

this could be the start

of something big





MENTORING NEWCOMER YOUTH IN CANADA: An Evaluation of the Conversation Club

Susan Nomi, BSW, Director of Programs, BBBS of Peel

Julia Pryce, Ph.D. & Michael Kelly, Ph.D.

Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work

Nooreen Pirbhai, MSW, National Inclusion Advisor, BBBS of Canada



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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Introductions
- Canada and Immigration
- Breakout Session
- History of Conversation Club
- Overview of Results from Evaluation
- Limitation and Implications of Evaluation
- Video from Conversation Club
- Perspective of Staff
- Group Discussion and Conclusion





Canada and Immigration



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Canada and Immigration

- **One out of 5 people in Canada's population is foreign-born.**

- In 2011, 94.8% of Canada's foreign-born population lived in four provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and Alberta.



Canada and Immigration

- **1.2 million new immigrants arrived in Canada between 2006 and 2011.**
- Immigrant children aged 14 and under who came in the last five years accounted for 19.2% of the newcomer population, and another 14.5% were between the ages of 15 and 24.

Source: Statistics Canada: 2011 National Household Survey



Canada and Immigration

Following current trends, projections show an **annual increase of 380,000 to 400,000** new immigrants to Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada

In 2015-2016, Canada saw **over 30,000** Syrian refugees settle in over 300 communities across the country. Currently there are an additional 19,000 applications being processed.

Source: Government of Canada;
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp>





Breakout Activity



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Breakout Activity

Think about your community context.

Share with a partner what you think the needs of newcomer children and youth are in that context, and how you are seeing those needs currently addressed (or not).





History of Conversation Club



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Peel Region Context

One of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in Canada; :

- Immigrants comprise 50.5% of Peel's population.
- The racialized population sits at 56.85% of the region's total population of 1,289,015
- Peel's immigrant populations grew by 32.1% from 2001 to 2006 and immigrants account for roughly 80% of the growth.
- 33% of immigrant families live below the poverty line in Peel and 41.6% of Immigrants were youth- ages of 5 to 24.

Source: 2006 Census & 2011 National Household Survey





History of Conversation Club

- Partnership with a settlement agency – The Centre for Education and Training – started in 2008
- Key to newcomer youth recruitment; relationships with newcomer families; trusted and safe program location
- Expanded to the schools in 2011 through existing partnerships with the local school boards
- Currently offer 10 programs with 2 settlement partners, a library and 4 middle and secondary schools;
- Serving 180 newcomer youth per year
- Partnership development was essential in reaching newcomer youth!



Conversation Club - Program Description

Program Values

- Respect,
- Inclusion;
- Appreciation for all cultures & diversity;
- Youth engagement & youth voice



Conversation Club – Program Description

Program Goals

- Build confidence and sense of belonging through mentoring relationships with established youth
- Practice English language conversation skills in a safe, encouraging environment; strengthen presentation and small group work skills
- Opportunities for social integration and friendship with youth from other cultures and backgrounds; cultural sharing & celebrations
- Build leadership skills through youth engagement & youth voice





Key Components of the Conversation Club

Site-based Group Mentoring Program

- Newcomer youth ages 12-18
- Volunteer Mentors ages 18-24 (post-secondary age)
- Weekly program meetings of mentors and newcomer youth facilitated by program staff; informal, relaxed; safe & fun
- Program staff - passion for working with youth; youth engagement skills & understanding of issues facing newcomer youth





Key Components of the Conversation Club

- “Shared authorship” approach – youth have input in program planning & leadership of activities
- “Get to know your group” – focus on relationship building and developing a sense of community;
- Activities – ice breakers; hot topics; games; team-building activities, group projects, field trips



Context for Evaluation and Expansion

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada recognized the success of the Conversation Club in Peel Region in engaging newcomer youth in mentoring relationships.
- Decision in 2013 was made to conduct a formal Program Evaluation to assess the outcomes of the program with a view to expand the program to other communities across Canada.

Three year evaluation was generously funded through the
RBC Foundation





Conversation Club: A Three Year Evaluation



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Primary Aim of Evaluation

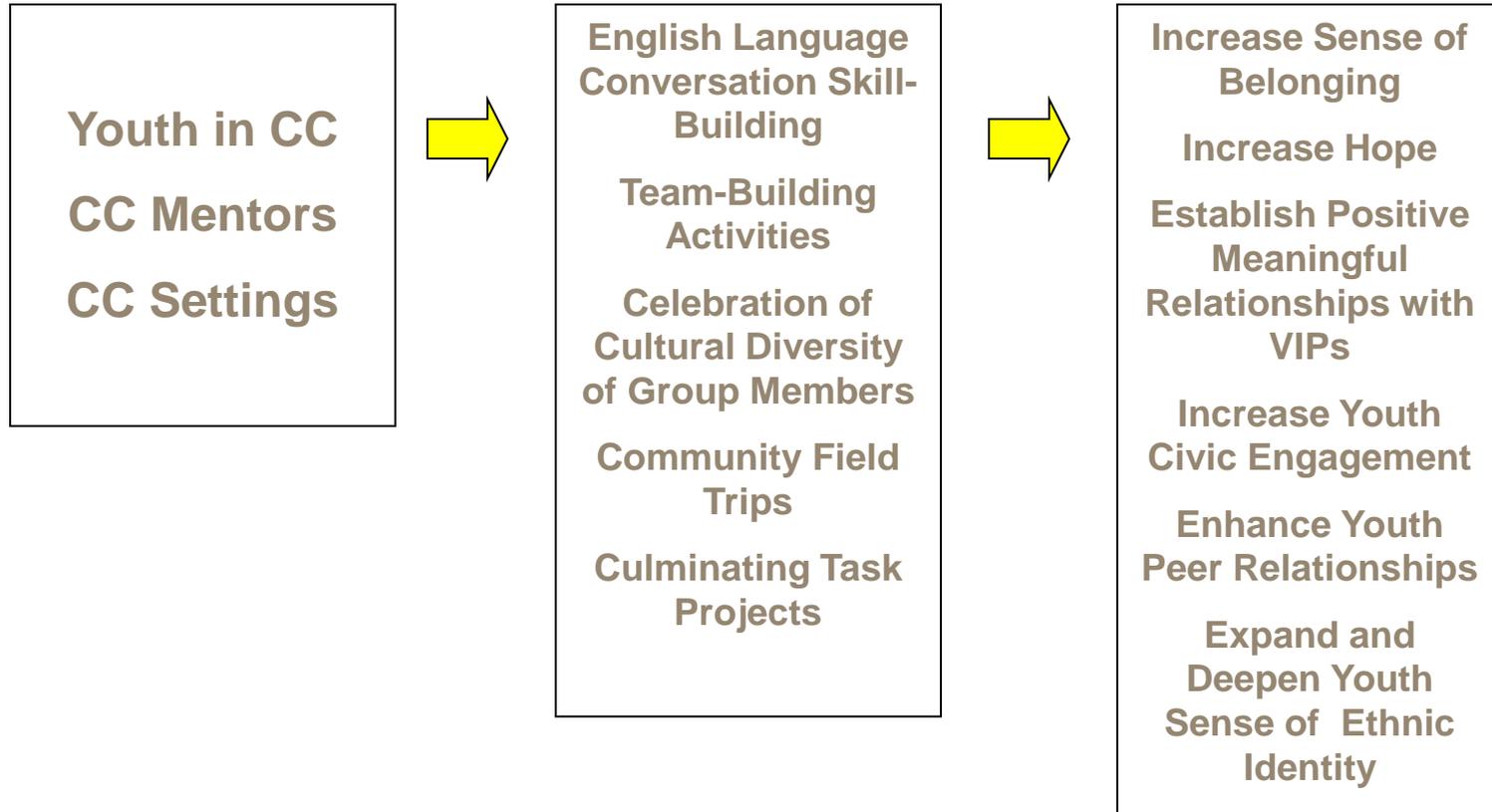
- To assess CC's impact on newcomers in regards to the following factors:
 - Hope (Hope Scale)
 - Belonging (Perceived Cohesion Scale)
- To use process data to understand how program leaders and participants experienced adoption at new sites
- To further inform future efforts of CC implementation by interviewing youth from the sites



Conversation Club

Basic Logic Model

Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes





Evaluation Process: Year 1

- CC youth (n=67) formed in groups and consents for evaluation were gathered by Peel team
- Comparison group (n=25) recruited by Peel team in collaboration with school faculty and staff
- Questionnaire administered at pre- and post-test over the 2013/14 school year
- Interview guide created and in-depth interviews conducted by team with CC youth (n= 13)



Data Analysis

- Pre-/Post-test data delivered to Loyola and entered into SPSS for analysis (T-tests for significance)
- Each of the 4 scales analyzed separately to determine how CC sample compared to comparison group in terms of key evaluation research questions
- Interview data transcribed and analyzed for key themes, particularly as related to key questions



Conversation Club Increased Newcomer Civic Engagement

Findings from **Sense of Community Scale** (Cicognani et al., 2012).

All repeated measure one-tailed t-test findings, significant at $\alpha=.05$ $df=66$

Comparison group NS difference

Emotional Connection with Peers

“I think I have a lot in common with other young people that live here;”

“There are people in my community who represent an important source of moral support for me;”

“In my community, it’s not difficult to find someone that can give some advice, if I have to make some decisions.”



Conversation Club Increased Newcomer Sense of Belonging

Findings from *Sense of Community Scale* (Cicognani et al., 2012).

- All repeated measure one-tailed t-test findings and were significant at $\alpha=.05$ $df=66$
- Comparison group NS difference

Emotional Connection to Community

“This is a beautiful community.”

Sense of Belonging to the Community

“As compared to others, my community has many advantages”

“In my community, there are many places loved and appreciated by people who live here.”



Conversation Club Increased Newcomer Hope

Findings from *Children's Hope Scale* (Snyder, 1997). All repeated measure one-tailed t-test findings and were significant at $\alpha=.05$ $df=66$
Comparison group NS difference

Agency for Hope

“I think I am doing pretty well.”

“I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.”

Pathways to Increasing Hope

“I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.”



What we didn't find...

- Gender, time in Canada, time in CC, Immigration status, and CC site location had **no** statistically significant impact on findings
- Comparison Group/CC findings: NS for Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure between CC and comparison group (only group that scored higher at post-test were CC youth 11-14)
- Many scores on the scale questions started at pre-test at a high level for the CC and stayed high



Additional considerations that emerged from qualitative data

- Core role of English language learning
- Importance of peer relationships and social support (“I have friends now”)
- Access to community as sense of hope
- Potential transformation of perspective

“It was surprising at first, because I thought to be friends we have to have things in common, like big things, religion and culture... but then I realized it doesn't have to be religion, can be something else. Like *how you look at people*. It doesn't have to be the culture. That's what makes me... like, have friends now.” (Alexandra)



Expansion of the Conversation Club: Year 2 & Year 3

Three locations in Ontario:

- ✓ Peel Region – original location and program founder
- ✓ York Region
- ✓ Ottawa



Primary Aim of the 2014 -15 Program Evaluation

- To evaluate CC's impact on newcomers in regards to the following factors:
 - Hope
 - Belonging
 - Enhanced sense of ethnic identity
 - Sense of social support
- To collect process data in order to analyze how program leaders and participants experienced adoption of new locations
- To interview CC leaders from new sites in order to inform future efforts of CC implementation



Findings

- Conversation Club increased newcomers' sense of hope.
- Conversation Club increased young people's sense of belonging to both CC and to Canada.
- There was no significant change in ethnic identity and social/emotional support.



Findings (continued)

- Feedback from process evaluation data suggested a high level of enjoyment overall by participants across sessions and across sites.
 - The most well-liked sessions included outdoor/physical games, field trips, and competitive games involving Canadian trivia.
 - ***Activities: Staff (and youth!) seem to be stressing that physical activity is an important component of the program for youth and they are trying to incorporate it more. This is a little problematic for me as this strays from the real objectives of the program. I wonder if it is taking away from discussions/games about Canada and their communities and time for general conversation to informally practice English language skills together. I think further discussion will be needed here as well as I'm worried this will set a precedent for this coming year.***



Results from Year 3 of Evaluation

- Participation from Conversation Club members of Peel, York, and Ottawa (N=120)
 - Completed questionnaire:
 - Demographic data
 - Sense of belonging, hope for the future
- CC participants from York and Ottawa completed brief evaluations of group sessions
 - Level of fun/enjoyment as well as open-ended feedback on highlights of session and what could be improved
- 18 participants participated in open-ended interview about experience





Demographics of Conversation Club Youth

- 120 youth completed baseline and follow up measures
- 53 (44.2%) male, 67 (55.8%) female
- Average age was 14.8 years (range in age from 11-19)
- Average time reported living in Canada was ~27 *months*
 - 86.7% were permanent residents of Canada
- Average time involved in CC was 10.25 months
- 33 countries represented in this group





Findings from Outcome Evaluation

- Paired t-test analysis revealed that CC youth reported **statistically significant changes on the Children's Hope Scale (CHS) at post-test** on 4 out of the 6 specific items related to **hope**



Findings from Outcome Evaluation

- **Conversation Club increased young people's sense of belonging to both CC and to Canada**



Paired t-test analysis revealed that CC youth reported a strong connection to the Conversation Club group mentoring intervention and to their new home, reporting statistically significant change over time on the Perceived Cohesion Scale (PCS).



Findings from Process Evaluation

- Feedback from process evaluation data suggested a **high level of enjoyment overall** by participants across sessions and across sites.
 - Out of a total of 101 ratings by CC youth from October 2015-June 2016, a very strong picture emerged of the strengths of the CC program.
 - 79.2% of the responses rated the CC sessions as 4 (“very good”) and 12.9% of the remaining responses were in the “good” category, meaning that for York and Ottawa, 92% of the sessions were positive for the youth involved.



Participant Perspectives: Qualitative Interviews

Across the **18 interviews** conducted with Conversation Club participants at the end of the program year, several themes emerged:

- **Conversation Club increased newcomer's sense of hope and belonging**
- **Conversation Club increased newcomer's English communication skills**
- **Relationships with mentors and program staff were crucial**



Participant Perspective: Qualitative Interviews

Conversation Club increased newcomer's English communication skills

“Um, when you hear people talking in the language that you're not really familiar with, you start to learn. And you take chances, you start to talk to people, even though you're not perfect, but you get perfect. That's what I learned from Conversation Club.” (Aliyah)



English communication skills

“There’s a lot of changes that I’ve seen and, I would say that one would be, uh, how to talk to people. Yeah. ‘Cause for me, like, my first time here at school, I never talk to anyone. It was only teacher. And then I was shy. And then I didn’t want to talk to people or students, because my aunt taught me that, uh, when, if I come to this school, there is a lot of students, and those students are dangerous, and so I don’t need to be interested in them or talk to them. So I have to be scared of them. So when I come, I join this group, they start teaching me good stuff which helps me, which gives me the word of discovering friends, of knowing how to be, ya know, nice to people. Yeah. So. I would say the key for me to talk to people, it was Conversation Club, because that’s where I began. That’s where I started.” (Daniel)



Participant Perspective's: Qualitative Interviews

Conversation Club increased newcomer's sense of hope and belonging

“This club is very nice; there is no discrimination. People don't judge you on the basis of your looks or your caste or your background.

Like, it's just, everyone is, uh, everyone is just, has this experience to share how they feel and they're encouraged to, like, express themselves, don't feel left out.”

(Emmanuel)



– “And when I joined Conversation Club, I feel like I’m not the only one, ya know. There are others and whereby, like, everyone is maybe interested in what I will say that or words or mistake, everyone like, people are interested in meaning, not mistakes.” (Rachel)



Participant Perspectives: Qualitative Interviews

Relationships with mentors and program staff were crucial

- “They’ll just talk and they’ll help you, they’ll ask about school, how’s it going, then, like, they’ll talk more about their experience when they were at school. And then, ya know, they’ll just relate it and try to help you and give you advice and stuff. And even now, like, sometimes we talk about, like, fitness with one of the adults there.” (James)



“At first I joined Conversation Club, [program staff] was like a teacher to me. But now, like, more than a teacher, she’s like a friend. She’s more than a teacher, she’s a friend to me. She just tells what is good and what is bad. And that’s the only reason that we got more students here, ‘cause it’s better than other organizations because my mentor, like, she is really good, she never yells at us. So it makes other students to feel comfortable and better, like they don’t have to be scared of getting yelled at.” (Manish)



Limitations of the Evaluation

- There was missing data (i.e., 15-20 youth out of a total of 120 had missing data for some questions, and there was no process data available from Peel for this year).
- More research is needed on CC, both in terms of a larger sample in the CC groups as well as having a comparison group, preferably one that is randomly assigned to a control condition.



Limitations of the Evaluation

While this study shows some positive outcomes, there are as always important limitations to bear in mind in interpreting results.

- The sampling plan represented a convenience sample of the youth that agreed to participate in York, Ottawa and Peel, and does not include any comparison groups that could more fully show the impact of CC on its participants.



Impact of Conversation Club on Newcomer Youth

- Results of evaluation suggest that participating in Conversation Club:
 - positively impacts students' feelings of hope and belonging to the group and to Canada
 - positively increased newcomer youth's sense of civic engagement
- Students report a high level of enjoyment across sessions and sites



Impact of Conversation Club on Newcomer Youth

- Leaders and staff reported strong investment in the program and a desire to work with newcomer youth
- Our evaluation shows promise that Conversation Club is distinct from other institutions in these children's lives





Questions?



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Conversation Club Staff Experience

“I have gone through the refugee and immigration process twice in my life and I have gone through the challenges of settling into a new country, learning a new language and adapting to the new environment and culture. The newcomer youth I work with really benefit from our program. It is a safe environment where they can voice their opinions and concerns and know that they have the support of the staff and their mentors. I see the newcomer youth positively transition into their new community, getting more involved in their schools, getting accepted to post-secondary education, getting a job and most importantly gaining the confidence to make new friends. I witness the positive changes in the newcomer youth, building new relationships, gaining confidence to take part in the group activities & field trips and expressing their viewpoints and ideas for making the program youth-led. Witnessing this on weekly basis for me is the most rewarding part of my role.” - Zuhail



Conversation Club Staff Experience

“Being a Caseworker with the Conversation Club gives me the privilege to work with diverse youth and learn about their cultures, countries and experiences in moving to Canada. It has been a wonderful experience to see the youth naturally become mentors themselves. At some point they start to encourage newcomers to join, take initiative to lead activities, translate for peers, and motivate shyer youth to ‘just try’ new things. It is their shared experience of what it is like to be a newcomer that helps to create a safe and supportive environment.” - Danielle



Ingredients for Success

- ✓ Strong relationships with Partners – settlement organizations and/or schools; ongoing communication
- ✓ Value of school setting
 - ✓ newcomer youth recruitment
 - ✓ support to families
 - ✓ safe space
 - ✓ accessible
- ✓ Understanding newcomer populations in your community; needs, challenges, gaps in service, values & celebrations



Ingredients for Success

- ✓ Youthful age of mentors – (age 18-24); with their own immigration experience
- ✓ Youth-centered program; youth engagement & voice!
- ✓ Language & diversity of staff; flexible & youth-focused
- ✓ Staff Training in working with newcomer & refugee youth; impact of trauma on youth



Cautions and Challenges

- “Do no harm” – important that program staff facilitate and monitor the group dynamics; reinforcing positive, supportive interactions and respect; vulnerable population of youth
- Partnership development can be a slow process as trust builds; proactively communicate and recognize contributions regularly; transitions in partner staffing will impact program; be ready to engage new staff actively in partnership
- Newcomer youth recruitment - Creatively plan newcomer youth recruitment with partners; community events, classroom presentations, Open Houses; “elevator speech” to new families



Conclusion

- Results of evaluation suggest that participating in Conversation Club:
 - positively impacts students' feelings of hope and belonging to the group and to Canada
 - Enhances newcomer youth's English skills
 - Students report a high level of enjoyment across sessions and sites
- Leaders and staff reported strong investment in the program and a desire to work with newcomer youth
- **Our evaluation shows promise that Conversation Club is a group mentoring intervention that is poised to be scaled up to use across different sites serving newcomer youth in Canada**



Next Steps for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

Given the success of the three-year evaluation, over the next year, BBBS, in collaboration with BBBS



Peel, will be developing a plan to roll-out the Conversation Club to Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies who see the need for newcomer mentoring programs in their communities. This

will include: the completion of a program manual and development of a Community of Practice.





Potential Discussion Questions (time permitting)

- **Based on these findings, what challenges do you anticipate in successfully offering a program like this to newcomer youth?**
- **What else would you wonder about adding to the intervention to build it further?**
- **What barriers do you see to scaling this program up to be offered across Canada? How might these be addressed?**



Newcomer Mentoring Resources

Ontario Mentoring Coalition - Toolkit of Effective Mentoring for Youth Facing Barrier to Success

<http://ontariomentoringcoalition.ca/mentoringyouthfacingbarriers/tailored-mentoring-for-youth-with-specific-needs/newcomer-youth/>

Alberta Mentoring Partnership – Tools for Mentoring Newcomer and Refugee Children and Youth

<http://albertamentors.ca/tools-research/>

MENTOR

<http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/mentor-resources-and-publications/>





Thank you!

The Conversation Club Evaluation was
generously funded by:



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