

HOST Program Review

The HOST program provides newcomer youth with the support, skills and training they need during the settlement and acculturation process. The program aims to help new residents adapt to life in Canada by matching them with volunteers who will help them carry out supportive activities. Program staff provide helpful links in the community through outings to community resources and inviting in guest speakers. Level 3 provides a safe space for newcomer youth to socialize, talk about issues affecting their lives, learn from each other and have fun.

The program was broken down into two cycles of participants. The first cycle of youth began the program in Fall 2008. Activities they participated in focused on leadership, academic success and employability skills. There was a lot of time spent on team building activities and some guest speakers were brought in to introduce the youth to post secondary institutions.

Program Successes

Given that this was the first year of the program, there were many successes to note. The first was strong support on the project Advisory Committee. Since EMYS has enjoyed a plethora of partnerships with youth-serving agencies, we had representation on the Committee from a variety of organizations. While one organization that serves young immigrants in schools bowed out of the Committee and subsequent support, which placed some barriers in terms of recruitment, over time, the program has recruited many young people facing the challenges of immigration and settlement. In fact, as noted below, 13 youth have graduated and all 16 spots for the next phase of the program are full.

Another success to note is the active involvement of the HOST youth in Level 3 programming. The youth quickly started utilizing the drop in times to come in on a daily basis outside of programming time to play pool, video games or explore Studio 2. A number of HOST youth attended the Level 3 Holiday Party that engaged youth from all Level 3 programming. The first cycle also took it upon themselves to begin a Facebook group which now has grown to 46 members from the community.

Program Challenges

Program outreach to the Somali, Afghan, Phillipino and Pakistani communities has been a challenge. There are no program participants representative of these communities and this is clearly an area of focus for the program if it moves forward with the funding.

Language barriers are evident in the second cycle of youth participants. Program staff are having to translate often for youth participants who speak Tamil.

Program Changes

The ADAPT program has experienced staffing changes. The program coordinator and one of the program assistants left the agency as the program began rolling out. We were however able to successfully fill the program assistant position relatively quickly.

It quickly became evident that CIC had funded a number of service providers to engage newcomer youth across the city. EMYS staff have worked very hard at establishing

relationships with other service providers in an attempt to understand best practices and share knowledge.

ACCESS Alliance contacted program staff to inquire about a new initiative. They are looking to understand challenges faced by Newcomer Youth and they are doing research to understand these challenges. At the end of the research, modules will be created based on the feedback to serve as a resource and guide to servicing newcomer youth, translated in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and distributed to programs who contributed to the project. This is a great initiative.

HOST program staff are working with St. Christopher's House to create a youth forum for newcomer youth using variety of media arts, including spoken word and art, to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences about being a newcomer to Canada. This is scheduled to happen by the end of March 2009.

Client Statistics

The first group graduated in January 2009 with 13 participants. All the youth continue to be engaged in the program, and will be receiving formal mentorship training over the next few weeks and they will be matched with youth currently in the second cycle. The second cycle of the program is filled with 16 registered participants.

The majority of youth served by the program are Indian, Tamil and Chinese. 14 were Gujrati speaking. 4 Tamil speaking, 2 Indian, 8 Chinese youth. Average age of the youth is 16 years of age. Majority of first cycle had been in the country one year or less. They had heard of the program through their friends. The second cycle has been in the country less than 4 months. They learned about the programs through the ISAP parent groups, other service providers such as South Asian Family Services, and friends. In the first cycle there was a majority of male participants, the second cycle is dominated by female participants.

Aggregate Data

The program evaluation shows strong results. At the beginning and end of the first round of the program, an evaluation was created to measure changes from the program in areas such as skill building. There were 10 questions in all, asking the participants to strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree with statements about the program. The findings were so positive that there was not one question that elicited a disagree or strongly disagree response. The findings are broken down as follows:

Question	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The program helped me with my English skills	40%	60%
2. The program gave me skills to feel more comfortable at school	33%	67%
3. The program helped me know more about Toronto	60%	40%
4. The program gave me more information about other programs available to me	80%	20%
5. The program gave me the skills to help me get a job	60%	40%
6. The program gave me skills to deal with challenges	40%	60%
7. The program made me feel welcomed	44%	56%
8. The program helped me discover my interests, strengths and skill	22%	78%

9. The program helped me to feel comfortable as a member of Canadian society	56%	44%
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The evaluation also asked participants to note the things they liked best and least about the program. In terms of what they liked best, there were a total of 18 responses, with the most common response being workshops at 44%. 39% liked the outings the best. In terms of what they like the least, the participants only offered 6 responses in total. 2 noted the YMCA (physical activity), 1 stated workshops, 1 outings, 1 timing of workshops and the other the short duration of the program. Overall these responses confirm that the participants enjoyed and gained a great deal from the program.

Future Directions

One of the challenges outlined above was the capacity to connect with certain ethno specific groups, such as Somali, Philipino, Afghan and Pakistani. This indicates that program staff will be more active in connecting with other service providers who have established relationships within these communities, in an attempt to engage them in programming. Program staff will also work more closely with the DIAS worker to better understand and support the Afghan community.

The HOST program has brought a new energy to VIP and Level 3. The capacity to service Newcomer youth in violence prevention has brought many unexpected benefits to the space and the program. The focus on diversity and newcomer youth has served all VIP programs well, and moving forward we are hopeful that CIC will continue the funding so that we can intensify our work in the newcomer community.