

Title: Missing Links: Youth Programs, Social Services, and African Youth in Metro Vancouver

Author(s): Jenny Francis

Contact: jenois@telus.net

WP Number: 10-07

Research Questions:

Do existing youth programs and social services meet the needs and concerns of African youth and their families in Metro Vancouver? If not, how can services be better coordinated to overcome the challenges they identify?

Importance:

Compared to adults, youth face unique challenges, yet there is a lack of targeted programs aimed at meeting their needs. By providing an overview of the challenges African youth and their families face, and identifying gaps in available services, the study findings can be used to improve existing policy and service provision.

Research Findings:

For many African youth, the challenges of trying to navigate a new country, culture, and language are overlaid with discrimination, family separation, low incomes, and refugee status. These complex stresses affect family stability, housing, employment, education, and personal well-being. Under- and unemployment is pervasive. Additionally, youth must integrate into a new school system and are vulnerable to negative influences as they try to “fit in.” At the same time, gaps in service provision result in interruption of services for vulnerable clients and may create a sense of mistrust among African youth and parents. Some African youth are consequently left without the supports they need to thrive.

Abstract:

This paper provides an exploration of African youths’ access to integration and settlement resources by examining their relationships with organizations serving youth in Metro Vancouver. The main finding is that a series of missing links exists between African youth and information and resources related to employment, education, and social services, as well as among service providers themselves. This may lead to mistrust among parents and youth in relation to settlement and social service organisations, and underrepresentation of African youth in programs that could help them settle in Canada. The author suggests the need for a better coordinated service approach, arguing that integrated services should be available throughout youths’ settlement and integration processes.

Implications:

The report makes four key policy and programmatic recommendations:

- 1) Enhanced outreach and more personal connections with parents to promote more proactive and effective follow up.
- 2) Increased availability of programs aimed at African youth to bridge the time of their arrival in Canada until they are ready to enter mainstream programming.
- 3) More long-term and ongoing programs in addition to short term projects.
- 4) Better coordination and information sharing among service providers.