 The Value of the Human Touch, Empathy, Personalized Service, and a Welcoming Environment

The non-profit sector is known for its community-oriented and more human focused approach to service provision. This is extremely important in terms of meaningfully connecting with youth. A GTA youth noted that the “human touch” in services helped youth “feel that they are not alone” (GTA-IY/FG1.1). Another GTA youth expressed that when services are provided with a high degree of empathy it shows that the service workers care and understand the struggle that youth are facing (GTA YOUTH#2 FG). Settlement workers also communicated their strong feelings about the service for their clients. As one said: “... I don’t care what the numbers are. I care about helping to integrate more Canadians, more people who come to the country (Ottawa-SW/FG1.1).

The value of the emotional support and one on one time by service workers was strongly expressed:

I think the role of service for newcomers in providing emotional support is critical. Making the newcomer feel accepted and acknowledged, listening and empathizing with the challenges they are going through, will generally keep the channels open for communication and optimism. I would say that for youth, the emotional support is even more critical. They typically know how to find the information quickly. A lot of the challenges relate to their ability to keep motivated and deal with anxiety (KI4).

My group sessions used to be very well attended, but I found that most of them needed their 1-1 time with me as well, so they would stop by at any time and just spend time in my office talking about their life, challenges, accomplishments, etc. (Windsor-SW3).

Providing a welcoming environment for youth is also important. A Windsor settlement worker expressed their welcoming approach this way:

So, as staff our job is kind of as soon as they come in it’s, “Hi, how are you? How was your day?” and kind of engage them in that conversation.

And then we always try to keep it looking fresh, looking youthful with, I don’t know, balloons or streamers, just so they feel like they’re coming into somewhere nice, and we get them involved with the decorating too, so they feel like they’re contributing to this space and they’re kind of invested in it (Windsor-SW1).

Often times non-profit agencies, because they are cut to the bone in terms of their funding, have a difficult time in finding the resources to create welcoming spaces for youth. Funders like to support programs but not organizational infrastructure or “frills” like snacks, decorations, and transit fairs. But these are often the things that bring youth to the agencies where they become introduced to actual youth programs. The agency space, facilities and the “frills” provided are in actuality central to bringing in and holding

youth; it is core to successful programming. It is common that youth workers themselves help to provide the resources for some of these welcoming touches. The settlement sector enjoys the “non-profit advantage” of bringing the human and welcoming touch to the services it provides. The funding models need to recognize this and support this approach which pays dividends in terms of better settlement outcomes for newcomer youth.

6.3 Supporting Culturally Appropriate Services

Settlement services need to be designed in culturally appropriate ways in order to maximize their impact on clients. For example, parents from some cultural backgrounds have strict curfew times that youth need to follow and programming schedules should accommodate this. Staff must be aware of different cultural norms and adjust services appropriately. Employing staff from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, consequently, is central to addressing this need. A Windsor settlement worker spoke to their agency’s experience:

At [name of organization], we’re not only ethnically diverse, but we’re culturally diverse. Everyone comes from different backgrounds. Some are Canadian-born, Canadian-raised and never had an immigration story ever. Then some were just born in Canada, but their whole family are immigrants. Some are very new immigrants.

Then we also have volunteers from our language service program, so we have so much diversity where if we can’t provide them with the service, at least we can provide them with someone to talk to and that’s powerful. That networking opportunity is very powerful (Windsor-SW2).

For youth, providing culturally appropriate food during some events, such as Halal products for Muslim youth, is important to help motivate them to attend and buy into programming. Attention to cultural practices shows respect and acceptance of difference that is a key element for inclusive services.

6.4 Adopt a Family-Centered Approach to Immigrant Youth Programming

In most cases youth arrive in Canada as families and settlement is in practice a “family affair” (Bauder 2019). Effective youth settlement programming, consequently, requires a family-centered approach that recognizes the family dynamics for newcomer youth and that bring in the parents to understand their needs, perspectives, and wishes. If parents are not informed, do not understand, and have no attachment to the youth services, these services will be less effective; it is thus desirable to have parent involvement, as an Ottawa settlement worker noted: “... working with parents should be going hand and hand with working with youth”. Often parents take a long time to get beyond culture shock and youth get there much quicker. This creates “struggles and pressures between the parents and the youth” (Ottawa-SW/FG1.2). This needs to be recognized. A Windsor settlement

worker's agency approached the situation in this way: "... we'll often get the families involved and we'll talk about like what your child needs and talk to the parents, and then we'll refer out. So, yeah, it could be sometimes housing issues, employment ..." (Windsor-SW1). So serving youth often means connecting parents to their own settlement service supports.

Clearly this speaks to the need for more programming centered around parents and increasing their involvement. Another Windsor settlement worker's observations are worth quoting at length:

... one of the things that we definitely would benefit from if we could is having the parents, I know language is always a barrier, but it's like taking a parenting class and only telling the parent to do all this work, ... a class where parents and youth can participate together.

I think having that inclusiveness is good because sometimes parents are like, "Why am I sending my child to this program? What are they learning from there?" because maybe they're being taken away from other responsibilities at the home.

I think within our programming if we can have a family day type of thing, where parents are able to see the accomplishments that their youth are accomplishing and getting the benefits that they're getting, I think that would be really awesome. (Windsor-SW2)

Funders should recognize the value of building a family-centric approach to youth programming and fund such initiatives. In fact, a recent OECD report notes that IRCC has moved in some of its programming toward "whole-of-family approaches to integration" with settlement support for the entire family (OECD 2019: 16).

6.5 Broaden Settlement Service Eligibility

The limitations of IRCC rules around funding eligibility are well recognized, as have been calls for its broadening (Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration 2019: 39-41). The voices of settlement workers on this are revealing:

... but our service and our mandate is for youth who have been here less than two years. So then we have these youth who fall into limbo and they're not eligible for our program. They can't really access another program. And then we just don't see them. They dropped out of school. They get a job at Tim Horton's, they get a job in a warehouse and we don't see the youth anymore (Ottawa-SW/FG1.6).

... there is not a lot available for undocumented youth and specially with younger youth that do not have a handle on immigration status or really know the details of it, there is a lot of frustration and feelings of rejection. I think that if there is something for youth, it should be for all youth as opposed to having these additional stipulations (Toronto-SW/FG1.6).

So, they look at it like, you're not going to help me? No, I want to help you, I cannot help you. But here's someone who could possibly help you and then just opening that line of communication. ...

So, unfortunately, we may not be able to provide a service, but we can definitely provide compassion, right, and sometimes that's all they really need is someone to talk to and ask questions (Windsor-SW2).

Settlement workers are well aware of the problems created by eligibility rigidities and work hard to be creative and flexible in their response with the aim of providing as much support to youth as is possible. The approach was described in the following way:

... as a settlement worker your concern is not with which box the government has decided to put someone in, your idea is to try and help that person. ... Well I'm kind of the mind-set that says my job is to help newcomers so I have my way of kind of thinking about it and eventually it'll probably cause some problems (Ottawa-SW/FG1.1).

There are clearly too many barriers based on factors such as age and citizenship status and certainly few services for non-regularized youth. This results in newcomer youth exclusions from services which greatly hinders integration. IRCC and other funders need to introduce greater flexibility regarding programing eligibility.

6.6 Importance of Social Media as an Outreach Tool

Social media involves the use of electronic communication for messaging, information sharing, and social networking. It includes applications such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Social media is the way that most youth today make connections and communicate. To be able to connect with contemporary newcomer youth, settlement agencies need to incorporate social media into their youth service and in the outreach for their programs. As a settlement worker observed:

... using social media has been a huge success. All the youth are looking at their phone right now. No matter which platform they are looking at their phone. I think that maybe development of the social media is something very important in order to make sure that our program is successful and we could have an extra channel to deliver information to them. Because I don't think they are going to read emails right now and if we are going to give them a package they are not going to read that but giving the one brief sentence in Instagram they will definitely read it and processes it in their brain (Toronto-SW/FG1.4).

While youth are generally very familiar with some social media applications like Facebook they are often in need of training in other kinds of computer software programs and in how to manage more text intensive media. Moreover, computers, cellphones, and the internet are expensive. "If you can't get a library card, you might not be able to use a computer. You might be able to check your email [only] once a month" (Ottawa-

SW/FG1.6). Hence, access to technology can be a challenge for many economically marginalized newcomer youth. Settlement agencies have computers clients can use which makes their youth centres popular among young people. Agencies need to expand their social media capacities and build programming around its use. Settlement should help to facilitate this.

6.7 The Pre-Arrival Service Advantage

IRCC has in recent years funded a new dimension of newcomer programming, pre-arrival services. These services offer some newcomers valuable information related to employment opportunities, language and skills training, “speed mentoring,” general orientation to Canada, and the availability of other settlement services in Canada. To date access to pre-arrival services has been primarily limited to adults living abroad who have been pre-approved for Canadian permanent residence status, mostly consisting of economic class migrants. Pre-arrival services are important because they offer newcomers valuable access to information about Canada before they arrive pushing forward the challenging learning process about settling into a new country and helping to increase awareness about the existence of settlement services once they arrive in Canada to increase newcomer usage of settlement services. Given the recognized advantage that pre-arrival services offer they should be expanded and promoted to include specific programming aimed at newcomer youth.

6.8 The Power of Stories

An important reflection by settlement workers involves the power connected with youth sharing their stories.

I believe in the power of sharing stories, so if an immigrant youth shares her story with other immigrant youth I think that connection is important to make because if I know you went through something that I am going through then I will find comfort in knowing that you have succeeded in facing those challenges and you came [out] successful. I believe that sharing their stories is important and that we should have platforms where they could do so (Toronto-SW/FG1.3).

Similarly, another settlement worker shared their idea of a:

... model of settlement where you train youth to be like ... ambassadors to help themselves and it works very nicely because it is not me the old guy telling you welcome to Canada, things are like this and like that, but somebody who is the same age and speaks the same language then they transmit the information ... (Toronto-SW/FG1.10).

Programming that taps into youth storytelling, consequently, can be a valuable asset to engage newcomer youth and foster their empowerment.

6.9 Youth as Unacknowledged Settlement Agents

A very telling observation that came out of our research is that newcomer youth, in effect, act as “unofficial settlement agents.” This is because they tend to be the first to gain a new language and adapt quickly to the new culture. This means that youth through their own use of settlement services often become aware of other settlement programming and they are able to relay to other members of their families and ethnic communities information and contacts regarding this.

... I think youth are the unofficial settlement agents in their communities. Within ethnic communities word of mouth is the number one source of information and with youth they always ... pick up the language faster and may get oriented faster than mom and dad. So if they are able to share settlement information with their parents, parents are in turn able to provide that information to family, friends, and neighbours. So, if we are strengthening youth capacity in the settlement, we are actually strengthening whole communities (Toronto-SW/FG1.6).

Hence, support of newcomer youth services is not simply age-specific programming but it can work to be a connector to promote broader settlement service supports to harder to reach newcomers. This speaks to the added value of newcomer youth settlement services.

6.10 Some Additional Promising Practices: Encouraging Innovation

In addition to practices indicated above, our research identified numerous other promising settlement approaches. Two examples are presented here. One of these involves the increased realization that the best way to connect youth to successful employment opportunities is to work more closely with employers.

We work with employers. We, this year, we are having two big employment partners that every one of them is leading to employment. One of them is [name of program] that is a 7-month course but at the end, most of those youth and young adults will get employment. Then we have [name of employer] who we just signed up an MOU that would be a 3-year agreement for them to support us with jobs for our refugees. So those are promising practices through our pre-employment (KI10).

A holistic approach to programming that involves all actors in the employment process is necessary. While valuable and necessary it is not sufficient to simply provide youth with more passive resume writing and interview skills. Youth benefit greatly from programming that provides direct engagement with employers who can offer mentorships, co-op, and other direct work experiences and placements. For settlement agencies this requires considerable outreach and education of employers who are too often unaware of the advantages this kind of programing can have to enhancing their own workforce and, often,

the positive publicity this can bring to their organization. Constructing settlement programming around win-win scenarios offers an enhanced pathway forward.

Another innovation is to create a program that matches newcomer youth with seniors so that youth can help and also learn from seniors. This can help boost the self-esteem of both groups while building personal outreach, intergenerational, and caring skills. It can be a valuable learning exercise for youth in better understanding their own social isolation by working with another marginalized population. As a key informant observed:

The help the youth can give is to boost their self-esteem and helps them as well. We want the youth to support seniors. Seniors is another matter that they are isolated. They get into depression. No one is paying attention to them. Um, everyone is already on their social media, whatever, and no one is helping them. So we want to match up young adults with seniors so that they can understand the elders, their needs, which at the end it will help them to grow (KI10).

The ability of the non-profit settlement sector to experiment, innovate, and take measured risks is vital to their continued relevance to newcomer settlement and a feature of the sector's resilience. The ability of these organizations to continue to learn through listening to youth and other actors in the settlement process and to flexibly adjust and adapt settlement services to changing realities on the ground speaks to the organic strengths and value of the sector and its ongoing international leadership in immigrant settlement. Funders should better recognize this innovative capacity of the non-profit settlement sector and support it through flexibility in terms of program design, by embracing managed risk and financial support to these ends.

7. CONCLUSION

Resilience is a core theme we identified at the beginning of this report. Settlement services offered through government funding by non-profit providers is a foundational support system for newcomer youth and their families. Settlement service programming helps to build individual resilience skills and competencies in newcomer youth. Collectively non-profit settlement agencies offer a host of other supports that provide necessary social resilience in support of newcomer communities. Newcomers, including youth, settle most effectively with the aid of multiple services (Shields et al. 2019). This reinforces the individual resilience within newcomer youth empowering them to be active and more effective agents in their own settlement and integration. We highlight many of the services and best practices provided through the non-profit settlement sector. We also identify areas for improvement and the need for further funder investments. Non-profit settlement agencies have proven themselves to be responsive and adaptive to newcomer needs and the changing environment in which they operate. It is important that they be properly supported by funders in order to do their jobs most effectively. This promotes non-profit agency resilience that is necessary for their ability to effectively support newcomer youth.

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