

Youth Engagement in Ethnocultural Organizations in Winnipeg

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Introduction

This report supplements a previous report, "Ethnocultural Community Organizations in Winnipeg: A Legacy Document", that was written in 2018. Collectively, the two documents explore the role of ethnocultural community groups and organizations in providing services and supports for newcomers, and particularly refugees, in Winnipeg. The legacy document was written first to serve the immediate knowledge needs of the project's community partner organization - *Immigration Partnership Winnipeg* (IPW), which is Winnipeg's Local Immigration Partnership. Findings from the legacy document informed the successful creation of the Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba in June, 2018.

The present report completes this research project by providing a more comprehensive account of the types of services, programs, and supports provided by Winnipeg's ethnocultural community groups to meet the needs of immigrants and refugees. In particular, this report focuses on the scope of immigrant and refugee youth engagement in ethnocultural community groups. Both documents are meant to inform staff at IPW as they develop initiatives to support the work of ethnocultural community groups and organizations and seek to better engage newcomer youth in their activities.

In addition to investigating the scope and scale of ethnocultural community groups' and organizations' provision of settlement services in the community, the study also explored the extent to which these services were aimed at assisting refugee families and youth. The research also examined the nature of youth engagement in ethnocultural community groups and documented initiatives in Winnipeg that reach out to refugee youth. A common concern of ethnocultural community groups is that they struggle to attract youth members and fear for the future of their organizations if youth are not better engaged. This research intended to explore the extent to which youth are engaged in such groups and what such groups are doing to reach out to young people in their communities.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- What is the scope and scale of ethnocultural organizations' provision of settlement services?
- To what extent do they perform such services for refugee families and refugee youth?
- How might they be better supported in their work?
- To what extent can refugee youth be better represented in their activities?

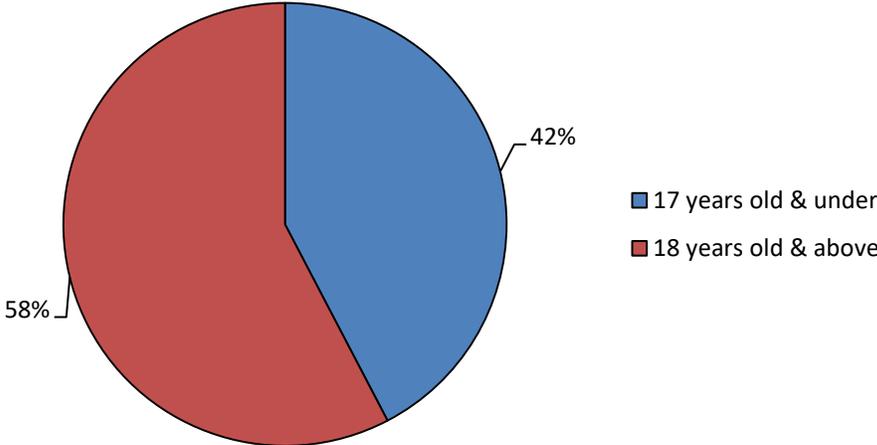
Context

Newly arrived immigrants and refugees are typically younger, on average, than the general population. For example, according to statistics released by the Manitoba government, in 2016, the median age of immigrants was 28 years while the median age of all Manitobans was 38 years

(Government of Manitoba, 2016). Of all permanent residents arriving to Manitoba between January 2015 and December 2018 (61,650), 54.9 percent are under the age of 30 (IRCC, December 31, 2018).

When focusing specifically on the refugee population, it is also evident that refugees arrive in Manitoba at quite young ages. Out of the 8,875 refugees arriving to the Province between January 2015 and December 2018, 42 percent are youth under 17 years of age (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Admissions of Resettled Refugees to Manitoba, by age group, January 2015 to September 2018



Source: IRCC, December 31, 2018

Since the Province's newly arrived immigrant and refugee populations are quite young, ethnocultural community organizations and service providers need to be in a position to attend to the specific needs of these youth and their families. However, despite the proportions of newcomer youth arriving to the Province, ethnocultural community groups do struggle to reach out to and include youth in their activities. This report focuses on documenting some of the efforts that have been undertaken to meet the needs of newcomer youth within the City of Winnipeg.

Methodology

Rooted in a community-based research approach, this project began from a research need identified by community partners at IPW. The community partners were engaged throughout the study and multiple discussions with them inform the findings. They were consulted throughout the project about their work with ethnocultural community representatives and youth and drawn on for assistance with recruitment of research participants.

The study began by conducting both a literature review and a comprehensive internet search for Winnipeg-based ethnocultural community organizations and developing a database of contact

information, website address, and details on programming and services. The literature review focused on better understanding immigrant and refugee youth engagement in ethnocultural groups across Canada while also investigating the unique challenges and experiences of newcomer and refugee youth.

In September and December 2017, two community forums were held in Winnipeg by IPW to bring together representatives from ethnocultural community groups and organizations and engage in much needed dialogue around challenges, opportunities, and experiences. The content from these forums inform the legacy document, but are also used to inform this report.

The study draws on a number of different data sources and methods as multiple methods were necessary after the initial planned data collection techniques failed to engage enough potential participants among ethnocultural community groups. An online survey using the software, Qualtrics, was distributed to 57 ethnocultural community representatives identified through contact information obtained from IPW and internet searches. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent through email. Thirteen individuals replied to the survey after repeated attempts to garner more responses.

The low response rate itself is a key research finding and demonstrates some of the struggles faced by such groups. Representatives of ethnocultural community groups and organizations are mostly volunteers with little extra time to engage in additional uncompensated activities such as research as many already work full-time jobs as they also work to support and assist members of their communities. As such, recruitment of research participants poses a challenge and necessitated revisiting the research plan. Conducting community-engaged research with busy volunteers who are devoted to ensuring the well-being of their community members is difficult and requires patient engagement over time, often necessitating changes to research plans and flexibility in project timelines.

Following the distribution of surveys, a focus group with six immigrant and refugee youth who are members of IPW's Youth Advisory Council for Newcomer Service was conducted in February 2018. The intention of the focus group was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth in Winnipeg, with a particular focus on their challenges and attitudes toward community engagement. The focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Research ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Winnipeg.

Literature Review

Settlement in a new community and new country is not a simple or straightforward experience for immigrants and refugees. When they arrive in their new community, many newcomers struggle to connect with a social network, develop language skills, navigate transportation systems, obtain adequate and affordable housing, and meet their economic needs, either through suitable

employment or social supports. Successful settlement requires wide community supports and appropriate services, both of which must attend to the specific needs that immigrants and refugees face.

Unfortunately, few studies have focused specifically on newcomer youth and their settlement experiences. In addition to the numerous challenges faced by immigrants and refugees in general, immigrant and refugee youth do face a number of unique challenges during the settlement process. Such challenges include structural factors related to racism, discrimination, difficulties finding employment, a lack of recognition of education, and financial issues, in addition to a number of personal factors related to a sense of disconnection from cultural heritage, intergenerational conflicts, and language issues (Lacroix, Baffoe & Liguori, 2014; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). They also may encounter conflicts of values, difficulties finding familial or community supports, and financial challenges directly related to their parents' struggles to secure employment or repay debts such as transportation loans (Lacroix, et al., 2014). Youth often identify employment and economic engagement as their most important concern (Kilbride & Anisef, 2001).

Although immigrant and refugee youth have difficult challenges to overcome, they also often possess a strong sense of resilience and strength. In a study of refugee and immigrant youth in Ontario, Kilbride and Anisef (2001) found that even though they do struggle with social inclusion and face difficulties in places like school and in the workplace, "they believe they will eventually overcome these problems and realize their goals" (p. ii)

One of the ways that immigrant and refugee youth can work toward overcoming the challenges they face is to connect with and be included in a supportive social network. Social isolation and exclusion can hinder newcomers' settlement process and finding a group of supportive peers builds social capital while aiding in settlement and integration. Ethnocultural community organizations and groups are often a source of such support and social capital. Through the creation of youth- and family-specific programming and supports (such as youth leadership projects, language classes, and cultural activities), ethnocultural community groups are uniquely positioned to help youth in their settlement and integration process by tailoring specific supports to address youths' needs, thereby ensuring a high level of inclusiveness (Lacroix et al., 2014).

Kilbride and Anisef (2001) found that youth who have connections to a larger ethnocultural community, or whose communities view youth as an essential part of the larger "whole," are more likely to receive the support they need to develop resilience and successfully participate (both socially and economically) in the larger society. Such communities may play a significant part of the social network for newcomer youth, who seek to situate themselves within larger support networks. Those who are still involved in the education system can often build upon this to find their own networks, and youth also identify religious and cultural groups as assisting them in building networks. However, youth who may not be able to find such networks may turn to counterproductive methods of finding inclusion, including joining gangs (Kilbride & Anisef, 2001).

A corresponding issue is the degree of civic engagement and social inclusion that immigrant and refugee youth face, which can be negatively impacted by: limited mobility and lack of access to transportation or efficient public transit systems, and dispersed settlement (whereby an ethnocultural community is not geographically concentrated in one area) (Wood et al., 2012). Connections to an inclusive and familiar community and social network are important to newcomer youth, but may be difficult to obtain during the settlement process.

Examples of Newcomer Youth Engagement

There are a number of noteworthy case studies on immigrant and refugee youth inclusion and engagement across Canada as the issues faced by youth are becoming of increasing concern in settlement and integration policies and programs. Noted below are just a few examples of some of these initiatives.

➤ **Canadian Council for Refugees' Newcomer Youth Civic Engagement project**

On a national level, the *Canadian Council for Refugees* recently created the Newcomer Youth Civic Engagement (NYCE) project, which took place between October 2017 and May 2018 (see <https://ccrweb.ca/en/youth/nyce-project>). The NYCE project was led by youth and focused on offering newcomer youth an opportunity to become leaders in their communities, with a specific task of tackling issues that affect them. The project aimed to help newcomer youth across Canada connect and engage with their ethnocultural communities. Key issues for newcomer youth were identified and the project supported youth in exploring ways to address these issues within their communities. Thirteen communities across Canada participated, with each community running their own local project centered around issues of civic engagement and often involving partnerships and collaboration with other local organizations. Over the course of the project, 449 newcomer youth participated. Some of the local projects that were part of the larger initiative included:

- *Newcomer Youth Voice* (Ottawa, Ontario): Newcomer youth used drama and video to have their voices heard, performing and showing the video to increase awareness in their community.
- *Together in Action* (Joliette, Quebec): Realizing the need for a positive and safe space, participants created a house for newcomer youth.
- *Conver-Station FM* (Montréal, Quebec): Participating youth opened dialogue with local government representatives, conducting interviews to create a provincial Francophone youth network.
- *Facing Issues and Barriers* (St. John, New Brunswick): Participants created tools to tackle problems and to reach out for help by meeting with the school boards, settlement workers, and youth workers.
- *Crossing Borders* (Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario): Participants made plans to create an English as a Second Language (ESL) Buddy System and a video to educate teachers about the struggles ESL students face in the classroom.

➤ **FCJ Refugee Centre's Youth Network**

In 2011, the *FCJ Refugee Centre*, which serves the Greater Toronto Area, identified a need to engage, work with, and better understand the experiences of refugee and precarious migrant youth. They started their youth-centric initiative by establishing a Youth Network, which brings youth together in a safe space to share their experiences and access resources. The Youth Network grew quickly and has led to other related activities for youth engagement. A Toolkit outlining the history of the initiative along with stories and experiences of refugee and precarious migrant youth and other resources for youth to access is available at:

http://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/TOOLkit_FinalPrezied.pdf

➤ **Winnipeg's Summer Youth Program**

Beginning in 2016 as a response to the arrival of Syrian refugees to Winnipeg, IPW, along with a number of other community partners, developed a Summer Youth Engagement Program for newly arrived refugee youth. Since then, the program has been held each summer throughout the months of July and August and continues to grow. In the summer of 2018, over 1,200 youth participated while 12 different ethnocultural community groups were involved in the program's planning and delivery. In addition to growing in size, the program is well-received by both participating youth and the community.

The program is designed to address a particular challenge for ethnocultural community groups, namely how to engage refugee youth when school closes for the summer and youth have few other places to go. It positively contributes to social inclusion by connecting youth to their ethnocultural communities through a variety of educational and leisure-based activities. Specific programming is developed by each ethnocultural community group or organization for youth from their communities.

The funding for the program is obtained from the Government of Canada through a competitive application process. In partnership with settlement service provider organizations, ethnocultural community groups and organizations apply for funding from the government. Once an application is successful, the settlement service provider organizations then receive the federal funding, which is accessed by ethnocultural community groups and organizations to plan and conduct their own unique programming within the Summer Youth Engagement Program. Such a structure is utilized because ethnocultural community groups and organizations often lack the organizational structure and human resource capacity to manage complex budgets, plus it enhances relationships between settlement service provider organizations and ethnocultural groups.

In addition to providing necessary youth engagement opportunities, the Summer Youth Program plays an important role within ethnocultural communities as it contributes to relationship and capacity building opportunities. The program creates a unique opportunity for ethnocultural community groups and organizations to partner with one another as they plan, manage, and facilitate it. For example, with the purposes of creating strong and competitive applications, many

ethnocultural community groups partner together to apply for funding to hold the annual event. Successful collaboration and partnership building is essential to obtaining successful funding applications and developing a positive summer camp experience for attendees. Furthermore, the program provides employment opportunities by employing youth and parents from various ethnocultural community groups and newcomer communities to run the program. Overall, this program positively impacts refugee and newcomer youth and their families, as evidenced by the growth in attendance and increased funding from year-to-year.

Findings

Given the various ways in which ethnocultural community groups and organizations were approached to contribute to this study, the findings reflect a diverse range of issues related to immigrant and refugee youth engagement. An attempt has been made to gain a broad understanding of the nature of youth engagement in existing ethnocultural community groups and organizations, how youth can be better engaged in such groups, what issues face newcomer youth in Winnipeg, and which initiatives and activities are currently being undertaken to ensure that immigrant and refugee youth are engaged and involved in community activities.

Through an online search and discussions with representatives at IPW, 84 different ethnocultural community groups or organizations were identified in Winnipeg. Since there are varying levels of formality to their online presence, it was often difficult to obtain specific information about these groups and determine their parameters or status. Some groups have well-developed websites or Facebook pages, while others were only listed on other pages and had little to no web-based presence. For some, we speculate that the contact information available online was not up-to-date. Such limitations reflect the difficulties that such organizations face in maintaining a consistent infrastructure and public profile, difficulties which may be remedied by increasing the amount of support these organizations receive.

The websites were searched for information regarding services and supports offered to immigrants and refugees, with particular attention paid to services, programs, and supports offered to youth. Of those groups and organizations identified, 31 percent offer some type of services and supports to newcomers (for ethnocultural community groups and organizations that offer services and supports to immigrants and refugees, see Appendix 1).

The programs, services, and supports offered by ethnocultural community groups and organizations are wide-ranging and include:

- drop-in services,
- information/referral services,
- assisting members on an individual basis,
- immigration assistance and information provision,
- employment referrals,

- offering sponsorship information,
- providing job listings suitable for newcomers,
- outreach programs that offer transportation to medical and legal appointments,
- providing wellness programs,
- cultural activities,
- counselling and advocacy services,
- financial support for basic needs,
- passport renewal information sessions, and
- tax information sessions.

A smaller number (17 percent) of ethnocultural community groups and organizations listed youth-specific programs and services on their websites (see Appendix 1). These programs and services were also wide-ranging and include:

- drop-in services,
- after-school programs and snack programs,
- summer drop-in programming,
- cultural events such as dance groups,
- “Moms and tots” programs,
- youth mentorship activities,
- sport and recreation programming, and
- “homework clubs” bringing youth together to work on educational activities.

Of the 13 groups that responded to the online survey that was distributed to Winnipeg-based ethnocultural community groups, three mentioned that they assist refugees and have been doing so for many years. These organizations offer counselling, information, service navigation, community connections, and other one-on-one supports to refugees. When asked about the supports they provide to refugee children and youth, only two of the three groups offer some type of services and supports to young newcomers. The supports offered focus on sport and leisure activities, in addition to providing winter clothing and toys, when necessary.

The three groups do face some challenges when serving refugees in Winnipeg. They struggle to find up-to-date information, transportation, translation, and feel that other service providers are too slow in addressing the immediate needs of refugee families.

All survey respondents were asked whether they face difficulties in engaging immigrant and refugee youth in their organization or group, with half indicating they do encounter difficulties and half indicating they do not. The difficulties are diverse, but some feel that the younger generation may not be interested in or aware of the group and its activities. Some youth may not be interested in cultural activities and therefore do not feel it necessary to join an ethnocultural community group.

In addition, some groups stated that they simply do not have the resources necessary to offer programming or services that are tailored to the needs or interest of newcomer youth.

When asked about their strategies to engage youth, survey respondents note that youth often become engaged in the organization because they arrive with their parents or are referred by family or community members. Others seek to engage youth through their programming or through cultural activities.

More generally, survey respondents were asked to identify the main issues facing newcomer youth in their community. There are many challenges outlined by respondents, with the most common being difficulties finding friends and social inclusion. Other challenges encountered by newcomer youth reflect similar issues that were identified in the literature review, which include language barriers, financial stresses, finding employment, mental health issues, and integration into a new culture. In addition, newcomer youth may face identity confusion, generational differences in values and norms, discrimination, and racism.

Survey respondents also identified potential ways to address the challenges faced by newcomer youth. Some organizations would like to work toward better connecting youth to peers and potential employers. Others believe that, as an organization, they must work with youth to identify and develop more relevant and appealing cultural programming, which involves listening to youth and ensuring they have a role to play in shaping the types of supports offered by such organizations.

IPW's Youth Advisory Council for Newcomer Service

To elaborate further on the survey data, a focus group was held with six members of IPW's Youth Advisory Council to learn more about the challenges facing immigrant and refugee youth and the extent to which they are engaged in their ethnocultural communities. All of those who participated are of a newcomer background, with some arriving as refugees and others as permanent residents. Much of the discussion focused on the myriad issues this population faces and the struggles they witness within their communities.

As part of their community engagement activities and as a way to ensure that the voices of youth were being heard, IPW formed the Youth Advisory Council, which is included as an essential aspect of their organizational and governing structure. The council consists of 11 immigrant and refugee youth from various sectors in Winnipeg who come together at least once a month to discuss issues facing newcomer youth and ways to address the challenges encountered by this population.

Individuals in the group joined the Youth Advisory Council because they have a strong desire to be involved in their communities and recognize the importance of civic engagement. They feel that it is important for newcomer youth to be connected to their community and cultural heritage as both a positive source of identity formation and a source of support. Furthermore, being engaged with one's community allows individuals to observe systemic challenges that face the community as a

whole, which then allows youth to focus their advocacy activities on those issues and have a stronger impact.

Much value is placed on bringing together youth both from within their own ethnocultural communities and from outside of their communities to build relationships and allow newcomer youth to share resources, information, and experiences. Technology has allowed youth to come together more easily, regardless of geography. As a result, youth are able to connect with one another as they can share similar experiences and extend supports to those who are struggling.

The discussion in the focus group mostly centred on the challenges faced by newcomer youth in Winnipeg. Individuals shared stories of their personal experiences with racism and discrimination and the difficulties they, along with many other newcomers, face when trying to find work or enter the job market. They also noted that immigrant and refugee youth lack representation in positions of power (such as politics, law enforcement, and in the education system), which is a serious issue as it limits sources of role models for young people. In addition, some participants discussed challenges they encounter with intergenerational differences and how their perspectives are different from and sometimes in conflict with those of their parents. There are differences in attitudes toward volunteering, civic engagement, and community involvement, which have to be navigated by newcomer youth who are interested in being advocates. Another challenge the group discussed was around cultural identity. They observe that identifying as a member of a cultural group can be a source of conflict in the lives of newcomer youth. On the one hand, youth have a desire to 'fit in' with their peers and underplay or ignore their cultural identity. On the other hand, participating in and celebrating one's cultural background can be empowering and joyful. Cultural identity, being in touch with one's 'roots', and maintaining one's language are quite important, but often get lost in youths' attempts to integrate.

The Youth Advisory Council represents an important opportunity for immigrant and refugee youth to voice their concerns, express their frustrations, share their experiences, and find ways to address their struggles. The group is very much actively engaged and interested in better understanding how youth can integrate while also holding on to their cultural identity, practices, and language in the Canadian context. As way to move forward with their activities, the group has identified economic empowerment and inclusion in the workforce as a thematic area they wish to address, as it is seen as one step toward addressing some of the issues faced by immigrant and refugee youth.

Conclusions

Ethnocultural community groups and organizations provide invaluable services to immigrant and refugee communities, and their efforts do require better documenting through research. However, they remain difficult objects of study because such groups are often operated on a volunteer basis with minimal funding to support dedicated human resources, a public profile, and organizational infrastructure. Although, the high level of participation in the two community forums undertaken as part of the early stages of this research suggest that representatives of ethnocultural community

organizations recognize the need to develop collective strategies to better improve their individual and collective abilities to serve their constituencies, including recently arrived immigrants and refugees.

We recognize that the present research is limited by the relatively small sample size obtained through survey responses. Nonetheless, the information obtained in this study provides us with a helpful starting point in being able to account for the range of ethnocultural community groups and organizations and the roles that they may play in supporting immigrant and refugee youth and their families over the course of their settlement. As the focus group demonstrated, newcomer youth do want to be engaged in initiatives that listen to their needs and value their experiences. Also, ethnocultural community groups and organizations require active youth engagement to keep their organizations vibrant and functioning into the future. The relationship between ethnocultural community groups and newcomer youth is important to foster as both groups provide mutually beneficial roles to one another. Moreover, we conclude that the settlement needs of newcomer youth and families – and, in particular, resettled refugee youth and their families – are such that they warrant further study and community responses to ensure that they are being met.

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Appendix 1

Ethnocultural community groups and organizations in Winnipeg that offer services and supports to immigrants and refugees:

- African Communities of Manitoba (ACOMI)
- Afro-Caribbean Association of Manitoba inc.
- Argentinean Manitoban Association
- Association of Pakistani Canadians
- Barbados Association of Winnipeg
- Canadian Multicultural Disability Centre
- Canadian Muslim Women's Institute
- Canadian Polish Congress
- Colombian Association of Manitoba
- Council of South Sudanese Community of Manitoba Inc
- Cuban Cultural Association of Manitoba
- Damas Peruanas en Winnipeg
- Ethiopian Society of Winnipeg
- Hindu Society of Manitoba
- Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba
- Islamic Social Services Association
- Jewish Federation of Winnipeg
- Manitoba Chinese Community Centre
- Manitoba Islamic Centre
- Manitoba Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
- Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba
- Sierra Leone Nationals Association of Manitoba-SALNAM
- Sierra Leone Refugee Resettlement, Inc.
- Spanish Club of Winnipeg
- Sri Lankan Association of Manitoba
- Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre

Those that offer youth-specific services and programs:

- African Communities of Manitoba (ACOMI)
- Afro-Caribbean Association of Manitoba Inc.
- Canadian Multicultural Disability Centre
- Canadian Muslim Women's Institute
- Damas Peruanas en Winnipeg
- Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba
- Islamic Social Services Association
- Jewish Federation of Winnipeg
- Manitoba Chinese Community Centre
- Manitoba Islamic Centre
- Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba
- Sierra Leone Nationals Association of Manitoba-SALNAM
- Sierra Leone Refugee Resettlement, Inc.
- Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre