



ISSUES CONFRONTING NEWCOMER YOUTH IN CANADA: ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR A NATIONAL YOUTH HOST PROGRAM

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Issue

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Introduction

The Host program is one of a package of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)-funded settlement programs designed to assist newcomers with their integration into Canadian life. Host helps immigrants overcome the stress of moving to a new country by matching them with volunteers familiar with Canadian ways.

The host volunteers assist newcomers by being there for moral support, directing them to available services, helping them practice English or French, including newcomers in social events, and, whenever possible, directing them to contacts in their field of work. In fact, many host volunteers are former newcomers themselves.

At the same time, the volunteers learn about other cultures and other countries, thereby providing an important knowledge link concerning the benefits of immigration.

The Host program began in 1985 in six cities across Canada. It was originally established as a series of pilot projects in response to the mobilization of community efforts to support the settlement of Indo-Chinese refugees in Canada during the late 1970s.

During that period, nearly half of the refugees to Canada were privately sponsored (CIC, 2003). Private sponsorship consisted of a group of individuals or an organization undertaking the necessary moral and financial obligations to assist the refugees they sponsored to rebuild their lives in Canada.

These refugees were provided with emotional support and friendship, as well as access to the sponsors' networks.

SUMMARY

The Host program, established in 1991, is one of a package of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)-funded settlement programs designed to assist newcomers with integration into Canadian life. It does this by matching newcomers with host volunteers who are familiar with Canadian ways. A study, commissioned by the Host Program of CIC, had as its primary objective, the development of three models of service delivery for youth within Host and Host-like programs. The models generated were considerate of the centrality of schooling in young people's lives a preventative model geared to newcomer youth identified as potentially at-risk; and a model that employed innovative strategies in order to provide a 'second chance' to newcomer youth who had experienced multiple risk factors. While service providers noted an array of promising practices, only a minority indicated that formal evaluations of them were employed.

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In those parts of Canada where direct Host program funding is possible, there are approximately 40 agencies providing services under the Host program. There are seven programs in the Atlantic region, nine programs in the Prairies-Northern Territories region, 23 programs in Ontario, and one in the Yukon.
(Authors)

In 1986, a study conducted by what was then known as Employment and Immigration Canada compared privately-sponsored refugees with government-sponsored refugees and concluded that newcomers settled more quickly when support systems were available.

Consequently, in 1988, the Host program was extended to government-assisted refugees as a pilot project. In 1991, the Host program was formally established as a fully-funded program, and the mandate was expanded to include all refugees and immigrants. Under federal-provincial agreements, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec have assumed responsibility for the design, administration, and delivery of settlement services to newcomers who settle in those provinces.

From the standpoint of this study, the three provinces in question can be said to be delivering Host-like programs

to the immigrants and refugees who settle within their borders. The study sought to evaluate the degree to which these programs are comparable to the national Host program.

Overview of the Host Program

Of all three settlement programs available to immigrants and refugees, Host is by far the smallest, receiving approximately 3 per cent of LINC's budget and 8 per cent of ISAP's budget. However, and this is important to note, Host contains two desired outcomes that clearly distinguish it from ISAP and LINC. These outcomes are:

- Host communities, including francophone minority communities, welcome and engage newcomers; and
- Newcomers of all ages and members of host communities are engaged in diverse social networks.

Flexible organizations that are funded under the Host program are expected to perform a large variety of tasks including:

- program promotion;
- screening and assessment of Host applicants;
- orientation for the Host volunteers, as well as orientation for newcomers;

- eligibility screening of newcomers;
- matching newcomers/hosts according to mutual interests;
- monitoring and support of the matches; and
- reporting to CIC regarding their financial, statistical, and program activity.

Currently, a limited number of CIC-funded Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) across the country have enhanced their Host activities to provide settlement-support services that are specifically targeted to children and youth. Other organizations provide support to children and youth on an as-needed basis through their regular Host program.

It is important to note, however, that the youth component of the Host program is not equally developed in all regions of Canada due to limited resources and the particular priorities of individual SPOs who deliver

Immigrant children may face unique settlement problems. Beyond the 'regular' difficulties that most children face, such as peer pressure, the tribulations of the teen years and academic concerns, many immigrant youth must also adjust to a new culture and language.
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settlement services and programs. While CIC has developed national guidelines for the Host program, these do not include specific guidelines to address the needs of children and youth.

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(Authors)*

The importance attributed to the re-settlement of immigrant children was recently emphasized in a report released by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The report emphasized the unique settlement problems faced by immigrant children. Beyond the 'regular' difficulties that most children face, such as peer pressure, the tribulations of the teen years and academic concerns, many immigrant youth must also adjust to a new culture and language.

Although it is commonly believed that children can acclimatize to a new environment better than adults, witnesses appearing before the Committee indicated that more needs to be done to foster the development of young newcomers and that programs specifically geared to their specific needs should be augmented (House of Commons 2003: 16-17).

Metropolis

The development of separate guidelines and principles for matching services for newcomer children and youth should be viewed as the next stage in the overall evolution of the Host program.

This can best be achieved by drawing on the strengths and experiences of SPOs that already have been involved in administering settlement services to newcomer children and youth. The greatest challenge we face is to design a national Youth program that responds to broad national goals and values, while remaining sufficiently flexible to permit successful delivery and administration across different regions and local contexts. One potential barrier to successful implementation, raised repeatedly by service providers, is the lack of adequate funding within the Host program.

Objectives of the Study

This research study, as commissioned by the Host Program of CIC, was established to explore and evaluate existing Youth Host models and activities that are being delivered across Canada. Five objectives were formulated for this project:

1. Identify the benefits and challenges within the various models as expressed by individual SPOs;

2. Identify effective practices and recommendations with regard to improving the delivery of youth activities within the Host program as expressed by individual SPOs;

3. Conduct a literature review into studies of the experiences of immigrant youth in Canada, focusing on the areas of overall health, education, employment, and social services;

4. Propose models of service delivery for youth within Host and host-like programs based on the recommendations of individual SPOs; and

5. Develop guidelines/ definitions for the youth Host program based on the proposed models recommended by individual SPOs.

*There are two desired outcomes of the Host program that distinguish it from either LINC and ISAP. Host communities should welcome and engage newcomers generally, and newcomers of all ages and members of host communities should be engaged in diverse social networks.
(Authors)*

In a recent analysis, Kunz (2005) argued that social capital (defined as networks of social relations that provide access to needed resources and supports)

could be employed as a useful framework to examine the impact of the Host program.

“... being able to function and participate in any society requires an understanding of the rules and norm, both written and unwritten that direct people’s behaviour. Cultural reciprocity, or the process of exchanging cultural cues and knowledge equally between hosts and newcomers, provides an additional important component of the foundation of integration. Many of these can not be learned in the classrooms or from textbooks. Rather they are acquired through informal communication.”
(Kunz 2005: 3, 16)

Newcomer Youth: What is Known

At the outset of the project on Youth Host Models, an extensive literature search was carried out. It built upon an existing review that had been prepared for *Managing Two Worlds: The Needs and Concern of Immigrant Youth in Ontario* (Anisef and Kilbride 2003).

The review of the literature confirmed that relatively little attention has been paid to this age group in North America, and particularly in Canada. Their needs, whether the youth arrived as very young children or as adolescents, have not been

systematically documented, nor have services for them been systematically identified.

What the review did contribute was a sense of the major issues confronting this age group, which include:

- identity development confounded by dual sources of identity when home and peer groups come from different cultures;
- language issues that arise, particularly in school;
- lack of recognition, especially for older youth, of prior learning experience;

Ontario can lay claim to the lion’s share of all newcomer youth to Canada, having in excess of 50 per cent of all age groups, followed by British Columbia with approximately 19 per cent of all age groups, and Quebec with roughly 14 per cent.
(Authors)

- conflicts in values beyond those characteristic of many adolescents, namely those between home and peer groups, as well as clashes between the values of institutions, especially those of the family and those of the school as representative of the larger community;
- differences in issues for male and female youth that are not necessarily found in all youth

experiences, but are characteristic of some cultures in particular; and

- recent increases in poverty among immigrant relative to non-immigrant groups.

The review of the literature also identified some programs that were being offered to youth in various locations in Canada. What follows is a summary of the literature that was uncovered in this project, grouped according to the most relevant categories for a study about the potential for establishing youth host programs. These categories include health and mental health, educational attainment, access to employment and economic mobility, and social services.

Health & Mental Health

Much of the literature on the health and well-being of newcomer youth has been informed by the theory of ethnic resiliency.

Steinhauer has defined resiliency as the ability to achieve unusually good adaptation in the face of severe

Many newcomers suffered from anxiety over the loss of all things familiar, and experienced varying degrees of culture shock that could cause emotional maladjustment.
(Authors)

stress and/or the ability of the stressed person to rebound to the pre-stress level of adaptation (Steinhauer 1998, 51).

Moreover, other scholars have suggested that the ability to identify with and respect one's cultural origin can both help to foster personal resilience and improve the likelihood for healthy development and integration (Beiser, Shik, and Curyk 1999).

According to the literature, the problems facing newcomer children and youth are numerous and threatening to both their physical and social development. The risk associated with maladaptive experiences is high among children from disadvantaged populations.

Most researchers consider the socioeconomic disparity between mainstream and newcomer groups as the primary determinant of negative development (Beiser, Shik, and Curyk 1999; Bertrand 1998; Fralick and Hyndman 1998; James 1997; Steinhauer 1998).

To date, the research in this area strongly suggests that adjusting to a new culture and language, as well as to new surroundings and peer expectations, is difficult to achieve without family stability and economic security. Authors

The inability to adapt successfully to the norms of society often results in problems at school, and creates a greater risk for substance abuse, delinquency, and depression.

James suggests that "the early identification of immigrant children at risk for these problems can help school personnel and health care providers plan culturally appropriate and effective interventions" (James 1997, 98).

According to Beiser (1999), data obtained from community-based samples, suggest that some newcomer children have experienced greater risk for alcohol abuse, drug addiction, delinquency, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Early intervention in the education of children has been identified in the literature as critical for the successful integration of newcomer youth because the experiences of early childhood tend to define social and behavioural patterns in youth. Clearly, there is scope for a Host program for youth to help to address many of the issues identified in this section.

Educational Attainment

The problems facing newcomer youth may be more complex than first imagined. More

A study of newcomer youth on a community college campus in Toronto showed that educational and financial concerns affected the majority of immigrant students, yet the college provided very little assistance in helping students meet those needs (Kilbride and D'Arcangelo 2000).

research is needed not only to examine how newcomer youth fare in school, but also to register their views, feelings, and sentiments about their learning opportunities, in order to identify the reasons why visible-minority youth, in particular, often show poor academic performance or drop out of school.

An American study by McDonnell and Hill (1993) indicated that older students experienced difficulty adapting because they were unprepared for the level of instruction offered in school. These researchers also pointed out that pressure from family often forced older students to drop out of school in order to find work and provide for the family.

It is evident from the review of the literature on newcomer youth that academic progress is a significant component of healthy integration. Schools can act as agents of academic and social growth, if they adopt appropriate practices designed

to help children at risk. Newcomer youth need academic support, parental and community involvement, and cross-cultural understanding of their unique circumstances and experiences.

Many of the researchers cited in this review of the literature concluded that intervention measures were necessary when unmet challenges arising from the migration and settlement process jeopardized the educational progress of such students.

Overall, research findings indicated a pressing need for “a more responsive and flexible approach to classroom instruction, to the school as a community institution with open boundaries, and to the diversity of learning needs, backgrounds and expectations in our changing population” (Anisef and Bunch 1994, 13).

[S]ome 28 per cent [of immigrant youth] claimed they had lost or left their former employment because of language problems. (Kasozi, 1986)

The conclusions and recommendations made by most researchers clearly point to the important role played by the school system in promoting settlement and integration. It is apparent that a collaborative and integrative effort must be

made in order to meet the needs of newcomer youth most effectively. Again, a Host program aimed specifically at youth could prove to be a highly beneficial initiative in addressing those needs.

Access to Employment and Economic Mobility

The report by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD 2000) exposed some of the realities facing newcomer youth when searching for employment. It is obvious that the barriers that adolescents must cross warrant further attention, but the report did not provide enough data on the needs and concerns specific to immigrant youth, such as family expectations, responsibilities at home, or a negative school environment.

Not to be underestimated in importance among some groups of newcomer youth is the role of language with regard to both employment and employability. For example, Kasozi (1986) found that some 60 per cent of the research subjects in his study stated that their accent was an obstacle in terms of both integrating into their new society and finding employment.

According to some studies, the ability of newcomer youth to obtain gainful employment can be further hampered by a “lack of meaningful support for these

newcomer youth from all angles” (Working for Youth Project). Peera (2003) identified the problem in large measure as arising from the fact that parents and community members are busy taking care of their own integration process and are, therefore, often unable to fully support their youth.

Peera noted that immigrant youth either were not informed of the existence of employment programs, or they did not feel these services would help, or they felt intimidated by them (2003).

In addition, their socioeconomic experiences and ethno-cultural background made such youth particularly susceptible to negative influences and discrimination, making it increasingly difficult for them to access resources in order to acquire the level of skills and training needed to compete in the labour market.

In their study, *Youth Employment: Canada's Rite of Passage*, the Canadian Youth Foundation used focus groups to document the experiences of Canadian youth between the ages of 15 and 29 (CYF 1995). The study sample included disparate groups of middle-class, aboriginal, immigrant, and street youth. The report revealed that most such youth saw themselves as “occupationally challenged despite their best efforts to the

contrary ... [and] they characterize themselves as demoralized job seekers with rapidly diminishing expectations” (CYF 1995: 1, 7).

The existence of a relationship between educational attainment and access to employment has been accepted by most researchers. Johnson and Peters (2003) have suggested that schools need to be flexible and adaptable in order to accommodate the unique needs of immigrant youth.

Thus, it is evident from this review of the literature that many newcomer youth need assistance with the transition from school to work. Researchers examining the economic opportunities for immigrant youth clearly point to the need for more flexibility in the system in order to respond to the needs, concerns and experiences specific to newcomer youth. A properly structured youth Host program could help to foster a smoother transition from school to the work place for newcomer youth.

Social Services

A greater proportion of the programs offered by service providers have tended to focus on adult newcomers; nevertheless, it has become increasingly important for these organizations to respond to the needs and concerns of

newcomer children and youth as well. Younger immigrants need assistance from many angles in order to adjust successfully and become full participants in Canadian economic, social, and political life.

Trust, support, intimacy, interactive relationships, mutual understanding, positive self-feelings, and feelings of spontaneity with friends from the same culture have been mentioned as the most important factors that fulfill and increase the participants' social needs, security, and self-esteem. (Seat 2003)

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) has identified four spheres of settlement and integration where service providers should focus their efforts:

- economic integration, which includes acquiring skills, entering the job market, and achieving financial independence;
- social integration, which includes establishing social networks and accessing institutions;
- cultural integration, which includes adapting various aspects of lifestyle and engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity; and

- political integration, which includes citizenship, voting, and civic participation (CCR 1998 18).

According to the CCR, it is essential that service providers direct their program delivery to these areas of integration. Newcomer youth may need assistance with language acquisition, cultural orientation and acceptance, building community networks, and accessing employment in order to achieve full participation in Canadian society (CCR 1998, 10).

Prior to gaining access to the potential services suggested by immigrant youth, making them aware of the services available should be a major focus for service providers.

According to several studies, youth felt strongly that they would benefit from various networking programs, and that job matching, mentoring, or co-op experiences should be a priority in order to overcome the barriers they typically must face as they try to adapt to life in Canada. (Authors)

Furthermore, it has been deemed crucial for immigrant youth to become more involved in the provision of social services, as they are the most important source for understanding their own needs.

Schools and community centres have been targeted by several researchers as potential key information hubs which should be utilized for both the promotion and administration of such services. (Authors)

Models for Delivery to Newcomer Youth in Host & Host-Like Programs

In this study, the researchers examined Host and Host-like programs across Canada to identify models or activities that were offered to newcomer youth. The benefits and shortcomings of these models were chronicled and described in order to discover promising practices as explained by the representatives of the SPOs. This collection of Host and Host-like models provided the needed information for generating three models for youth Host programs.

These models were based on both a distillation of essential (promising) characteristics identified during the course of this study and on a number of assumptions or insights, some of which had been derived from literature relating to settlement service models, 'best practices,' and youth development programs.

Model 1: Based on the Centrality of Schooling

A youth Host model, working in partnership with schools, could infuse schools with positive energies that would be beneficial to both newcomer children/youth and non-immigrant students and staff within the schools.

The research studies that we have conducted previously in this area have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of listening to what newcomer youth tell us they need. Among the things most consistently requested by youth have been counseling and support services, welcoming and reception centres, assessment services, mentoring and peer tutoring programs.

Assessment services are critical to determining appropriate school placement and mentoring and peer tutoring would reduce isolation and the risk of dropping out.

Newcomer children and youth have expressed a need for assistance in understanding Canadian culture, and they also want this culture to understand

The first and most important institution encountered by most newcomer children and youth upon their arrival in Canada is the school. (Authors)

them – not simply with tolerance, but a real open mindedness by school community members. The matching component of the Host program, be it individual or group, is ideal for accomplishing this task.

One important example of a youth Host model that employs schools as sites of contact and engagement is the Buddy program. Buddy programs are intended to promote positive peer interaction and increase adaptation and eventual integration among newcomer students.

Ross and Roberts reported on a growing body of evidence which indicates that as family income falls, the risks of poor developmental outcomes, in terms of children's health, behavior, learning, and socialization rises (1999).

Model 2: A Preventative At-Risk Model

Through exposure to multiple risk factors, certain newcomers often feel especially marginalized and socially excluded. Included here are children and youth who are failing in school or at risk of dropping out of school, and the youth who find it difficult to make effective transitions from school to employment. The

challenges faced by these more vulnerable youth are often grounded in socio-economic disadvantages, and include stressors such as lasting trauma, poverty, discrimination, and unemployment.

Ethnic-specific service provider agencies, in partnership with mainstream organizations (for example, pre-schools, daycares, elementary and secondary schools, and health clinics) could serve as reception centres for newcomer immigrant families. Then, with the help of culturally-sensitive counselors, the specific needs of newcomer children and youth (such as language skills, literacy, and therapy to deal with culture shock and traumatic refugee experiences) could be assessed.

In addition, such programs [Host programs] can help resident youth learn about and appreciate newcomer youth from diverse cultures.
(Authors)

Part of this assessment would consist in the identification of multiple risk factors. This process should take place in consultation with parent(s) or guardians. If a newcomer child or youth is identified as possessing multiple risk factors, specific procedures should be employed to appropriately match them with specific

individual and/or group modes of delivery.

Model 3: Targeting At-Risk Newcomer Children and Youth

Efforts to reach at-risk youth cannot remain passive. Rather, more aggressive efforts to deliver information and services that will enable newcomer youth to surmount the obstacles that exclude or marginalize them should be pursued.
(Authors)

The lack of awareness about information on available social services is a serious problem for all newcomers, and it is especially problematic for newcomer youth who are at-risk.

Information about programs that provide opportunities for a ‘second chance’ – including returning to school to complete high-school equivalency qualifications, employment skills programs, mentoring programs, placement services, and counseling programs to resolve lasting traumas – must be made available and publicized so that ‘hard-to-reach,’ at-risk youth can learn of their availability.

This will require the development of innovative programs for disseminating relevant information and providing immediate support services that would make use of

information that is palatable to newcomer youth at risk.

Conclusions

The results of our study strongly suggest that a separate Youth Host program would provide an effective response to the present (and future) challenges that are faced by newcomer children and youth.

The Host program has, itself, undergone a number of significant changes since its inception in 1985, namely, its extension to government-assisted refugees in 1988, and to all immigrants and refugees in 1991 (CIC 2003). We would argue that the development of separate guidelines and principles for matching services for children and youth should be viewed as the next logical stage in the overall evolution of the Host program.

This can best be achieved by drawing on the existing strengths and experiences of SPOs in administering settlement services to these age groups.

The greatest challenge in designing a national Youth Host program will be to ensure that it will respond to broad national goals and values, and yet remain sufficiently flexible to meet regional or local demands.
(Authors)

Finally, the consequences for newcomer youth who slip between the cracks, be it via low-paying jobs in non-challenging areas of work, substance abuse, early school leaving, or gang activities, are not positive for them or for the larger Canadian society – where the costs can be measured in such things as the loss of talent, or human capital, and the expenditures that become necessary to deal with ‘social problems.’

A very large proportion of the service providers who responded to our survey* were found to offer services to children and youth, but they also indicated that many of these programs were either under-funded or not funded, which serves to underscore the recognition that these services are sorely needed. Adequate funding, however, must be accompanied by programs tailored to the specific needs of newcomer children and youth if they are to be effective.

These interrelated objectives are proposed to address the issues raised in this study:

1) A much stronger focus on, and acknowledgment of, the needs and challenges currently being faced by newcomer children and youth;

2) Specific programs for children and youth within Host

and perhaps other existing settlement programs; and

3) Sufficient funding to design, implement and evaluate such programs.

Notes:

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http://ceris.metropolis.net/frame_set_e.html

*** A survey of 80 SPOs in Host and Host-like programs across Canada was conducted by this study in 2005.**

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