



# METROPOLIS BRITISH COLUMBIA

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

**Jenny Francis**

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# **Metropolis British Columbia**

## ***Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity***

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## Working Paper Series

### **MISSING LINKS: YOUTH PROGRAMS, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND AFRICAN YOUTH IN METRO VANCOUVER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**T**his paper provides a preliminary exploration of African youths' access to integration and settlement resources and examines their relationships with organizations serving youth in Metro Vancouver. Data was collected through individual interviews with youth workers and settlement service providers and in focus groups with African youth and parents. The preliminary findings were presented at a Community Forum where participants generated practical recommendations to improve services to better meet the needs of African youth and families. The study's main finding is that there is a series of disconnections or missing links between African youth and information and resources related to employment, education, social services, and wider society. There are also gaps between settlement and social service organisations and African families, as well as among service providers themselves. These gaps may lead to a sense of mistrust among parents and youth in relation to settlement and social service organisations as well as underrepresentation of African youth in programs that could help them settle in Canada. To address these concerns, the author suggests the need for a better coordinated service approach including more personal outreach to youth and families and argues that integrated services should be available when people first arrive and throughout their settlement and integration processes.

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BC	British Columbia
CIAI	Centre of Integration for African Immigrants
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CREHS	Centre for Research and Education in Human Services
EAL	English as an Additional Language (formerly ESL)
ESL	English as a Second Language
GAR	Government Assisted Refugee
GPA	Grade Point Average
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
ISA	Immigrant Serving Agency
ISAP	Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program
ISSo/BC	Immigrant Services Society of BC
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
MITACS	Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (research network)
PR	Permanent Residence
RAP	Resettlement Assistance Program
SIN	Social Insurance Number
SWIS	Settlement Workers in Schools
TR	Temporary Residence
UOCS	Umoja Operation Compassion Society
UBC	University of British Columbia
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Immigration is the most important factor in population growth in Canada, and around one third of immigrants are under the age of twenty-five. In 2001, a total of 91,641 youth (including 77,925 immigrants and 13,716 refugees) under twenty-five immigrated to Canada (Chuang 2009, 2). In 2006, there were over ten million Permanent Residents in Canada under the age of thirty; clearly the numbers are significant. Many youth arrive accompanied by family members, but others come on their own to work, study, or as refugees. Most are non-European in origin and the majority are members of a visible minority group. Compared to adults, youth face unique challenges as they try to locate themselves within geographic, cultural, social, and adult spaces in families and communities. People who grow up in Canada spend their lives learning how to navigate local social, economic, educational, and other systems, but newcomers have to learn those things when they arrive. Immigrant and refugee youth must start a new socialization process and engage in a complex negotiation of multiple identities as they get used to the Canadian school system, balance the cultural expectations of youth in Canada with those of their country of origin, and find their way in the Canadian labour market.

Youth from Africa make up an increasing proportion of youth coming to Canada, yet despite their increasing numbers, there is little research looking at their experiences in the Canadian context. Through several years of work as a volunteer organiser and advocate with different African communities and individuals in Metro Vancouver, I have come to recognize that although there is a wealth of evidence and experiential knowledge concerning the immense and sometimes overwhelming challenges African youth—refugees in particular—face, unless their perspectives are made the focus of formal inquiry, prospects

for policy change remain remote. Seeking to link issues affecting people I care about with mainstream policy concerns so as to highlight how African youths' unique experiences fit into larger settlement patterns and offer recommendations for positive social change, I carried out this study during my Master's Degree as part of an internship involving five partner organisations (Metropolis BC, UBC School of Social Work, MITACS Accelerate BC, Centre of Integration for African Immigrants, and Umoja Operation Compassion Society). I have seen how some African youth come to Canada eager to work, study, and participate in social and civic life, but find themselves unable to translate knowledge and skills from home into forms of human and social capital recognized in Canada, where they also face intersecting forms of structural disadvantage: as young people, they lack social, economic, and political power; as black Africans, they encounter discrimination based on skin colour, immigration status, and country of origin. I argue that a comprehensive and coordinated approach to meeting youths' needs and concerns is essential so that they can integrate successfully and participate fully in democratic civil society.

Youth programs potentially offer means of addressing these issues, but without both effective programming and high levels of participation, the social and economic integration of newcomer youth is inhibited, potentially leading to poor socioeconomic prospects in the long term. In fact, research from across Canada indicates that immigrant youth needing settlement services experience a consistent gap in service provision. In Metro Vancouver, Immigrant Serving Agencies (ISAs) and other service providers offer a range of youth programs aimed at employment, recreation, artistic expression, and social and civic engagement, yet evidence suggests that African youth, particularly refugees, do not participate widely in these programs. In this context, the

concern is that African youth are being left without the information and supports they need to thrive in Canadian society.

This exploratory study seeks to expand current knowledge and offer ways to improve service provision to youth by exploring and analysing African youths' participation in youth programs in Metro Vancouver. Key research questions focus on the barriers African youth and their families face in accessing existing programs, and the development of solutions regarding how services can be better coordinated to meet their needs and concerns. The findings echo arguments made in previous studies pointing to the need for more targeted programming aimed at improving the integration trajectories of immigrant and refugee youth and families.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 African Youth in British Columbia*

According to the 2006 Census, there are 34,575 people of African origin living in British Columbia (BC), out of a total African-Canadian population of just over 300,000 (Statistics Canada 2007b). Importantly, the number of immigrants from Africa entering BC is growing steadily: the five-year period from 1996 to 2000 saw the arrival of 5,270 immigrants from Africa (of which 4,135 settled in Metro Vancouver), while 6,080 arrived between 2001 and 2006 (of which 4,800 settled in Metro Vancouver). Although African immigrants and refugees make their way to BC from every country in Africa, the majority have originated in East Africa (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008, 29–30). In 2006, the total number of people claiming African origin in Metro Vancouver was 27,260 (Statistics Canada 2007a), while 20,670 identified as “Black” (Statistics Canada 2007c).

Most people of African origin settling in BC arrive through economic or family sponsorship schemes, or transfer from another province in Canada. However, a significant number also come as refugees. For Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) selected abroad by the Canadian government, the introduction of the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 implemented a shift in Canadian resettlement policy from selecting those deemed most likely to establish themselves independently in Canada to those with the most pressing needs. IRPA has seriously affected the profile of immigrant and refugee youth that enter Canada, but the lack of specific programming and funding aimed at youth has meant that problems identified several years ago remain and continue to grow. Around eight hundred GARs are resettled in BC each year and approximately 40 percent of those are youth under eighteen (ISSofBC 2007). Most have lived in camps for a decade or more where there are often not even basic schools set up. When combined with conflict, poverty, and dislocation, the result may be several generations of family members who lack literacy and/or numeracy skills. Moreover, people from camps are often arriving from rural areas into a complex urban environment and from oral societies to an intensely print-based culture. Ongoing trauma issues for parents and youth can also affect settlement experiences. Overall this is a high needs population that requires comprehensive orientation to living independently in a large western urban environment.

From 2003–2006, 1,065 GARs arrived from Africa out of a provincial total of 3,219; in other words, 33 percent of GARs arriving in BC during that period came from African countries. Given that over half the world's displaced people are in Africa, this figure is disproportionately low. Table 1 shows the countries of origin for GARs coming from Africa. Reflecting broader settlement patterns among African immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver (Masinda and

Ngene-Kambere 2008, 31–32), the vast majority settled in Burnaby or Surrey (Table 2).

TABLE 1. SOURCE COUNTRIES OF GARs FROM AFRICA: 2003–2006

SOURCE COUNTRIES	NUMBER	% (OF TOTAL GARs)
Southern Africa (Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe)	6	0.02%
East Africa (Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia)	752	23.36%
West Africa (Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Togo, Liberia)	176	5.47%
Great Lakes Region (Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda)	130	4.04%
North Africa (Morocco)	1	0.03%
TOTAL	1065	33%

Source: Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2007

TABLE 2. AFRICAN GARs' INITIAL SETTLEMENT LOCATIONS

AREA	NUMBER	% (OF AFRICAN GARs)
Vancouver	76	7%
Burnaby	409	38%
New Westminster	93	9%
Surrey	287	27%
Other areas	200	19%
TOTAL	1065	100%

Source: Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2007

In contrast to GARs who are selected overseas for resettlement in Canada, refugee claimants (RCs) make their own way to the Canadian border. Another key difference between GARs and RCs is that GARs arrive with Permanent Residence (PR) status, while RCs often experience long-term Temporary Residence (TR) or undocumented status (Francis 2009). In 2008, the total number of refugee claims filed by people from Africa in Canada was 1,747 (Rehaag 2009), out of 36,851 total entries across the country (CIC 2008b). Out of that national figure, 2,147 made claims in BC, and by the end of 2008, a total of 4,672 claimants were living in BC (including arrivals from previous

years), with 2,245 of those residing in Metro Vancouver (CIC 2008a). Specific statistics are difficult to come by, but clearly only a small portion of those would have come from Africa.

## *2.2 Complex Challenges*

Various conceptual frameworks have been applied to study the integration and settlement of newcomer youth, including human ecology, social capital, risk/resilience, and marginalisation. Because risk results from a combination of environmental and individual factors, Kilbride and Anisef (2001) argue for well-grounded culturally sensitive understandings of the multiple sources of risk and of the ensuing needs, behaviours, and characteristics of youth in order to better comprehend the processes through which youth deal with adversity. They suggest that in terms of supports for immigrant and refugee youth, the focus should be placed on resiliency (defined as a young person's ability to successfully cope with major stresses or risk factors), fostering family stability, and developing cohesive communities. In this context, developing family social capital, or the protective network of supportive and positive relationships among families, social institutions, and the wider community, is crucial. When these relationships are weak or ineffective, they limit the ability of all to reduce risk factors, vulnerability, marginalisation, and isolation (Yan, Lauer, and Chan 2009).

Another important concept is that of social exclusion, which Galabuzi (2006) defines as the inability of certain groups or individuals to participate fully in Canadian life due to inequalities in access to resources arising out of intersecting disadvantages based in race, age, class, gender, disability, and immigrant status. The framework of social exclusion is important because it puts the burden of addressing marginalisation on the society and not on the

individuals who are its victims. The characteristics of social exclusion occur in multiple dimensions simultaneously and are also mutually reinforcing. Thus, for example, people living in low income areas are also likely to experience substandard housing, inequalities in access to employment and education, social service deficits, disconnection from civil society, increased health risks, stigmatization, and isolation.

The literature contradicts the traditional linear assumption that immigrant youth do better than their parents and underlines the frustration that families and youth experience in a Canadian labour market increasingly geared towards "flexibility." This shift has been accompanied by the decline of better paid, full-time, unionised work and an increase in unofficial employment exploitative of vulnerable populations including young people, immigrants, and refugees (Wilkinson 2008). Furthermore, service economy demands for higher levels of language abilities have increased, making it harder for refugee youth in particular (Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz 2006, 12). According to Galabuzi (2006), there are just not enough good jobs available, while flexibility means higher levels of unemployment and casualisation, increased income polarisation, and under-utilisation of skills, all in the context of welfare state retrenchment. Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz (2006) argue that the neoliberal discourse on social exclusion attempts to individualise blame and denies the significance of structural barriers; individuals are simply expected to conform to the demands of the market society. Despite their eagerness to work, many immigrant and refugee youth end up in a vicious cycle of unemployment, poverty, and/or dependence on social welfare. However, the authors argue that the notion youth should be content with whatever poorly paid job they can find ignores the mismatch between supply and demand and encourages public policy that is increasingly punitive and restrictive of support for youth unemployment.

Newcomer youth have almost double the unemployment rate of established immigrants and non-immigrants and a poverty rate of around five times that of the Canadian born (Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz 2006; Kunz 2003). In a comparative study of the labour market experiences of immigrant, refugee, and Canadian-born youth aged 15–24, Wilkinson (2008) found that refugee youth experience the highest rate of unemployment, at nearly 30 percent. Kilbride and Anisef (2001) found that newcomer volunteer rates are also lower than those for the general population. In addition, Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz (2006) and Wilkinson (2008) find that visible minority youth with the same training and background find it more difficult to obtain employment than those of European heritage. Another challenge is presented by widespread demands for Canadian experience and education. According to Galabuzi, African-Canadian university graduates have the same unemployment rate as white high school dropouts (2006, 203). When youth are not hired, they do not know whether it is because they lack experience or skills, or due to discrimination, and this can lead newcomer youth to doubt their abilities (Kilbride et al. 2001, 33). Inequalities in incomes among racialised and non-racialised workers are particularly deep among the male youth cohort aged 16–24, in which the difference in median after-tax income was approximately 40 percent in 2000 (Galabuzi 2006, 203).

Immigrant youth and low income families face greater challenges acquiring job experience than the Canadian born or those in the middle classes due to lack of family contacts in business, language fluency and literacy issues, responsibilities at home, and families' insistence that youth concentrate on school (Kilbride and Anisef 2001). Parents who are struggling or trapped in low-paid jobs lack the social connections to help their children find work. The parents interviewed by ISSofBC (2009), Chuang (2009), and CREHS (2000)

have limited abilities to provide for their children's basic needs, such as nutrition, and have to sacrifice parental involvement in their children's lives in order to work long hours or at multiple jobs. Information deficits are also huge (Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz 2006). Chuang (2009) notes that immigrant youth have no idea of the range of work and trades opportunities that exist in Canada or what each means. For those with temporary residence, the immigration system itself is seen as a major barrier to employment, sometimes forcing youth to work under extremely exploitative conditions (Reitsma 2001). Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz (2006) and Galabuzi (2006) note that potential negative societal consequences of under- and unemployed and frustrated youth include social exclusion, despair, alienation from families and communities, psychological problems, social conflict, and increased contact with the criminal justice system.

Low levels of education are among the greatest barriers to employment, socio-economic advancement, and social well-being (Kilbride and Anisef 2001). Often refugee youth have already switched education systems at least once since leaving home, or their education may have been interrupted by several years in a refugee camp (Brough et al. 2003; Jacquet et al. 2008). Authors point out that current school placement practices based on age are inadequate because they result in some youth being placed in grades too high or too low for them, and that this affects youths' academic performance as well as their psychological well-being (Reitsma 2001; Jacquet et al. 2008; ISSo/BC 2009; CREHS 2000; Chuang 2009). At the same time, the Canadian education system assumes a significant amount of parent involvement, yet immigrant parents are often baffled by the school system and frustrated at being unable to offer adequate support to their children (Reitsma 2001; Chuang 2009). ISSo/BC (2009) and Kilbride and Anisef (2001, 22) note that children

in low income households consume relatively less nutritious food, have less access to private space for doing homework, are less likely to own computers, are more likely to have parents with little education, and moreover, have to face class-based discrimination and low expectations from teachers more than other students. Further, Galabuzi argues that some youth experience social exclusion in the education system, which is a key institution for socialisation, because it produces and reproduces racist ideologies, attitudes, and structures of inequality, and that curricula alienate racialised students by presenting their reality as inconsequential or invisible (2006, 191). Exacerbating these concerns, many youth are also struggling to learn English, as around two-thirds of dependent immigrants aged 15–24 speak neither English nor French (Kunz and Hanvey 2000). Language difficulties can produce low self esteem, exacerbate educational differences, increase discrimination, reduce employment opportunities, and create family difficulties (Kilbride et al. 2001; Reitsma 2001; CREHS 2000). In these contexts, school officials, settlement workers, and community leaders are becoming increasingly aware of a crisis among youth who come to Canada as teenagers and leave the school system without having achieved basic literacy and numeracy, leaving them with few mechanisms to understand and access opportunities for employment and, therefore, few resources to support themselves economically (ISSofBC 2009).

The social context in which youth access education and employment is also important. Fantino and Colak (2001) and Jacquet et al. (2008) draw attention to the difficulties of developing a strong sense of identity when familiar home, family, and community networks and institutions have been lost. Older youth face the additional challenge of entering an environment where most of their peers have already established friendship circles (Kilbride et al. 2001; 26). As a result of difficulties making friends, youth experience low self

esteem, depression, stress, and confusion about their ethnic identity. Some youth find a solution in negative behaviours, the most serious of which extend to criminal or gang-related activities. Gangs attract youth by offering a sense of belonging, power, and access to material goods in return for carrying out crimes or other anti-social activities. Money from gangs can be enticing for impoverished, isolated, and alienated youth (Chuang 2009, 12).

Additionally, all of the studies in this review noted racism and discrimination, including that from peers and teachers (Kilbride et al. 2001; Chuang 2009; Reitsma 2001), bus drivers (Umoja 2008), other people (Kunz and Hanvey 2000; Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer 2005), media (Ibrahim 2003; UOCS 2008), and the criminal justice system (Galabuzi 2006; Manzo and Bailey 2005). Galabuzi argues that young people are routinely subjected to racist images and stereotypes in books, visual media, stories, toys, music, and mainstream media. All of these images deepen their perception of racial differences; for non-racialised youth, the images reinforce negative stereotypes about their racialised peers, while for racialised youth, the images influence their self perception and social development (2006, 191). Depending on their level of personal resilience, youth who face racism and discrimination can be left feeling alienated, depressed, and isolated (Reitsma 2001; Chuang 2009).

At the same time, migration into a new cultural environment puts enormous strain on families as parents and youth confront new parenting styles, dating expectations, and relationships between youth and elders (CREHS 2000; Chuang 2009; Reitsma 2001; Kilbride et al. 2001). Specifically, some authors have found that parents tend to be stricter with girls than boys and are more likely to restrict girls' dress and outings with peers (Chuang 2009; Reitsma 2001; Kilbride et al. 2001). A related issue is that youth experience guilt or anxiety about "betraying" their home cultures, yet they are isolated from the

wider community if they fail to embrace the dominant culture (Reitsma 2001; Brough et al. 2003). One of the coping mechanisms for girls is to lead dual lives (see also Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer 2005).

On top of these challenges, parents and youth tend to acculturate to different aspects of Canadian culture at different rates. As a result, parents may become dependent on youth to translate, pay bills, etc. Often youths' family responsibilities can be quite heavy, especially if they are expected to contribute to childcare and income support as well as providing translation and other assistance (Umoja 2008, 16). When parents also attempt to hold on to their parental status in the family, this dependence can become problematic (Chuang 2009, 13). Family separation and reunification after a long separation are also stressful (Kilbride et al. 2001; Chuang 2009; Kilbride and Anisef 2000).

Youth respond to the complex and diverse stresses in their lives in a number of ways, drawing strength from close family relationships and strong spirituality (Masinda and Ngene-Kambere 2008; Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer 2005); a sense of historical and cultural awareness of African and black history (Codjoe 2005); and an ability to negotiate different cultural expectations (Okeke-Ihejirika and Spitzer 2005).

### *2.3 Youth Programming*

In addition to the personal and familial resources immigrants and refugees bring with them to deal with challenges they face, various institutions and organisations offer a range of services to newcomers, including youth and families. However, the objectives of most federal immigration programs such as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), and Host programs are focused

on adults, while provincial and local education systems have traditionally been assumed to support children and youth (Chuang 2009, 1). Although recently there has been an increase in the program offerings for young people, Kilbride and Anisef (2001) found a significant disparity between what service providers say they have to offer and what youth find accessible, helpful, or interesting. Across the country, the list of available services is impressive and includes workshops, individual meetings, food, clothing, furniture, transportation, funds or tickets to events or activities, interpretation and translation, advocacy, counselling, referrals, emotional and social support, leadership training, mentorship, employment assistance, school orientation, and sports.

However, these resources are unevenly distributed, and there remains an overall lack of targeted youth programs, even as the number and needs of families are increasing (Chuang 2009). In this context, the literature reveals a significant information gap between families and those serving youth, and stresses the importance of building relationships with parents to build trust and gain a better understanding of the challenges youth and families face (Kilbride and Anisef 2001; Kilbride et al. 2001; Chuang 2009). Available information is often incomplete or in inaccessible locations, while many institutions lack culturally responsive tools for the assessment of trauma, education, disability, etc., so youth and families turn to informal networks, religious institutions, family members, or ethno-specific service providers (Kilbride et al. 2001; Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz 2006). Financial constraints can also hamper families' abilities to afford program or transportation costs (Kunz and Hanvey 2000). In addition, Wilkinson (2008) and Kilbride and Anisef (2001) found that immigrant and refugee youth are often unable or reluctant to access mainstream employment programs because they tend to offer only part-time, poorly paid employment, fail to provide labour market information that would

assist people not born here to access it more effectively, are unable to actually place people in positions, and employ a one-size-fits-all delivery model that does not take into account different needs.

Finally, the way service delivery is structured inhibits agencies from helping as they would like. For example, since funding is project-based and non-renewable, much organisational time and resources are allocated to seeking and writing grant proposal applications (Chuang 2009; Kunz and Hanvey 2000). At the same time, coordination among services providers is incomplete or nonexistent (Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz 2006; Anisef 2005). Overall, these conditions result in a set of unmet needs for immigrant and refugee youth including family and individual counselling; mental health support; employment assistance; basic needs such as food, shelter and access to health care and professionals; and support for parents (Kunz and Hanvey 2000).

### 3. METHODS

#### *3.1 Recruitment and Data Collection*

Data for this study was collected in several stages. First, a literature review of secondary sources was conducted to provide an overview of the immigration and settlement of refugees, youth, and families; social service provision; and existing youth programming. Next, as a collaborative process, sixteen interviews were held with twenty stakeholders who work with immigrant or refugee youth (see Appendix A for the organisations they represented). A range of mainstream service providers, multicultural immigrant serving agencies, and ethno-specific or community-based organizations was included. The semi-structured individual interviews were intended to achieve two purposes:

a) to learn about the programs offered, inquire about the level and nature of participation of African youth, and identify challenges and best practices in terms of recruitment and retention; and b) to seek stakeholders' advice concerning the formulation and design of the focus groups with youth and parents. In the third phase, the information gathered in the first set of interviews was collated and used as a basis for discussions in small groups with forty youth aged 13–30 and twelve parents of youth in order to identify challenges and gaps between youths' needs and the services offered (see Appendices B, C, and D for interview questions). The focus groups were conducted in English with translation into French, Arabic and various African languages available for participants who required it. In one interview, Adam (father, Congo) insisted,

Please work hard on this project. We really need help from the organisations. We are talking to you like this because we believe it will help us . . . We really appreciate what you are doing. Just keep talking to us all the time. If community organisations stand for the family, then we will be okay, but they also need information from us.

All of the interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded manually by the researcher using qualitative analysis methods.

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique incorporating multiple points of entry including youth groups, settlement workers, immigrant serving agencies, and recommendations by other interviewees as well as through community networks developed by the researcher as a result of several years of community involvement. An important limitation of this technique is that the youth included in the study are already more or less connected with organisations or service providers, while the most marginalised and isolated youth were excluded. A related concern is that by only speaking to people who are relatively well connected, there is a risk of reinforcing domi-

nant positions in the community. However, due to the sample size, a broad range of perspectives is represented. Participant demographics are described in more detail in section 3.2.

In the final phase of the research, the preliminary findings from the interviews and focus groups were presented at a Community Forum in October 2009 at the Centre of Integration for African Immigrants (CIAI), attended by eighteen people, including stakeholders who were interviewed as well as youth and parents who attended the focus groups. The objective of the forum was to use a dialogical process to collectively generate policy and program recommendations that could enhance the capabilities of different organizations to meet the needs of African refugee youth. The discussion was focused on two main issues: a) a validation of the understanding of the findings regarding the challenges experienced by African youths and parents, and the gaps in services they identified; and b) the generation of practical recommendations to improve services so that they better meet the needs and concerns of African youth and their families. The recommendations found at the end of this paper are based on a consideration of the recommendations that came out of the forum together with the researcher's observations based on the interview data. The study findings were written up in a final report and distributed widely in print and electronic form.

It is important to note that speaking to forty youth from a large number of countries means that a complex combination of experiences, histories, and personalities are included. In addition, youth were also differentiated by class, age, gender, language, culture, religion, and legal status. It is not always possible to generalize their experiences, and this could have implications for the utility of focusing on "African youth" as a group. However, within the variation among African communities, distinctive patterns may also be observed.

Moreover, as we will see, youth, parents, and settlement workers offered compelling reasons why they believe there should be youth programs aimed specifically at African youth. Finally, the existence of organizations (such as CIAI and Umoja) focused on providing services to African immigrants indicates that there are important commonalities in terms of African immigrants' experiences abroad and in Canada.

Please note that all the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

### 3.2 *The Study Sample*

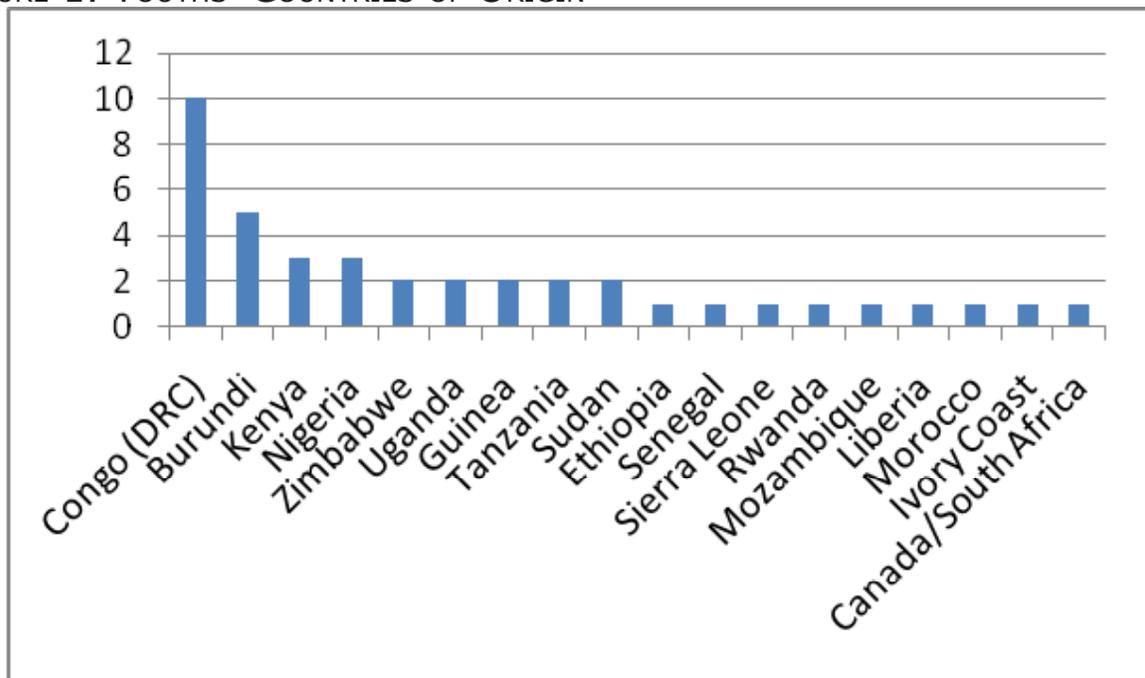
#### 3.2.1 Youth

A total of forty youth (twenty-one men and nineteen women) between the ages of thirteen and thirty took part in the study (Table 3). The majority either have or had refugee status, whether as sponsored refugees (Government Assisted, i.e., GARs, or Privately Sponsored) or Refugee Claimants, and had been in Canada less than three years. The group includes a large number of French speakers, and in general, the majority were learning English as an Additional Language. Figure 1 shows their countries of origin. Approximately one-third lived in each of Vancouver, Burnaby/New Westminster, and Surrey.

TABLE 3. YOUTHS' DEMOGRAPHICS

	YOUTH (N = 40)	NUMBER	PERCENT
Age	13–19 years	22	55%
	20–30 years	18	45%
Immigration status on arrival to Canada	Refugee (any class)	25	63%
	Other	4	10%
	No data	11	27%
Language spoken on arrival to Canada	English	5	12%
	French	23	58%
	Other	12	30%
	Total EAL	35	88%
Length of time in Canada	Less than 1 year	9	23%
	1–3 years	23	57%
	More than 3 years	8	20%

FIGURE 1. YOUTHS' COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



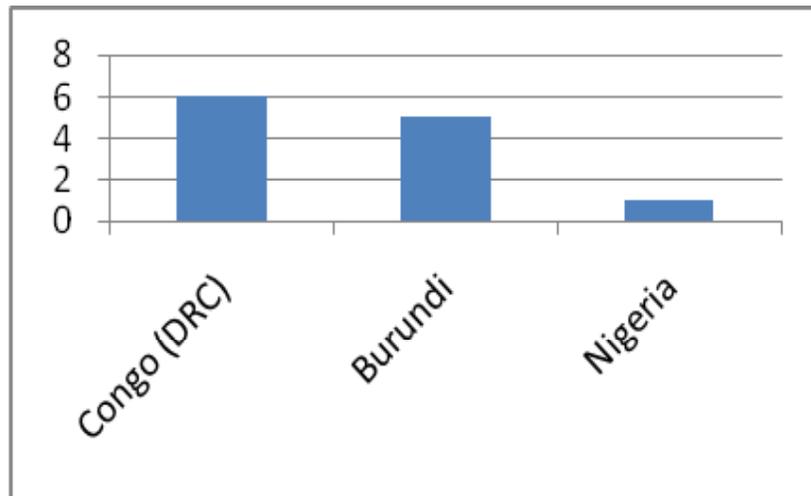
### 3.2.2 Parents

Twelve parents (seven mothers, five fathers) of African youth from Central and West Africa took part in the study (Figure 2). All came as GARs and had been in Canada three years or less. Half of those interviewed were franco-phones, and all were learning English as an Additional Language (Table 4).

TABLE 4. PARENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

PARENTS (N = 12)		NUMBER	PERCENT
Length of time in Canada	Less than 1 year	1	2%
	1–3 years	11	92%
Immigration status on arrival to Canada	GAR	12	100%
Languages spoken on arrival to Canada	English	0	0%
	French	6	50%
	Other	6	50%
	Total EAL	12	100%

FIGURE 2. PARENTS' COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



### 3.2.3 Youth/Settlement Workers

A total of twenty youth/settlement workers from fourteen agencies took part in the research (Table 5). Organisations included multicultural ISAs, francophone agencies, ethno-specific and community-based organisations, and mainstream service providers (see Appendix A).

TABLE 5. YOUTH/SETTLEMENT WORKERS, BY TYPE OF CLIENT TYPICALLY SERVED

FRANCOPHONE YOUTH/ FAMILIES	IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH/FAMILIES ("MULTICULTURAL ISA")	AFRICAN YOUTH/ FAMILIES ("ETHNO-SPECIFIC ISA")	ALL YOUTH/FAMILIES) ("MAINSTREAM")
Aimé	Jorge	David	Mark
Pierre	Kissa	Denzel	Ange
Patrice	Susan	Kadee	Tamara
Senwe	John	Thomas	Lise
Jean	Nancy	Omotunde Naima	

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 *General Challenges for African Youth*

#### 4.1.1 Introduction

To “integrate” means to make into a whole by bringing all parts together; to join something with something else. Consequently, social integration may be said to involve making connections among people, communities, and institutions. If successful integration depends on strong positive connections, then social exclusion may be said to arise from missing links or gaps. The central finding of this study is that a series of disconnections or missing links exists between African youth, and information and resources related to employment, education, the development of social networks, access to social services, and wider society. There are also fissures between organisations offering settlement and other social services and African families as well as among service-providing organisations themselves. In this paper, gaps (or opportunities to make connections) are grouped into the following categories: employment/finances; education; social/cultural networks; family life; and personal well-being. Depending on the strength of the foundations youth are able to construct in each area, and how they intersect with each other in youths’ lives, developments in each category can contribute to either social exclusion or successful integration. Since positive connections result in strong families and individuals, while missing links weaken integration and contribute to social exclusion, the aim of settlement programs should be to enable youth to develop positive relationships within each category. Moreover, in order to be successful, holistic programs offered by a cohesive network of agencies need to function together to provide information and other supports. According to the findings of this study, there are still many connections to be made.

#### 4.1.2 Employment

All of those interviewed confirmed that under- and unemployment and poverty as barriers to settlement and integration affect African youth in particular ways. Most of the youth who took part in this study were struggling to find work (Table 6).

TABLE 6. YOUTHS' LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Working	7	17%
Looking for work	27	68%
Not currently looking for work or working	6	15%

Aimé, a settlement worker originally from Africa who works with francophone immigrants, confirmed the high rate of unemployment among African youth: “Most of the people I speak to are looking for a job—that’s their main goal. They have urgent needs to pay rent and bills.” For example, Ali (age 29, Ivory Coast) insisted,

All I care about is getting a job. It’s great to go to school, but you have to pay, so then you need a job. The problem for us is that English isn’t our first language, and we don’t know Vancouver well because we are new, so how to find a person to help you find a job is the problem . . . and why do they ask for Canadian experience? It’s very difficult when you’ve never had a job here—how can you get Canadian experience?

Amir (age 29, Morocco) added, “The thing is that we have experience, just not in Canada.”

As Ali indicates, language, demands for Canadian experience, and weak social networks are key barriers to finding employment. Other youth interviewed pointed to lack of information about how to find a job, the challenges

of trying to find work (or study) without a computer at home, the limitations imposed by temporary residence, and cultural differences in labour market expectations. Regarding the latter point, Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe), who holds a Bachelor degree from a Quebec university, suggested that African youth are often reluctant to exhibit the assertiveness often expected in Canada. She elaborated,

It's a different culture where I come from: [in Africa] you have to keep things to yourself, but here you have to show it to everyone, so there are really different interpretations of how to find work. At home, I cannot put my name out there. I have to keep it to myself and ask very few people, so that's why maybe I'm lacking the skills to be outspoken, to be out there.

Thomas, a service provider of African origin, confirmed that African youth resist asking for help. He explained that for Africans, "it's like a taboo: 'they shouldn't see that I'm poor.' No! If you're poor, say 'I'm poor.' But we are always saying, 'I don't want people to know that I don't have a job.' That's not right! If you don't have a job, then tell people! Just say, 'My name is X, here's my résumé. I'm looking for a job.'"

In addition to the challenges of asking for help, there is also the problem of who to ask when one lacks a strong social network. Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe) explained that "among my friends, they do have that problem. They have good ideas—like one of my friends wants to start [a business] but he doesn't know the right people to talk to . . . he has got ideas and the skills, and he wants to do it on his own, but he doesn't know where to start." Similarly, Musoke (age 24, Uganda) asserted, "All this time I've been here, I haven't met the right people . . . with the art and talent I have, I know what I'm good at, but I don't know where I can be my best, so I really need to meet people somehow."

My suggestion that volunteering could help develop networks for employment elicited mixed reactions. Honoré (age 24, Congo) summed up what many youth felt: "It's great to do community work, but only after you have a job." Others were unaware of how to go about finding volunteer employment, and many were surprised to learn that volunteering does not necessarily have to mean "community work" but can also take place within one's professional field. In general, youth who participated in this study demonstrated a wide range of confidence and knowledge about volunteering. Some youth expressed very positive attitudes and strong work ethics. George (age 16, Congo) pointed out, "Volunteering is really important. Since I'm new here and I need a job but I don't have any experience and I also want leadership skills to put on my résumé, it's really worthwhile." Constance (age 18, Congo) added that volunteering "is not only for a job—you also get to know people and to know the city. It's not just about the money; you also have to do what you feel good about." However George and Constance may be exceptional. Naima, a settlement worker from Africa who works closely with African youth and families offered the following observation:

Look at volunteering opportunities: [African youth] don't volunteer! Why? They think they are exempted from volunteering because they are not wanted! I asked [a group of African youth] why they have no interest in volunteering when it counts so much towards scholarships and other things, and they said, "No way, we can't be accepted. Where can we volunteer?" And I said, "Why can't you volunteer, why not?" They said, "We can't be accepted," but they could not put a finger on who would not accept them! In their minds they are not being accepted, period. So they exclude themselves just like that!

Naima's comments suggest that, in addition to lack of information, real or perceived discrimination also limits African youths' volunteer and employment opportunities.

As with the youth who took part in this study, most of the parents interviewed were also looking for work (Table 7).

TABLE 7. PARENTS' LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION AND SOURCES OF INCOME:

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Working	5	42%
Looking for work	8	67%
Income Assistance (welfare)	6	50%
Resettlement Assistance Program (GARs)	1	2%

\*Columns do not total 100% because more than one answer is possible.

Parental unemployment has repercussions for both family income security as well as youths' confidence and initiative because when youth see their parents struggling to survive, they may become discouraged from seeking success for themselves. The following exchange between Marthe (mother, Burundi), Iman (mother, Burundi), and Odette (mother, Burundi) confirm this:

Marthe: The kids' life comes from the parents. When mom no job, daddy no job, just welfare, and the kids say, "I need some stuff," and the parents say, "I can't afford it," then it causes problems. Then those kids that are fourteen or fifteen—you send them to go to work and school, it is very hard.

Iman: That traumatises people—when you can't properly care for your child because you are so upset—how can you support seven kids when you are traumatised? It can also cause fights between husband and wife: "Why aren't you looking for a job?" "I am, why don't you look?" Then they fight because of harassment from welfare, it really causes a lot of problems in the house. And then the kids don't get encouragement to go to school—like most African kids will say, "Yeah I'm going to school, but I'll never get a job." They're already hopeless, then they get in trouble—that's why they drop

school. They say, "My dad has a BA and he doesn't have a job; another man has a diploma and he only works part time, so why should I go to school?" That really discourages kids.

Odette: It's a poverty issue. It is nice to try to save the youth, but youth who have jobless parents may even go to school without a good lunch. And it is because of poverty that kids go bad; they just say, "My mom and dad aren't working," and they can't respect their parents any more. You just get depressed.

In another focus group, Fabaya (mother, Congo) stressed, "Kids need support, but we also need support—even us parents need a job. If the parents don't have a job, then I really don't see the future for the kids." In general, there was a high level of resentment among parents and youth around expectations of what "the government" should provide in terms of education and employment. To illustrate, Iman (mother, Congo) insisted that "to help the youth, what the government has to do is support the parents to get a job. Youth see mom and dad don't have jobs so they get a job at McDonald's just to support their parents, if they are good kids. Then they will slowly become bad, even if they started out good, and they will also miss their education."

At the same time, although education is a core value in most African families, parents of low income households may expect youth to contribute to family finances. John, who works in a large multicultural ISA, elaborated on this point, explaining that "education is a priority for every parent we speak to, but the reality of family income support is that if they're spending sixty percent or more of their income on housing, then un- and underemployment pulls them in different directions." Lise runs a mainstream youth employment program. She pointed out that her organisation sees "a lot of youth coming in looking for jobs because their parents have lost theirs and now they have

to work to support their family; they don't really want to be working but they have no choice."

For Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), the requirement to pay back the travel loan to CIC is a significant barrier to achieving income security. These loans are extended to refugees overseas to pay for medical and transportation costs and are typically between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per person (e.g., around \$11,000 for a family of five). Repayment begins within six months of arrival in Canada and must be completed within three years or interest is accumulated. The short amortization period and high monthly payments for families living well below the poverty line are major financial and psychological burdens. Moreover, because African GARs tend to arrive with larger than average family sizes, both the amount of their debt and their living costs are higher than for other groups. Omar (father, Burundi) suggested,

The Canadian government did a great thing to help immigrants, but they have to study case by case, not just put all people in the same package. They have to say, "Okay, this person didn't find a job for six or seven years even though they were doing their best, so maybe he or she can continue to pay but not accumulate interest." With that interest, the amount never goes down. My kids will be helping me to pay it even after they grow up.

According to Iman (mother, Burundi), "the transport loan is a form of modern slavery that affects children and parents." Settlement workers also commented on the negative consequences for families, insisting that the requirement to repay the loan in three years is a key factor in the production and reproduction of poverty. Senwe, a Settlement Worker In Schools (SWIS), explained, "When people arrive with a loan of ten thousand dollars and you are getting a message every month reminding you that you have to repay the loan, the reaction . . . is that parents will simply ask kids to help, to start working."

Similarly, John insisted, “the issue of youth basic human rights gets intertwined with family income security—like the transportation loan which families are asked to repay within a few months—that impacts youth. We’re aware of increasing cases where youth are dropping out of school to work to help pay off the loan.” However, as Denzel, who works at a smaller ethno-specific ISA pointed out, “Those are things that could easily be resolved politically if there was the will.”

John also drew attention to the lack of income support targeted towards children and youth, explaining, “Right now neither federal income support nor provincial welfare include travel subsidies for youth, so a single mother of six with kids between the ages of six and seventeen has to figure out how to get that family from A to B because they are charged if they ride the bus. So there are definitely some income security issues that affect youth and families specifically.” Parents in this study agreed that the cost of transportation is a major barrier when seeking employment or education, taking part in youth and family programs, or participating in social activities.

Related to income security are the difficulties youth and families experience finding suitable and affordable housing, which sometimes leads to homelessness. Ali (age 29, Ivory Coast) linked unemployment and housing in the following way, “When you don’t have a job, you just stay home and think, think, think, ‘Why don’t I have a job, why can’t I find one?’ Then you don’t have money; all you can do is sit at home, or even become homeless and turn to drugs—it’s because people can’t find a job.” Denzel explained, “There are a lot of homeless African youth—I’ll tell you how: there are a lot of youth sleeping on people’s couches—that’s homelessness! A lot of other youth are sleeping ten to a room or something like that; these are huge issues!” Jeanne’s (age 15, Burundi) family of seven was homeless for seven months, and it set

them back significantly as belongings were lost, the five children were forced to change schools, and the family had to adjust to a new neighbourhood. At the time of the interview, her parents had been referred to a collection agency by their previous landlord, a large management company, who was asking for several thousand dollars. The issue took over a year to resolve and was a major source of stress for the whole family.

The foregoing examples illustrate how economic exclusion can result when youth are disconnected from resources to help them realise their full potential. As a result of the multiple challenges they face, refugee youth in particular tend to end up in low-paying and dead end jobs, yet they desire education and good employment as strongly as their peers. Therefore, what they badly need is information on how to connect with financial assistance that will enable them to stay in school and how to develop networks to enable them to access better-paid jobs and participate fully in Canadian society.

#### 4.1.3 Education

Employment outcomes are closely linked to educational attainments. However, entering a new education system presents major challenges for newcomer youth, whether they are still in high school or considering postsecondary qualifications. John shed some light on the larger context, explaining, “The way the school system assesses people is based on a deficit model . . . there’s a real lack of recognition of youths’ tremendous resilience and of the skills and assets they have. The way our system is structured is that we have to pin a label on youth, then we will get more money.” Grade placement is particularly challenging for youth whose schooling has been interrupted by

several years in a refugee camp. Senwe linked these issues in the case of francophone African refugees:

Definitely African youth immigrants face the same types of problems as other youth having the same pre-immigration history, such as . . . people from Afghanistan. These are people who have gone through the same type of trauma: maybe a civil war, then lived in refugee camps for five or ten years before they were able to come here. That applies to other groups. However, having said that, it is clear that African youths' situation is still completely different from people from China or Korea, who have been exposed to formal education, who know how to sit down and listen to a teacher for several hours every day, who know the rules.

Given these concerns, participants pointed to the need for increased access to literacy-based training and education. For example, Denzel explained,

Literacy issues are huge . . . So governments should think about having services that can address those. There are a lot of adult learning centres and there are also several places for kids who don't do well in school, so maybe the answer is to expand some of those programs To *really* address what is happening with youth, because with literacy—let's put it this way—many of the people in jail right now are illiterate or close to it. Lack of literacy causes huge issues because people feel so much sensitivity around it, and if you can't read or write, How will you open up your mind to new things? . . . And then you talk about coming from a refugee camp and the kind of schooling available there. On top of that, what they have seen in those camps and before they got there . . . and you're adjusting to a new country, to the people and the future, maybe you're separated from your family, which a lot of them are, or a parent is sick or whatever.

Similarly, Marcel's (age 20, Rwanda) comment was representative of older youth no longer in high school:

I think the government should have more organisations to help people who have no education: they should have free courses for young people,

which they can take and use in the future, as part of a plan for kids who are coming here—some kind of orientation for

young people that will also help them develop their skills.

In addition to inadequate grade placements and literacy challenges, the high school experience can be extremely discouraging in other ways as well. According to most of the youth interviewed, teachers and guidance counselors are perceived as unhelpful and unsupportive of youths' aspirations. The following conversation was typical:

Francoise (age 16, Burundi): The guidance counsellor knew that I wanted to do medicine, but all she did was put me down: "Oh, you can't do it because you didn't do science." She really didn't help . . . I also told her that I'm moving to an English school and she was so shocked, she's like, "You can't do it, you won't pass!" I said, "Well I'm going to try." I was like, "I thought you were here to help!" But she's like, "You won't be able to do it." I don't think she's helping us at all.

Emilie (age 14, Burundi): All the teachers are like that: so discouraging! If you don't get a good mark, instead of sitting beside you and helping and teaching and explaining to you, they just scream at you.

Francoise: And they tell you you're going to fail.

Hélène (age 19, Burundi): My science teacher made my friend cry—the teacher asked a question but she really didn't get it, and the teacher was yelling at her, "Well I already explained this twice!" The teacher said, "I don't get it, you guys are so stupid!" I was like, "Oh my God, you are calling us stupid?"

In another focus group, Peter (age 20, Liberia) mentioned the pain of overhearing his English teacher comment to another instructor about him and his fellow students, "These kids are all ESL in here, so we know where they're

going: nowhere.” Jorge, a youth program coordinator who came to Canada as a GAR, also underlined the problem of low expectations, suggesting,

There’s an attitude not only among some people who work in ESL, but also in the very structure of ESL. The system is not designed for you to go past a certain point, it’s not designed for ambition beyond that point . . . People in the system tell me not everybody is cut out for four years at UBC, but in the context of people who are newcomers, it is crucially important *not* to assume that *none* of them are cut out for that.

Erasto, (father, Congo) who has a fifteen-year-old daughter in high school, added that lack of information, low confidence levels, and discrimination can combine to prevent African youth from doing their best. He explained, “At school, the African children—because they are not informed—are afraid, so they don’t really show what they are capable of; even though she might know what she’s doing, she is afraid to show what she knows. But when they have information about what they are doing, then they feel confident: ‘I can do it.’ Even at school they can show it.” Naima elaborated on these ideas, stating, “There are some psychological barriers that are even more influential than academic barriers; sometimes it’s in their mindset. That affects their school-work in turn, and then we have all these drop-outs; they don’t think they will succeed. That’s something most [African youth] are suffering from.” Similarly, David, who runs an African youth group, noted,

There are a lot of youth who have dropped out of high school because they felt like they couldn’t make it; they felt like, wow, they are losers: “I can’t do this, I cannot do that.” They just drop out, they become hopeless. Those who are between eighteen and twenty-five, we try to get them into continuing adult education. Basically, youth services are very limited at the moment, but where courses are offered, we try to get them in . . . It’s really hard to convince kids that it’s worthwhile studying though, because they feel like they can’t do anything; they have been so discouraged at school.

Parents also struggle to understand the Canadian education system at the same time as they are trying to learn a new language and culture. Omotunde, an African youth worker, explained,

Some of these mothers didn't have the opportunity to meet with many people in public or to be educated, so when they get here, they are shy about talking about many things. Like the teacher calling home to say the child didn't do their homework, or things like that—they don't know what to do. They just get scared—they are really intimidated, even talking to the teacher or principal. Then the children just tell them anything and get away with it because they know that their mother cannot verify what they said.

In this context, Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) have a crucial part to play in the settlement and integration of African youth. The SWIS initiative in BC is a partnership between the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and the Ministry of Education to provide a school-based outreach program for immigrant and refugee students and their families. Settlement workers employed by a school district or subcontracted through an immigrant settlement organization are placed in secondary and elementary schools across the province to provide outreach and settlement counselling for students, parents, and families, and act as client/school liaisons by facilitating cross-cultural understanding and communication. However, according to several youth workers who took part in this study, although SWIS are an important means of connecting families with education and other services, the number of SWIS currently employed in Metro Vancouver remains insufficient to address the growing need. Moreover, perhaps because the program is still new, many of the youth, parents, and settlement workers interviewed seemed unfamiliar with the precise role of SWIS in their community.

In addition to concerns related to the school environment, youth might also be forced to leave school early due to economic reasons as parents who are struggling to support their families may ask youth to contribute to family finances even at the cost of their education. For example, David explained,

When you are dealing with uneducated people, they sometimes don't know the value of education because they haven't experienced it themselves. They advise their kids, "Hey, you are sixteen, go and get a job!" Their son can work in a warehouse and at least he's bringing some income to the family, but they can't see that it's not good because their kid is still young. So we tell them that they still have a lot to achieve and they will end up making even more money if they invest some time in education now; that's what the parents need to hear because lots of them don't know the value of education. That's why it's so difficult for the kids: their parents just want them to bring home money . . .

Several settlement workers also mentioned conflicts between parents and youth that occur when parents expect their working youth to contribute their entire paycheck to the family income, which youth inevitably resist.

Early school-leaving affects boys and girls differently. Senwe explained, We have disproportionately more girls than boys completing high school. Most of the boys grew up in a culture where boys have to take some responsibility very quickly—they grew up with this mentality, so once you are here, how do you become a responsible man, if not going out to work and helping the family survive? That is "becoming a man," so we shouldn't be surprised to see them fighting to get a job and trying to help their family. On the other side, because they are supporting their family and spending hours outside working, they will fail in school. Meanwhile the girls are at home doing their homework.

Youth interviewed generally agreed that, due to gendered notions of family and household responsibilities, childcare, and individual autonomy, girls are

both more likely than boys to stay in school and less likely to move away from home before marriage.

When youth finish high school, they face another dilemma: whether to accept low wage work or take a student loan to continue their education. The youth who took part in this study offered a range of perspectives on student loans; however, the majority expressed reluctance to take on a large debt, especially if their family already owes money for their ticket to Canada. Seeing their peers struggle also affects youths' perception of the value of education, as the following conversation illustrates:

Peter (age 20, Liberia): I've left high school, but I have to pay rent: I'm all alone here now. [A local employment centre] called me all the time, "Hey, you have to finish high school." I said, "But will you pay my rent?" They said, "Just come down and we'll figure it out." But there was nothing, so what can I do? They want me to take a student loan, but I've seen my friends do that and then after graduation: no job! I don't want to do that! If I'm going to school, I prefer to work and pay for it.

Annie (age 23, Congo): You have to be careful which training you choose, because some of the careers are absolute nonsense.

Peter (age 20, Liberia): I've seen so many friends with that problem: taking those courses, then no job. They study computers or whatever . . . my friend borrowed fifteen thousand dollars to be a mechanic and now he has no job.

Leon (age 22, Ethiopia): I was actually about to do the same thing and take that course but after I saw what happened to him, I was, like, forget it.

Aimé explained that helping youth overcome their fear of taking a student loan is crucial if they are to develop their talents to the best of their abilities. Most students in Canada have to borrow to study, but he explained that African students "don't see it as an investment in their future . . . You can find many

refugee youth with a lot of potential, but one of their barriers is their fear of taking a student loan . . . So we also have to teach them to manage their debt and their money responsibly.” The youths’ comments also draw attention to the growing market in high priced private postsecondary education that requires significant borrowing financed by federal government student loans. In the United States, the quality of certification obtained from some institutions has been questioned, as have aggressive recruitment practices. High default rates on student loans taken by people previously unable to access higher education have been likened to the sub-prime mortgage crisis (PBS 2010).

Annie (age 23, Congo) explained that another underlying issue is African youth’s lack information about their options. She insisted, “We need people to come and speak to us just like you are, and to tell us, ‘You know what, if you go to school, there is this, this. If you don’t go to school, here is the procedure for you to create something!’” Lacking sufficient information and support, many African youth remain disconnected from educational resources that could help them develop their talents and improve their economic outcomes. In other words, gaps in the provision of services vital to African youths’ successful integration leave them disconnected from educational opportunities that could improve their settlement trajectories.

#### 4.1.4 Social and Cultural Life

As we have seen, finding a job without a pre-existing social network along with getting through high school in an unfamiliar system are two of the challenges newcomer youth face when they enter a new culture as teenagers. The youth who took part in this study also stressed the difficulties of trying to fit in and make friends in a new cultural environment. Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe)

pointed out, "In Africa you have people around you, but here you have no one around—it's so hard! You can go crazy with loneliness!" Héléne (age 19, Burundi) also experienced difficulties making new friends. She explained,

I really had lots of troubles finding friends, even right now I can't go out there saying I have friends because the only people I talked to are the bad ones who just go clubbing and I don't do that . . . I can't even really call these people my friends because we only saw each other in school. I'm so happy that I'm finished school and can go and make my own friends.

These troubles are exacerbated for youth who are here without parents. Miriam (age 23, Congo) commented, "Though I have my brother here, when you don't have your parents it's so hard! But anyway, you have to talk, talking will cure your heart. When you close yourself and don't want to meet other people and don't want to participate—I was like that for a while, just went to school, then went home—you can be too lonely!" Joy (age 16, Nigeria) insisted that organisations have a key role to play in helping youth connect with other people, asserting, "It's really important to know other immigrant kids or people from Africa, so [agencies] have to find them and introduce new youth so that they won't feel lonely. All you need are the right connections, but you can't do that on your own because you don't know anybody." Alma (age 15, Burundi) agreed, noting that "there's more of a chance to get into trouble if you don't have anything to do. You really need other activities, not just be a black kid who sits around at home all the time watching TV. It's good to have some kind of activities to do." Afifah (age 19, Congo) perceptively suggested, "the busier you are, the easier your integration."

As the youth above indicated, it is very difficult for young people who have just arrived and do not know where to start to develop a strong and effective social network. Aimé confirmed this:

One thing I have noticed that is missing, especially among African refugees, is that we don't ask for help. Usually we rely on ourselves or our community, but the problem—especially for francophone Africans—is that this community is not big or powerful; you cannot reach your goal if you only stay within this community . . . It's very important to teach young people how to extend their networks and meet other people, so that they can get more information, so that they can make very well informed decisions.

At the same time, although African youth want to integrate as quickly as possible into Canadian society, several also expressed concern that they were forgetting their culture from home, and this was a source of guilt and stress. For example, Musoke (age 24, Uganda) explained, "Our cultures are really rich, but here we find that we can't even respect our own culture . . . Most of us have forgotten our culture and where we came from. Back home there are some things that are taboo and if you break them you will suffer the consequences, but here it's different." Most related these ideas to what they view as the absence of a strong social network or cohesive sense of unity among African communities in Metro Vancouver, as well as to a related lack of mentorship for African youth.

Youth also drew attention to the need for better information to help them make good choices about sexual health, nutrition, drugs, and other aspects of adolescent life in the Canadian context, since the connections with elders and family members who would have advised them at home has been lost. Many called for a youth-focused orientation program for when youth first arrive. Afifah (age 19, Congo) pointed out, "Having a book with all the youth programs in it would be really useful—if they could give that [to] you when you come to Canada, it would help a lot." Many participants believed that for the first year, there should be a range of after-school programs set up and in place for youth upon arrival and that parents should be involved. Some

stressed that programs should be offered all year round. For example, David explained that his group's "main upcoming challenge is what to do with those youth when school ends in June. Those three months are like three years for them, so we have to figure out things to keep them engaged." Additionally, those who were aware of existing Host programs for youth wished they could be expanded. Isaac (age 17, South Africa) and Miriam (age 23, Congo) underline these points:

Miriam: When you come, you get so much bad information: somebody will tell you, "Go to this place," but you go there and it's so bad . . . Youth don't have good information about where to go and what to do, so they are confused: you are confused because you don't have any idea. Like me, I changed my school three times, all because I had no idea.

Isaac: Just because you are young—there are still things you have to know. It's different from being an adult, it's two totally different things. There are things you've got to know when you're our age, before you become an adult . . . And we have to go to high school, so we have to be prepared to know what will happen.

Youth complained that parents blame them for making poor choices, even though they cannot always tell who is good or bad, or what is helpful or unhelpful, and that adults tend to point out the problems (quitting school, getting pregnant, taking drugs, etc.) without offering means of prevention or solutions. However, parents are also trying to adapt to a new culture and to help their youth deal with experiences for which they have no context. David pointed out, "Some parents don't even know that there is such a thing called 'drugs' which can kill people here! Even if their kid is selling drugs! So all of this requires working with parents—increasing their awareness of what's going on here." On the other hand, Kissa a youth worker who came to Canada as a youth from Africa found that African parents

are often very protective, or really school-focused: "No, she can't come out after four because she needs to do her homework." Even though she might do better on her homework if she came out and got some context for it, and improved her English so that she can understand it . . . But I find the parents are very protective, particularly about the girls.

Eveline (mother, Congo) offered her perspective on Canadian culture:

Going out too often is very bad for the children—you know, different houses, different children, different education. At home I have my own education that I give to my children, another parent has theirs. So I think going out with friends, to see a movie or whatever, sometimes it is good, but often—no! . . . Because the friends will destroy your children: "What, your mom does this? No, no, no, you don't have to do that . . ." You see, they destroy their mind. For us Africans, you cannot say, "Hey Mom, today I'm going out," "With who?" No, never. I can't lie to you, Canadian culture is not nice, it's not good.

Some parents and youth also believe that Vancouver can be a dangerous place for young people to hang around outside. Constance (age 18, Congo) told me,

Here it's really hard to leave your kids outside without getting hurt. In Africa you leave your kids outside and you don't have to worry about somebody stealing them. Even if they are two [years old], they can run and play on their own, but here they have to have somebody watching them all the time . . . Parents worry a lot about that here, so they don't want their kid coming home late, at least my parents do.

However, Constance also stressed that parents can make mistakes, too. She related,

Sometimes parents say, "I don't want you to hang out with this friend." They don't even know if your friend is good or bad, they just judge them by the way they look: "He dresses like this so I don't want you to hang around

them.” But that person who dresses badly might be the one who actually helps you and gives good advice. There are parents who take good friends away and just leave you with the bad ones.

Many youth explained that they experience a loss of independence they felt they had in Africa. For example, Francoise (age 16, Burundi) explained that what she most missed from Africa was “freedom to be out, because here, it’s not that it’s completely unsafe, but then at the same time with the things that go on, it’s not safe for us to just hang around outside.” The result, according to some youth, is boredom, which translates, in Lubo’s (age 24, Mozambique) words, into having “nothing to do except watch TV,” especially during summer holidays.

Finally, while finding their way around the city and trying to make friends, African youth also have to deal with widespread societal discrimination and racism. John elaborated on this point, explaining,

Other than the issue of racism as the most defining barrier for youth coming from various African countries, you could argue that many of the other characteristics are similar in nature to every other low income refugee family in BC. But racism is part of the underlying differential challenge that youth from Africa face: racism in school, from educators, from people in general, assumptions made that don’t give them the same opportunities as youth from other countries—that’s significant.

Naima explained how racism can inhibit the development of friendship among young people:

There are many children out there who have no idea, who see their first black person in class, and they don’t know how to react to them. They have been told many stories at home by their parents and now they are sitting next to this person who they have heard all the negative stories about! It’s

very hard for the other children to warm up just because they are fellow classmates.

Further, Prince (age 17, Uganda) and Musoke (age 24, Uganda) offered the following examples of how racism in the media affects their experiences:

Prince: A lot of people stereotype things in Africa. For instance, they will show all the poverty but they never show the good stuff—that's the way the media gets their money. Then everybody thinks "Africa is poor." . . . That also creates a mindset: they stereotype us.

Musoke: Yes, and that makes us feel inferior: if they only show the bad things about Africa, only the poor places, then when we come here, they think we don't have experience, we don't have this or that, we don't have good education or whatever. But maybe in Africa, there is good education.

Settlement workers drew attention to the problematic relationship of African youth to public space. For example, Jorge pointed out,

Places like community centres might be public spaces, but they seem like they are private and regulated, not welcoming; they don't seem like places where you can actually go to do things . . . At the same time, if you're a young African man walking down Arbutus and 33<sup>rd</sup>, [located in a wealthy Vancouver suburb] somebody is going to call the cops on you, so there is a real policing of public space that is not acknowledged but that is definitely there.

Relatedly, Patrice commented, "there is a cultural and structural gap between a country in a civil war and others in how police react. For example, in some countries if you are quiet and reserved, it is interpreted positively, but if you act like that here, you may be suspected of hiding something." Consequently, Kissa insisted on the need for collaboration with local law enforcement bodies:

There are a lot of stories about youth being harassed—sometimes I get so drained thinking about it—there are so many horror stories about the police and transit police . . . Most people are afraid of police. Racial profiling and abuse still happen regularly, and these are the issues that youth face, so we have to work with the police somehow.

Despite all the challenges they face, youth and parents feel a deep connection to Canada that they wish to be strengthened and acknowledged. Programs that facilitate the integration of African youth and families can provide vital links that enhance their social and cultural ties to their new home. Iman (mother, Burundi) explained,

For me I don't want my kids to be Canadian on paper only. Wherever you go: "Where do you come from?" When they look for a job: "Where do you come from?" So our dream is for the government to know . . . that this country is for everybody. We don't like it when Canadians think that Africans are only immigrants. All of us who they let come, they have to give us a chance.

In order to give African youth a fair chance and to overcome divisions between groups of people, youth need to be better connected to information, services, and social support networks.

#### 4.1.5 Family Life

Navigating new educational, economic, and social systems can also strain family relations. Although families expect to undergo changes when they enter a new culture, the nature of those changes may be unexpected. New behaviours, styles of dress and speech, and changing roles for women can create problems between African parents and youth. A commonly expressed understanding among parents was offered by Erasto (father, Congo), who asserted, "When youth come here, they lose their sense of boundaries; they hear that

people have 'freedom' here and think that means they can do whatever they want." The following advice from Adam (father, Congo) to prospective immigrant parents is telling:

I think we should talk to them before they come here, "Life is like this in Canada . . . the culture is different! Don't be surprised about all the things you will find. Because in Africa, for example, you don't have girls dressing in trousers, but that's what they will do here. Or they'll—I don't know—put make-up on their face from here to here, you have to be prepared for that. And they even have the right to go out if they want, at such age, so please don't be surprised."

Eveline (mother, Congo) added "We are so shocked about the culture: you don't control your children—why?"

Although most parents interviewed are aware that many of the challenges they face in Canada are similar to those they had to deal with back home, here problems arise in a whole new context. At the same time many parents struggle to employ new methods of discipline. Although Eveline (mother, Congo) insisted, "In Africa we teach our children to keep our family matters private," all of the parents and youth interviewed knew of multiple cases where a child had called 911 Emergency Services to deal with a conflict with their parents. However, there is little understanding among youth and parents of how the system works in terms of what the precise roles of social workers, police, ministry, settlement workers, etc., are. Ange, a youth coordinator originally from Africa, added another important difference, "Back there, a child belongs to the community, to the nation, so it's not an individual thing. Here you have to do things as an individual—nobody can help you—it's your choice and it's your child."

Youth and parents who enjoyed strong family relationships stressed the importance of keeping lines of communication open, having family meetings, and having parents that are open to talking and interested in what is going on in their children's lives. Unfortunately, the reality can be quite different. For example, Constance (age 18, Congo) drew attention to a key difference between life in Vancouver compared to that in Africa for low income families: "At home my parents went to work at the same time as the kids went to school, so they all came back together. But here mom goes to work at night, and the child stays home alone, so you don't really spend time with your parents like in Africa." The following exchange between Fatima (age 18, Sudan) and Constance (age 18, Congo) is also instructive:

Constance: Support is really important to keep the family together, like if the mom is tired after work and doesn't want to talk to anyone, then you just stop telling her things or she'll say, "Can't you see I'm tired?" Then you realise she never wants to listen to you because she never has time . . .

Fatima: There are really two different cultures: in Africa there is one thing and here there's another. In Africa usually the mom doesn't work, you always see your dad going to work and everything is fine. But here everybody is busy, there's not even anybody to cook the food. Mom and dad are both working and so stressed, so everything goes wrong. They may not even have time to take care of their kids, but the kids are used to having mom around, now they miss that. And they learn another culture outside. Then they come home and the mom is like, "Oh my God," so this is the problem. The kids can even get confused because you are trying to mix two things—two different cultures—so it really takes time. Culture is a big thing—there are some good things and some bad things. But when the kid is learning, they can't just select "this one is good, and that is bad;" they learn the whole culture; then the parents get angry.

Despite these issues, parents complained that there is a lack of assistance for families before, during, and after conflicts arise. For example, Erasto (father, Congo) stated, [Organisations] care about you when you are there,

or maybe if you have a crisis, but they leave you alone in the meantime, so they don't prevent the crisis from happening in the first place . . . they should have somebody who is in contact with the families who have left Welcome House<sup>1</sup>—just keep in touch with them, help them settle: "If this happens, there is this program; if you need that, go there." . . . Once you leave Welcome House, you have to look by yourself, but you don't know where you are going.

Some parents feel that there is a particular lack of institutional support for immigrant fathers. For example, Adam (father, Congo) told me, "Fathers are rejected here in Canada. They know about us but they don't focus on us. It's okay that they give power to our wives because that will help us fathers too, but they also have to think about us."

When families break up, the result is often a single-parent female-headed household and/or homeless youth. This was the case for several of the youth and parents who took part in this study: three youth were homeless at the time of the interviews as a result of family relationships breaking down. Leon (age 22, Ethiopia) related the following anecdote:

For my high school graduation, it was just too much: my family were like, "When are you graduating? When are you getting a job? When are you going to do this?" Pushing you!

(Peter [age 20, Liberia] in agreement: "*Pushing* you!") I didn't even wait for my graduation, just bought a ticket to Alberta, and I'm out! They didn't even know where I went until I called them after three months.

Due to the many challenges they face, some African youth and parents experience feelings of isolation and hopelessness. The temptation for some youth to take or sell drugs, whether to fit in, deal with stress, or earn money, can be

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<sup>1</sup> Welcome House is the reception centre for GARs in BC, operated by Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSoBC).

overwhelming. Describing the youth he deals with, Denzel explained, "There is usually a problem at home when they come here; often it's housing or issues with the parental relationship. With some there are some drug issues as well, or alcohol."

In these contexts, intergenerational dialogue to strengthen communications between youth and parents was a popular suggestion. Jorge explained, "I wish I'd had that with my parents when we came. It can sometimes be easier to discuss things in a formal situation because it's really hard to talk about many things when you are alone with your parents at home." Joy (age 15, Nigeria) insisted, "Everyone needs to talk; there should be some way that youth and families can come together and share." Adam (father, Congo) agreed, "It would be very good to put the adults and youth together, because we would be teaching them and they would be teaching us at the same time. So it will be like putting things together properly."

For youth separated from their parents such as Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe), Musoke (age 24, Uganda), and Miriam (age 23, Congo), the challenges are just as tough. Unaccompanied teenagers arriving to Canada after having spent several years in a refugee camp often find themselves without any support system, and are forced to deal with difficult situations on their own. Aimé explained,

For unaccompanied youth on their own, it's really hard! Sometimes siblings aren't able to live together: you have a brother there, a sister here. They don't have any authority to tell them, "Don't do this or that." They really struggle, and they have nobody to teach them how to deal with everyday situations. They can't learn from mom or dad's experiences, and they have nobody who is stronger than they are who can support them and give them advice . . . They have no role models so they have to learn on their own, and sometimes they learn from the bad model. It's not like in Africa where

your family is large, and you know people. It's a real problem that some people don't have anyone to turn to. We have a lot of families like that—youth on their own—so if the government could do something to help them, it would be great, because to be here alone is very, very painful.

Clearly youth are better able to deal with challenges related to education, employment, developing new social networks, and adapting to a new culture when they live in a healthy home environment. Youth programs that connect young people to settlement and integration programs can also contribute to more cohesive families to support youth better.

#### 4.1.6 Personal Well-being

The challenges of adapting to a new culture and education system, leaving behind everything that is familiar, struggling with poverty, and dealing with trauma can have powerful effects on youths' psychological well-being. Emotional strain is present from the moment of arrival, and forms a continuum of trauma and stress (see Wasik 2006). Jorge, who passed through Welcome House as a teenager, described the initial situation as "a pendulum swing between extreme anxiety and being bored out of your mind." Accordingly, there is a need to connect youth with resources, information, and networks as soon as they arrive.

Constance (age 18, Congo) drew attention to how, without adequate connections and support, family and social problems can result in a dramatic downward spiral of depression for youth. She suggested,

If the parents aren't home all day and when they come home they just go to bed, then the child doesn't have time to talk to the parents, to tell them how they feel, how their day went. So they probably think, "My mom and dad don't like me" . . . Then they try to find friends, and they might not find good friends so they feel left out and like nobody wants them, or they might

find what seems like the right people but when you're not with them they backstab you, and when you find it out, then it really hurts you. First it's not good at home, then your friend treats you wrong, and you can't talk to your parents . . . then you'll probably think, "Well, I might as well die because there's nothing to live for."

Naima elaborated on some of the psychological effects of dislocation in the context of discrimination, explaining,

One thing that really affects African youth is the social impact of the loss of confidence generally; they lose themselves when they come here, after what they've been through, and it's confirmed by the way they're looked upon, the stereotypes, everything. They think, "Well this is who I was afraid I was and now that person has just confirmed that this is who I am." . . . And they take that identity and keep on growing with it, so they lose their self-esteem and courage and get into a different mode altogether.

Some parents and youth related these fears to the overall lack of opportunities for African youth to develop their existing skills and talents, which creates a cycle of low confidence. Musoke (age 24, Uganda) explained, "Self-esteem is what lets most people down—I've seen it with many of my friends: they don't have the confidence." Consequently, Annie (age 18, Congo) insisted that "programs that boost youths' confidence are really important; that's what we need." Some settlement workers also explained that unless youth are provided with opportunities to regain their confidence in a comfortable environment, they feel unable to contribute to their communities. This in turn leads to self exclusion for the most vulnerable. Miriam (age 23, Congo) summed up the situation for newcomer youth: "It's so hard when you don't know anything, it's so hard! I've been there . . . Without support, young people really can't make it."

Related to the issue of low self esteem, youth workers interviewed lamented the low self expectations of some African youth, such as among those who are satisfied with a low wage, dead end job after quitting school at sixteen. Senwe pointed out that "speaking about the African community, probably as a result of having lived in a refugee camp for many years, some people have lost their sense of high expectations or goals; they set their expectations extremely low and the idea of 'better' is just out of their mind . . . The fact of being here is already huge; they just enjoy what they have." Ange agreed,

[Youth] might be having problems but they don't recognize that they have problems, or they don't want to change. Let's say a youth has withdrawn from school and is working at McDonald's or something and he's satisfied with that. He just says, "Oh no, me, I'm fine, I don't want to go back to school, I don't need anything." He can't think about the next ten or twenty or even thirty years. So that's one problem we face.

Whether or not adults support their choices, African youth draw on a range of personal resources and strengths to negotiate the multiple and overlapping challenges they face. These include strong motivation and a commitment to "make it." Among older youth especially, there is a firm sense that they are here to better their lives. Zakaria (age 28, Guinea) insisted, "To be successful here, you have to be hard in your head." Further, all of the African youth who took part in this study were committed to education for personal development as well as a means of improving their lives. During the interviews, they also revealed youthful energy, curiosity, adaptability, and flexibility. In addition, several youth and parents pointed out that African youth have valuable life experience from having lived in at least two countries and being able to speak at least two languages. Strong family relationships were also important for most

of those interviewed. Finally, a number of youth mentioned drawing strength from religion.

Based on their struggles, some youth offered powerful and revealing advice to others who might be facing similar difficulties. Camille (age 17, Congo) suggested,

Get involved as much as you can in the community, and also try to walk around and just know where you are, because when we didn't know where we were, it was really hard—you just stay in the house the whole day, which makes you depressed. When you just sit alone, when you don't know anybody, it is kind of depressing, so it's really important to get to know people, you have to get involved.

Finally, Françoise (age 16, Burundi), Héléne (age 19, Burundi), and Emilie (age 14, Burundi) held the following thoughtful, and somewhat defiant, exchange. Their advice to other young African women indicates some of the challenges youth face during immigration:

Héléne: Don't be afraid of what other people might think of you.

Françoise: Just be yourself.

Emilie: Be yourself and go ahead and do what you want to do . . . Also, just go out there and ask questions: if you have a question, don't be afraid . . . there are bad people, but just ignore them.

Héléne: Just talk to people if you have a problem . . . If you keep going to people and they keep saying bad things, don't give up. Just keep going and eventually you will find somebody.

In order to develop strong and cohesive adult identities, youth need to be connected into friendship and community support networks in which their

identities can develop safely. Where youth are not connected firmly to strong supports, social exclusion can result.

## *4.2 Programs and Services for Youth*

### 4.2.1 Introduction

The previous sections described some of the challenges confronting African youth and their families as they try to integrate into Canadian life in order to provide a contextual framework within which to examine service provision to immigrant and refugee youth. Despite the desire of organisations to ease the settlement of African youth, however, there are barriers to attendance in programs designed to facilitate integration. Importantly, participants explained that lack of effective outreach to African parents and youth inhibits the development of trust, with the result that some organisations struggle to attract or retain African youth. Many programs are also unable to offer adequate supports to youth in terms of childcare, transportation, and financial and emotional support. Barriers may also stem from unrealistic expectations on the part of some service providers concerning African youths' rate of cultural adaptation, or because youth feel they are treated unfairly based on their age, level of literacy, skin colour, country of origin, or other characteristic. Additional barriers to attraction and retention are related to the lack of collaboration among organisations, including mainstream, multicultural ISAs and "ethno-specific" organisations, and the ways in which funding is delivered. The overall point is that there is a need to build stronger relationships both between youth, parents, and organisations and among organisations themselves. The development of trusting relationships depends primarily on information sharing. If these connections are made, a holistic support system can be created. As Kadee explained, "Youth programs should function together like a unit." Without these links, African youth and families remain disconnected from the settlement services and resources needed for successful integration.

#### 4.2.2 Information on Arrival

Although on the one hand, youth, parents and settlement workers agree that there are not enough services for African families, on the other, the sheer number of programs available from different agencies can be overwhelming. Specifically, youth and parents explained they may not know about programs, or how to access them, especially if they do not speak or read English, or use a computer. At the same time, families may know of a service, but lack information about exactly what goes on there, what supports are available, and why they might be useful. Michael (age 16, Sierra Leone) emphasized that “[organisations] should have somebody to help young people with good advice because you just have no idea where to go, where to start, and you can waste so much time!” The time spent trying to navigate assistance systems can be significant since once youth become citizens, they may no longer be eligible for some programs, even though they would benefit from participation.

During the focus groups, I showed youth and parents a large collection of flyers collected from various agencies advertising different youth programs and facilities around Metro Vancouver. Although I had initially intended the flyers to serve as a conversation starter, they inevitably became the focus of discussion. Interviewees seemed to perceive our meeting as much as an information session where they were informed about different resources for families and youth as an interview where I learned about the challenges they face. Everybody found the pamphlets and information extremely helpful; I had to repeatedly replenish my stock as people removed flyers that interested them. Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe) and Annie (age 23, Congo) elaborated on this point.

Thandi: I think when an immigrant comes in, they should give him or her these flyers and information (general agreement), then after three months

there should be a mandatory meeting—or after six months—to re-introduce you to these things (general agreement), and again after a year . . .

Annie: Because most people don't know so many things! Or maybe they do get some information, but it's when they first arrive and they don't understand. They just tell you, "Go home and read it. If you have questions, call me," but it's in English and they might speak Chinese or whatever!

Similarly, Camille (age 17, Congo) emphasised, "There are just so many things and programs that it's hard to know which one is what when you first arrive; you don't know which thing you should focus on, so you get confused . . . Another thing is trust, because when you are new, you don't really trust people so you are afraid to ask." Aimé also observed, "This is a great country with lots of opportunities, but youth don't know how to access them, so they need more information about how to take advantage of all these resources. The government has set up a lot of services, but it's your responsibility to find out about them and use them, the program will not come to you."

Some youth thought when they arrived that they would find what they needed online or from other people, but discovered that people born in Canada do not necessarily understand the immigrant experience, while newcomers may not have accurate information themselves. Thus, although community networks are important, they may also be mis- or uninformed. Without effective orientation, information gathering can be quite random. Zakaria (age 29, Guinea) pointed out,

[ISAs] really have to work to get youth into these programs and let them know about them . . . When people come, [they] can go and talk to them in their home and let them know this information. That's better than just walking on the street until you see a black guy: "Hey, are you from Africa? Can you help me?"

Jeanne (age 15, Burundi) stated simply, "People don't know about the programs: like if your friend doesn't tell you, then you won't know."

Parents asserted that they also need more information. For example, Omar (father, Burundi) explained that the reason African youth do not attend programs is

because we parents don't know anything about it—all they tell us is that there is the YMCA, but we don't know what it is or what they have there. We don't know what is important . . . To let people know about these programs they have to organise community workshops in each community, because not all immigrants have email, they might not even have a phone connection . . . This would help the parents become familiar with those organisations and then you will see how useful those workshops can be.

Settlement workers voiced similar concerns. For example, Aimé pointed out,

When people first come to Canada, they tell you about all the services, but it is just once, and it is overwhelming. And even though they tell you about different services, it is up to you to find the right program for you. But you don't know the Canadian culture and how things work here, so it's very difficult. You need time! After speaking to other people about your goal, you can get more precise, but in the beginning you don't know, so you can have the feeling that "there is nothing for me."

These comments underline how lack of information and understanding about how to access settlement services function as a barrier to participation in programs to ease their integration.

### 4.2.3 Outreach to African Communities

The issue of information provision is in part a question of effective outreach. The following comments by Lise and Tamara are representative of those made by youth workers employed in large mainstream organisations. Tamara explained, “We haven’t outreached to the African community and to be honest, I don’t know who to outreach to, that’s another reason I was interested in talking to you.” Lise offered, “We really want to be able to reach out to the African community and let them know that we are here, and be able to reach those youth who are really struggling but are totally isolated from services. We know they are out there, but we need to work closely with the community to reach them, and I’m at a loss how to do that.” The challenge is how to connect youth who do not know how to access programs with centre-based social service programming that assumes people will go and seek help. Many people of African origin, especially those from rural areas or who have spent several years in a refugee camp, are unused to visiting offices to ask for help, and are often intimidated by the process. For example, Thomas explained that African youth “don’t know what’s out there and they won’t think to look for any programs—why would they? In their society it wasn’t like that, so they just sit at home, not doing anything, or they join the wrong group.” The following responses to my question of how organisations should let African families know about available resources were typical:

Adam (father, Congo): They should do what you are doing right now: you are in my house and I am explaining my problems to you . . . it’s better. Maybe you can’t give a 100 percent solution but at least you know about it. At least it’s somebody who can talk to you and encourage you . . . Instead it was spoiled from the beginning: when we landed, we were already on our own, but as parents we really need help.

Erasto (father, Congo): It should be like you are working like this—in touch with people! Just get a group of people together to look at this information, to help them settle. . . . They should have people to keep in touch with you to make you feel settled properly. Make a phone call: “How are you guys doing?” Make some visits even. That can help people move on.

Fabaya (mother, Congo): Just like this, what you are doing!

Participants in this study were unanimous that outreach to African youth and families requires meeting people in person to explain things in a comfortable environment where trust can develop. For example, Marthe (mother, Burundi) insisted, “It’s not enough to simply call and say ‘send your kid on Friday.’” Nancy, who coordinates an immigrant youth program at a large multicultural ISA, commented,

When I started I thought it would be easy to get youth . . . I thought I would just contact community leaders and they would bring the youth, but I found that didn’t work—I really had to meet the youth myself in order for them to come to the program. Even if a mentor tells them about the program, if they haven’t met the coordinator and none of their friends are going, then it’s too scary. If I email all the SWIS and cultural liaison workers telling them that we have openings, I might get two or three youth signing up, but if I go to an ESL class and do a presentation with a youth who’s already done the program, then I’ll get around twenty applications.

In addition, Erasto (father, Congo) suggested,

Going through the community is a good way—each country has its community, so ask how many families they have and get their phone numbers and addresses and start from there. People will say, “Oh, this organisation cares about us. We are getting a lot of information from them, so if there’s something we need, we can call them and they can help us.” People don’t know where to find this support alone.

Susan coordinates a program for immigrant youth at a well-established multicultural ISA. She suggested,

What we need is not more programs but more workers: people who have the time to be with people and invite them to things, follow up with them, and get them involved in programs. They could be working for a specific program or not, but just to have more support would be really helpful—just somebody who has the time to be with people as people and develop groups based on interesting things. But you're usually really pressed for time . . .

These comments underscore the need for more personal connections in order to link African youth and families with needed resources.

#### 4.2.4 Connecting with Parents

Parents who took part in this study revealed gaps in service provision that result in workers waiting in their offices for clients to come to them rather than phoning or visiting, leaving African parents feeling abandoned. For example, Adam (father, Congo) explained,

If you don't go to the office, then they don't even know about your problem or how you feel about it, so you feel alone with all the problems you have in Canada—that's the problem for many people. So they should have at least one person in the community who visits people and is in touch with them, instead of just waiting in the office . . . I don't say they have to visit every day, but at least find out how parents are doing.

Some parents pointed out that better outreach in the beginning could reduce problems later. Patience (mother, Congo) explained, "After six months you hear there are some organisations, but they have to be there from the first step; as parents we really need more help . . . because really here it's so different." Settlement workers agreed on the importance of outreach to develop trust with parents. For example, Naima explained,

You have to earn the trust of the parents! In the African community, if they don't trust you as the program coordinator or the youth worker or whatever, they just will not send their youth to you. Literacy is so important, both cultural and literal, because when they can't read, how will they understand: "Why do you want my children? I won't give them to you." Parents have to understand that you don't want to use them for anything, you just want to help. Once they trust you, they will send their children, but you have to prove yourself, and the children have to come back reflecting what you are doing. If there's no reflection, forget it—the parents have to see results—the children come back behaving better, for example.

Omar (father, Congo) made a similar point: "There's another culture here, it's basically a different world, everything is the opposite! . . . So parents need information: where we are, how to live with kids here, what should you do with your kids, what can they do, what are they free to do, that nothing is going to happen to them. Parents have to be informed!" Omotunde agreed:

Existing organisations should do more to relate to the families of these youth . . . We have to create a stronger relationship between parents and organisations, and then we can also bridge the gap between the youth and the various organisations. You can't just take a child somewhere without making sure the parents know what is happening, and just keep dealing with the kid without meeting with the parents at all; the parents should always be consulted . . . The aim is to try to take away fear, not only from the child, but also from the parents: to empower them.

Lacking these connections, parents in this study elaborated on their concerns that their children might pick up undesirable behaviours from facilitators or other youth, or be encouraged to forget their African roots. The following comments from different focus groups encapsulate these fears:

Iman (mother, Burundi): The thing is that you send the kids to somebody who doesn't give them good behaviour. For example, in my culture we don't

allow kids to wear a mini skirt, but the person leading the program might encourage them to do that. Then the kids will come home and say, "Mom, everybody wears one," and there is trouble in the house. So that's why it's not enough to talk to [people running programs] on the phone—we have to meet them personally—we can't send our kids to a stranger.

Eveline (mother, Congo): We've never seen anything like this before, that is why sometimes we are scared to send our kids: maybe they'll meet with other kids who have bad behaviour, and they will learn it quickly because children do learn quickly. If you send them for two weeks they will certainly come home with another behaviour, so we are scared of that. It's very safe when I am with my children: we have fun together . . . then come back together—that's very nice! But to send them somewhere every day is very dangerous in Canada.

Adam (father, Congo): When we come here, our children automatically forget about our culture and just integrate into Canadian culture. It's really difficult for us to see their behaviour: the way they dress and the words coming out of their mouths are not really the way somebody should be speaking . . . we are afraid of that. That's why we say that in those organisations, they should try to keep the African culture—and sometimes they do! You have to take the good things from both cultures.

Fabaya (mother, Congo): What I want those organisations to think about is the culture that the children were living in, because we do have our own culture and they should keep it to help them. We are not denying Canadian culture—it's good, we like it—but we need to keep our own culture too, so it would be good to have some programs where they will be teaching the children using African culture—I'm talking African in general.

Youth are also aware of these issues. Constance (age 18, Congo) believed that "parents are worried about sending their kid to places because they think they'll learn bad manners. They'll say, 'You don't know who's there and we don't know them. What they teach you might not be what we teach you, so you shouldn't go.'" Elizabeth (age 13, Nigeria) agreed, "Parents have to have

information about what is going on: you can't just let your kid go some place where you don't know what is happening."

Further, similar to John's earlier point regarding school evaluation and assessment based on a deficit model, some parents feel that some organisations are too eager to identify "youth at risk." Most linked such concerns to the lack of diversity among decision makers, resulting in a situation where the people who design programs may not be familiar with the needs of African families. Connecting the need for cultural sensitivity to the issue of program design, Aimé related,

Based on my conversations with immigrants and refugees, there are some cultural gaps. For instance, when you come from a different culture, the first thing you would like to have are some things and people who are familiar, who understand you, people who know your struggle. But it seems like sometimes African youth don't find this—they don't find people who are sensitive to their culture. And some people seem to want them to make radical change immediately: they say, "Okay, you are in Canada, and here you have to do this and that." Youth have to make some effort too, but it can't happen over night. I wouldn't say this problem is because of the people hired to run the program, but because the programs are often conceived by people who are not youth or even immigrants or refugees themselves, and when they run the program, they are not aware of the cultural parameters of the people who are in it. This is a big gap for me. Sometimes they take programs that are not designed for refugee youth and just apply it to them, and that doesn't work either. The thing is that there is a lack of diversity among the decision makers.

Meanwhile Omar (father, Burundi) wondered "how [non-African] organisations can say, 'We know the needs of Africans and we will save your youth,' when they don't even know our problems or understand our culture." Faced with these challenges, service providers need to find ways to connect with African parents in order to improve their services to youth and families.

#### 4.2.5 Connecting with Youth

Connecting African youth to programs also requires flexibility, the development of personal relationships based on trust, and the provision of information in a comfortable environment youth can relate to. Omotunde explained,

If you just say, "Here is the program, go there," then [African youth] won't go because they don't know it: they've never been there and they don't know who will be there. So they'll take the paper and say, "Yeah, sure, I'll go there," but they won't. So one of the things that may need to be done is have workshops where you explain, for example, "Okay, this is where you go when you need to learn how to write a résumé," then take them there and show them the place, and what resources are available there. It should be like a bridging program before they go into the real program, taught by people they are familiar with, in a comfortable environment.

Denzel also pointed out that "if [youth] don't know about the program and they go, they are very quick to see if it's a waste of time for them or not. They'll just make their assessment and that's it, you've lost them. I like that about youth, they're very honest. Sometimes you have to accept as a service provider that something isn't working and change your game a bit if that's what they want." Moreover, organisations need to recognise that they are marketing to a relatively cynical audience, as is revealed in the following conversation:

Constance (age 18, Congo): Sometimes they give you information telling you about their program and making it sound really good, but when you get there, you are like, "What am I doing here? This isn't what I signed up for."

Interviewer: Has that happened to any of you before?

Prince (age 17, Uganda): That I signed up for something and it wasn't as good as they said? *Yeah*, that's happened before, in fact it happens a lot! Because they're trying to sell the program to you, so you have to go in

thinking, “Okay, it probably won’t be as good as they said, but I might as well try it.”

In another focus group, Thandi (age 29, Zimbabwe) asked after looking at a flyer, “Do they really help you start your own business or is it just a name?” Based on her past experiences, Annie (age 23, Congo) explained, “When I need something, I just go to Google and find it. I don’t like going to offices, offices . . . too many appointments: come here, go there . . . it’s just pointless, I’ve tried that.”

Many youth also said they do not seek out services because they feel like they “do not belong.” For example, if there are no other immigrants in the program, African youth worry that their accent or level of literacy will be ridiculed and that their experiences will be misunderstood. Emilie (age 14, Burundi) explained,

Youth don’t take part in existing programs because sometimes we don’t really feel that we belong. According to how people may be looking at you or what they are thinking, you have this feeling that maybe they don’t want you there, but they don’t tell you that—you have to figure it out for yourself. After that experience, you don’t want to go to another one, you just leave that one. That happens to *lots* of people!

Afifah (age 19, Congo) suggested,

It’s really important to have programs for immigrants only. Like in [name of program], everyone is an immigrant so we feel comfortable together, and it also makes us practice our English. We correct each other but we don’t feel like we’ve done something wrong. You know, sometimes when native speakers correct you, you’re just like, “Oh, please don’t correct me like that . . .” But the other people in [program] have had the same experience so they are more gentle . . . I actually wasn’t comfortable with my English when I came here. I felt so uncomfortable that I kind of became a loner for a few months. Then I went to [program] and it was fun because everyone has an accent—that really made me talk.

Francoise (age 16, Burundi) agreed,

It's better if it's all immigrants because at least then you all understand each other somewhat. But if you are next to somebody who is not an immigrant, you will think, "This person is thinking, where am I from? And, what am I doing here? And they don't understand what I'm saying," so you won't really get along.

Similarly David insisted, "Youth need to have workshops or other activities where [youth] don't just feel that they are being used to get something out of them, or being displayed there: 'These are the stupid people.' There should be a way for the message to be relayed so that they don't feel like they have been picked on because they are stupid." Patrice also underlined the need for greater sensitivity, offering the observation that:

Some youth don't participate in activities because when they get there, the coordinator asks, "How old are you? Sixteen—okay, go there." They consider him as somebody who has already finished primary school, and when he is in the group, people laugh at him when he is asked a question and cannot answer. They go to programs! But because the coordinators don't arrange them there in a good way, it makes problems and discourages young people.

African youth also explained that they often feel uncomfortable or shy in mainstream organisations where, in Marcel's (age 20, Rwanda) words, they "don't know the rules" and there is nothing familiar they can relate to. For example, most organisations do not have people who speak youths' mother tongues, so those who do not speak English fear being isolated. Adam (father, Congo) asserted,

[One reason] youth do not attend programs is they think they won't be able to communicate with the other children . . . if [organisations] could just put some mother tongues there as a bridge before you go to English, that would help them to be integrated. It doesn't have to be a program in Swahili, but just put some people who speak those languages so when [the youth] go there they will find somebody who speaks their language so they will be encouraged . . . and slowly, slowly they will get connected to the other children. That would really help.

The following response from Erasto (father, Congo) to my suggestion that youth do not attend programs because they feel unwelcome relates these ideas to the need for more information generally:

Yeah! They have a reason to say that! Because if somebody is not informed, they will be afraid. It's not just that they are uncomfortable about being the only black person there . . . if they are told, "Don't worry, it's a good program, everybody will be proud of you," then they will be glad to go there; they won't feel uncomfortable for a second if they only know what is going on. The problem is that there is no information. To make them feel comfortable, you have to inform them: "You have the same rights like white girls or boys, so don't feel like you can't do something . . ." That is the information they need.

Organisations that were initially set up to serve only adults may also require some physical adaptation to make the environment more youth-friendly. Nancy explained that at her organisation, "Improving the atmosphere and décor would definitely make it more accessible to African youth." Furthermore, youth need to see themselves represented in the program literature. After viewing a large collection of flyers without a single representation of a black person, Alma (age 15, Burundi) stated, "I would be like, 'there are no black people there,' and it would even make me not want to go, since I would be

the only black person. It's just awkward." Kissa, who came to Canada as an African youth several years ago, pointed out,

Participation of African youth in the existing mainstream programs is low because it's hard to relate to the program, or to whoever is conducting the program. For example, if I'm going to feel like I'm the only different one there, then that won't work. African youth have to see people who they can relate to, then they will feel more comfortable. Until they know you, or are able to build that trust, they don't reach out and find programs.

In this context, David also stressed,

You have to make it so they are comfortable. Some people ask me, "How do you get so many youth to turn up to your club in the church basement?" And I tell them "Well, we sit down, we talk, they come and meet with their friends—sometimes we just talk about the game last night—and they like that because they feel welcomed: 'We are valued, people listen to us.'" That's how we do it: you bring them in slowly, and when they are here, you say, "Hey, this [program] could be good for you." If you are able to reach one person and they come and are happy, then tomorrow they will find another person to come, and the next day another, and so on. That works.

Youth who attended programs in the past also noted that they are often not run by youth, and the perception is that many programs consist primarily of adults "preaching at" them rather than providing real information about how to advance. Camille (age 17, Congo) commented,

You know, some people think they're helping but they're not, because if you just tell people the problem but not how to solve it, then it's pointless . . . I think because it's coming from older people, they just want to tell you what to do and what not to do. In a group for youth, it wouldn't be telling each other what to do, but more just talking about it.

In contrast, Joy (age 15, Nigeria) described the situation at an African youth group: “The people there are all African, meeting with them feels like home . . . I don’t feel alone, it’s so comfortable . . . I have the feeling all the time that I can just say whatever I want and nobody says, ‘What are you talking about?’ or gets scared or laughs.” A young woman who participates in an African dance group described it as “just too much fun! It also teaches us about our culture, because after five years, we start to forget everything about our country. It’s good that our parents are so into it as well. And it’s good because we are all young—it’s not an adult telling us to do this or that—we’re doing it because we want to.” The underlying point is that African youth need to be connected to agencies and resources incrementally, and sensitively, starting with what is familiar so they do not feel lost or overwhelmed, and remain connected with resources and networks.

Finally, it is important to note that even where relationships between agencies and youth are successfully initiated through outreach and information sharing, a number of other supports must also be in place to ensure African youths’ ongoing participation. Many of these additional needs stem from the reality of living in a low-income family, along with the financial and familial responsibilities that often accompany that status. Nancy commented,

The ones who would benefit from the program most are the low income refugee kids who are hardest to reach . . . but it’s a big commitment if they’ve got responsibilities at home for younger siblings, especially for girls, or need to earn money—that’s for boys and girls . . . and they also have to be interpreters and assistants for their parents. That’s what a lot of youth are doing for their entire family: going to the bank, the doctor, and discussing problems that they normally wouldn’t talk about. So they have a lot of responsibilities.

Urging the need for supports to be provided through a continuum of service, Susan related the following anecdote:

I can think of a couple of young women who wanted to do the program, but they were working and also childcare was a big thing, so they couldn't come because their parents were working and they were expected to care for their younger siblings . . . So it would be great if there were more support for the family. There are some amazing young people who would really benefit from the program, but they just can't.

In addition to family care responsibilities, youth also have financial responsibilities. Kissa explained, "Sometimes youth have to work and don't have time for extra-curricular activities; they have to support their families because many of them come from low-income families or are single parents, so as soon as the kid is sixteen, they need to start working. I hear that a lot." In this context, Omotunde also revealed, "You can't have one person coming absolutely regularly for four months; that's not possible because they have so many other things in their lives." These comments underline the need for flexibility in program design to accommodate youths' needs as they change over time; after making the initial connection, it is important to ensure that program offerings continue respond to youths' concerns.

#### 4.2.6 Relationships among Service Providers

As with relationships between organisations and families, those among organisations also need to be strengthened. The question arises of how a continuum of services can be created when organisations fail to work closely together. A number of parents and settlement workers suggested links between the lack of effective information-sharing capacity among service providers and the lack of follow-up with families. Participants who came through

Welcome House as GARs particularly stressed that organisations need to work together from the start. Perhaps because it is their first point of contact in Canada, many drew attention to the important role that Immigrant Services Society (the organisation that runs Welcome House) plays in the community. Whether or not the following suggestions are feasible, they draw attention to the need for adaptations in the way outreach, program delivery, and referrals are coordinated. For example, Erasto (father, Congo) suggested,

Welcome House has to tell organisations when people arrive, because it's like they are working in the same company—they all have the same goal: to welcome newcomers. So they should share information, not why people are here, but that they are here, how many kids they have, what they need, where they live, so [settlement workers] know where the new families are. We do have community organisations and agencies waiting to help people; the problem is they don't know where the people are.

Similarly, Fabaya (mother, Congo) proposed, "Every month, ISS should send just one letter to all the organisations that help newcomers, a message saying, 'This number of refugees are coming, here are their addresses. Please go and visit and find out which problems they have, and how you can help.'" Conversely, Adam (father, Congo) pointed out,

When immigrants come to Canada, those organisations that are there to help should go straight to Welcome House to let them know about their programs, to welcome them, and to tell them, "We have this, this, and this." I think when we arrive, only one organisation knows about us, but they can't provide everything that all newcomers need from the start.

From many settlement workers' perspectives, families who have made the transition from Welcome House into the community are already in crisis by the time they find out about them. Naima insisted,

There are services in the community, but nobody calls us or says, "We have these twenty-five people from Africa, they require these services, could you please help them?" . . . We read the stats of people coming in and wonder, where are they? . . . That is why by the time the youth come to me they are in so much trouble—because it took them a while to find me. Yet I could have prevented the problem in the first place if I had known what was going on . . . That's why parents and youth are struggling, and when you put the two of them together everyone is lost.

In this context, most settlement workers also mentioned concerns regarding tensions around referrals, which some related to short term funding systems that assume a sharp division between "community development" and "settlement," prevent long-term planning, discourage workers from making a significant investment in their project, and disrupt continuity of services for vulnerable people who already struggle to develop trusting relationships. John underlined that "one question revolves around the role of a multicultural ISA versus an ethno-specific organisation—there is ongoing tension . . . Rightly or wrongly, we are all being forced into this competitive Request For Proposals process . . ." John also explained,

There is a need as part of the settlement continuum to provide ethno-specific supports, to bring the youth up to a certain level where they can adequately integrate and move into more generalized support programs . . . That's one side, and the other side is who should be delivering those programs: schools will say they're doing it, ethno-specific orgs will say they have the cultural competence to do it, and ISAs think they should do it.

The findings from this study suggest that, rather than relying on a single organisational model to meet the needs of all youth, different organisations have to work together to ensure that people's concerns are addressed. However,

for organisations to work together, they need time to get to know one another, build trust, and develop information-sharing capacity. Consequently, governments and other funders need to recognise the significant intellectual labour that takes place in organisations offering settlement services and which goes far beyond service delivery to analysing and storing data, and building and maintaining working relationships. The problem is that divisions between agencies ultimately result in people who need services being left without access to sufficient resources to participate fully in Canadian life.

A related point is that when there are large organisations that provide services for everyone, the most marginalised always face extra barriers to accessing them. Yet smaller community-based organisations that provide vital services to vulnerable people may not receive any outside funding at all. Senwe believes that “the most vulnerable communities are those that have few programs for themselves: the African and Afghan communities.” Kissa made a similar point: “The organisations that are working specifically with Africans definitely need youth programs—and something other than sports. And programs need to be ongoing, not just project funding that ends suddenly, because when you build relationships, then you need ongoing funding.”

Representatives of large organisations that offer programs for immigrant youth also complained about the insufficiency of funding that prevents them from helping as they would like. Nancy, who runs an immigrant youth program through a well-established multicultural ISA, told me that for her program,

There’s a long waiting list, I’ve turned a lot of people away . . . we can’t expand to accommodate more groups unless we have more funding and the funding is pretty tight. In fact, right now it’s an unfunded program: I’m looking for funding at the moment, and it’s pretty dire. I don’t have any

more hours so I have to do it all off the corner of my desk. But how can I find funding quickly when I don't have any hours for it? A year ago I was excited, thinking we'll keep on expanding; now I'm just hoping to get it back to two or three programs a year. But six would be great because there are so many kids interested.

Kissa also works for a large multicultural service provider; she stated: "We would really like to expand the program but it's a question of funding . . . the need is definitely there."

In addition to calling for more money, settlement workers also offered their perspectives on how funding could be better allocated. Susan mentioned the need for ongoing program funding, explaining,

It's really a challenge funding-wise because funders don't give money to create a space where people feel welcome—the money is for straight delivery—but it would be nice if there was some recognition of the value of programs that are simply available and where people can come to. There has to be a continuum of support, and there have to be places to go and ways to develop starting from where people are.

A related complaint concerned funders' focus on "outputs" rather than "outcomes." In other words, many settlement workers feel that one reason some programs are not as successful as they could be is that funders are overly concerned with the lowest unit cost in terms of outputs as they are predicted in the initial funding proposal. Instead, they argue that the focus should be on outcomes, or clients' real life development within their communities over a longer period of time. Rather than measuring success by how many people attended a particular program, there is a need to look at whether and how people's lives actually improved as a result of their participation.

Settlement workers also repeatedly stressed the need for funding that takes a longer-term approach to settlement needs in order to achieve long-term results. For example, Pierre, who works for an organisation that serves francophones, insisted,

People need more time! They come here and have fifteen days to find an apartment, then they have one year of government support, but they have to pay back their ticket . . . they struggle with a lot of things. After five years of trauma or time in a refugee camp or whatever, you need time to integrate—years. And that should happen within a program, something stable and consistent that can help you take things step by step, because before youth can apply their energies to positive things, they have to feel comfortable and confident. They have to understand what’s going on around them and how they can use their energy, so they need time! . . . A six month program is great, but there also need to be programs that are two years or whatever. And not constantly applying for funding.

Denzel agreed on the need for more responsive and proactive funding mechanisms. In response to a question I posed to him, he answered,

Do I see any gaps in services for youth? Definitely! For starters, governments need to recognize how long it actually takes to work with youth . . . on average, it’s nine months before they have some success in finding work or going back to school. For refugees, it could be up to a year because there are so many underlying and pre-existing issue that you have to address—the homelessness for one . . . So if there was funding to help these youth get a home and stabilize their work situation, or get them into a program where they’ll develop skills from the ground up, from the pre-employment level, that would be really helpful . . . Also, slow it down a bit: look for longer-term results. It takes years to learn a language, but at least imagine if these kids could learn the language without having to worry about housing at the same time, or how they’re going to eat that night, or about their family breaking up because there’s no money in the home and the rent is due or whatnot. There’s a lot the government could do to alleviate that stress . . . It’s an investment: you want them in the country, why would you want them

to come in and fail? Sooner or later, the government needs to address these issues. Then these new Canadians could start to prosper and start to really perform.

Mark, who runs a youth program in a mainstream organisation with facilities around the lower mainland, drew attention to some of the positive consequences long-term funding can have in terms of professional development within service providing organisations:

What we need are people who can make a ten- to fifteen-year commitment—if only the government would invest in programs that will make a lifetime difference, [instead of] just these programs that come and go, short-term funding. When you look at most job opportunities, they're just one-year contracts, but that doesn't suit people with families. Then, if you think your job will disappear in one year, your investment in it will be limited too. But if you knew that you were going to have fifteen years to develop a program that will make a long-term difference, that would be great! You don't get success in the first one or two years of a program anyway, that comes with time. So that's what I would like government to do: fund long-term programs.

Funding offered on longer terms and through less competitive frameworks could go a long way towards enabling organisations to develop a more coherent network of complementary and overlapping resources available from a spectrum of organisations working in tandem to provide services to African and other immigrant youth.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### *5.1 Summary*

Youth can be a difficult stage of life even at the best of times as young people grapple with their identities during the transition to adulthood. Their integration into society may be seen as an outcome of investments at various levels; the greater the investment at the individual, family, and community levels, the greater the inclusion of youth through employment, education, and volunteerism, and the greater youths' sense of belonging to a community. Compared to their Canadian-born peers, newcomer youth face particular challenges because they have smaller social networks and are also trying to navigate a new country, culture, language, and way of life. For African youth, these difficulties are also overlaid with discrimination, family separation, lower-than-average family incomes, and in some cases, refugee status.

In order to address the question of how services can best be coordinated to meet the needs of African youth and families, this preliminary study has examined some of the factors affecting their participation in youth programs aimed at assisting them in their settlement and integration. The study findings were grouped under themes related to employment, education, social life, family concerns, personal well-being, and programmatic considerations. Successful integration requires youth to be connected to resources within each area so that a seamless continuum of holistic service access and delivery is achieved.

In terms of economic integration, the results of the research show that under- and unemployment is pervasive among African youth, who are also over-represented in precarious employment. Further, African youth and par-

ents, who may have limited experience with formal education, struggle to integrate into a new school system that is also based on a Eurocentric school curriculum.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, African immigrants to Metro Vancouver do not enter a well-developed or powerful social network and are therefore often left to navigate Canadian culture without an effective orientation or support system. Youth also struggle to make friends and are vulnerable to pressure from negative influences as they try to fit into Canadian society. These stresses strain family relationships and have negative consequences in terms of housing, employment, education, and personal well-being. Although African youth are motivated to succeed in Canada, trauma, family separation, poverty, and discrimination can take their toll on young people's confidence and sense of self-worth.

The aim of youth-focused settlement programs should be to address these complex and interrelated issues in a coherent and culturally sensitive manner. However, the study findings reveal a series of cultural, informational, and programmatic disconnections or gaps in youths' lives and suggest the need for a better integrated continuum of services to address people's needs from when they first arrive and throughout the settlement process. An ongoing challenge is how to connect isolated youth who are unused to visiting offices with programming that assumes people will seek help. Creating a coordinated continuum of service also requires the development of stronger connections among organisations that serve immigrants, which in turn will promote more positive links with African youth and families. Consequences of the current information and outreach disconnect include interruptions in services for vul-

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<sup>2</sup> It is in part to address this bias that the Toronto District School Board decided in 2008 to create an Africentric Alternative School. Students are taught the Ontario curriculum and receive the same system and provincial assessment benchmarks, while having the opportunity to see themselves positively reflected and represented in the images they see at school and in the curriculum taught (Toronto District School Board website: [http://www.tdsb.on.ca/SchoolWeb/\\_site/viewitem.asp?siteid=10423&pageid=19951&menuid=23019](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/SchoolWeb/_site/viewitem.asp?siteid=10423&pageid=19951&menuid=23019)).

nerable clients and a sense of mistrust among parents and youth in relation to organisations set up to serve them, with the result that African youth are underrepresented in programs that could help them settle.

### *5.2 Policy Implications*

The finding of a series of disconnections or missing links among African youth, families, and settlement and integration services suggests the need to build bridges that will enable stronger connections between families and service providers, and crucially, among service providers, in order to provide the supports youth need.

In terms of outreach, the initial development of a personal connection with somebody from an organisation could serve to help African parents feel more comfortable so that in time they may be more willing to seek help and information from people in offices. Better outreach and follow-up could also prevent crises. However, without that personal component, many parents remain unaware of how to effectively access social services or obtain information.

At the same time, increasing the availability of programs for African youth that can then act as a bridge from when they first arrive until they are ready to enter mainstream programming will ensure that vulnerable or sensitive youth are given the opportunity to adapt and find their feet at their own pace. Ongoing programs can also increase program accessibility by accommodating changes in people's lives where they may have to stop attending until their lives re-stabilize. Further, longer-term programming can help overcome the disconnection in services that sometimes occurs when projects end and therefore ensure that ongoing needs continue to be met. Program planning also needs to take a longer-term approach, and this orientation towards ongoing support and assistance should be reflected in funding availability.

The aim of youth programs is to improve the lives of youth, so existing tensions around referrals must be overcome if the needs of African youth and their families are to be adequately met. Extending the collaboration among ISAs and SWIS would also be beneficial, given the key role SWIS play in the lives of newcomer youth and their families. Increased collaboration requires that funding mechanisms acknowledge the time and intellectual commitment demanded of organisations seeking to develop relationships with each other.

### *5.3 Further Research*

The needs and concerns of youth are as complex and diverse as their experiences; migration, settlement, and integration are far more complicated than a linear series of discrete events. This paper has provided a preliminary overview of how some of the challenges immigrants face are manifested in the lives of African youth in Metro Vancouver. However, given the scale of the study, many questions have been left unanswered. Further research into the experiences of African youth and families in Metro Vancouver disaggregated by ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, religion, language, sexual orientation, age, gender, etc., is needed to better understand the range of experiences. Future investigations could also include comparative studies of African youths' experiences in different Canadian cities. In addition, longitudinal studies that track youths' integration trajectories over time could deepen understandings of how changes in political, economic, and social life affect particular groups of newcomer youth. Other research could examine the convergences and divergences of experiences among youth who identify as black in terms of identity formation, community relations, and experiences of social inequality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study adds to the growing body of research demonstrating the need for more focused programming for immigrant and refugee youth. Unfortunately, policy has not kept pace with the growing and increasingly diverse needs, and the result is a series of missing links between and among newcomers and settlement services and other resources that facilitate integration. Rather than positive integration, many African youth are experiencing negative forms of integration, or social exclusion. Consequently, there is an opportunity for governments, agencies, schools, and community organizations to come together to improve the living conditions of many new Canadians. Implementing this reports' recommendations will require funding and additional support, but it is worth investing in African youth to create a more just society in the present, and to promote a more prosperous Canada in the future.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *A proactive strategy that includes enhanced outreach and more personal connections with parents to promote more effective follow-up after people leave Welcome House:*

A proactive approach is more effective than leaving people on their own to find things out “the hard way” and may prevent the situation where, as one family settlement worker put it, “families are already in the mouth of the crocodile before they go for help.”

2. *Increased availability of programs aimed specifically at African youth to act as a bridge from when they first arrive in Canada until they are ready to enter mainstream programming:*

Immigrant and refugee youth needs are diverse, so a one-size-fits-all approach cannot address everyone’s concerns. There is a need for a combination of African-focused, multicultural, and mainstream programming in order to accommodate different people’s needs at various stages in their integration, given that the pace of integration may differ. Developing this component of the service continuum would create a space for people to develop the confidence to take a more active part in mainstream programming.

3. *More long-term and ongoing programs in addition to short term projects:*

When combined with the second recommendation, increased long-term and ongoing programming will create a culturally sensitive continuum of care and incremental assistance for people at every point in their integration, so that they remain connected to networks and resources.

4. *Better and more structured coordination and information sharing among ISAs, community-based organisations, and other service providers:*

Governments and funders need to recognize that, beyond the question of direct service delivery, there is also a need for agencies to organize, analyse, store, learn from, and share data, as well as to build community and professional relationships that will facilitate the most effective and efficient use of that data.

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## 9. APPENDICES

*Appendix A: Participating Organisations*

<b>VANCOUVER</b>	<b>BURNABY / NEW WESTMINSTER</b>	<b>SURREY</b>
La Boussole Centre Communautaire Francophone	African Homework Club	YMCA of Greater Vancouver
MOSAIC	Purpose Youth Society	DiverseCity Community Resources Society
Collège Educacentre	Centre of Integration for African Immigrants (CIAI)	Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS)
Immigrant Services Society (ISSofBC)	Immigrant Services Society (ISSofBC)	Immigrant Services Society (ISSofBC)
Broadway Youth Resource Centre (PCRS)	Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS)	Umoja Operation Compassion Society (UOCS)
REACH Multicultural Family Centre (MFC)		

*Appendix B: Youth Focus Group Questions*

1. Before we start, do you have any questions about me or the research project?
2. In the last few weeks I've been meeting with representatives from organisations that offer programs for young people like yourselves, and they told me about the programs they offer. Some examples they gave me are: [...]. Have any of you attended any of those programs?
  - a) If yes, what was it like? What did you find most/least enjoyable/useful/ interesting? Were there any problems with the programs that you attended?
  - b) If no, why not? Was it because you didn't know about the programs, or some other reason?
3. What other programs for youth do you know about? Can you give some examples? (for example, sports, homework, employment, social, volunteering, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc.) Do you ever take part in those? Why/why not?
4. What kinds of programs do you think would be most useful/enjoyable/interesting for you to attend? If those programs were offered, would you attend? Why/why not? What qualities do you want to see in the people who work with you?
5. How do you feel about the supports you have received to date? Can you make some suggestions to organisations that offer programs of ways they could make their programs more accessible and attractive to

you? What could they do to make it easier for you to attend? How can organisations support you better?

6. Coming back to yourselves, what could you do to improve your situation? What are your plans, dreams, hopes for the future? Do you have a plan?
7. Is there something you'd like to mention that I haven't asked about?

*Appendix C: Parents Focus Group Questions*

1. Before we start, do you have any questions about me or the research project?
2. In the last few weeks I've been meeting with representatives from organisations that offer programs for young people, and they told me about the programs they offer. Some examples they gave me are: [...]. Have your children attended any of those programs?
3. If yes, can you tell me what it was like? What did you and your children find most/least enjoyable/useful/interesting about the program? Were there any problems with the program?
4. If no, can you tell me why not? Was it because you didn't know about the programs, or some other reason?
5. What other programs for youth do you know about? Can you give me some examples? (e.g. sports, employment, social, artistic, cultural, religious, etc.) Do your children ever take part in those? Why/why not?
6. What kinds of programs do you think would be most useful/enjoyable/interesting for your children to attend? If those programs were offered, would your children attend? Why/why not? What do you need to feel comfortable in terms of letting your child participate in extra-curricular programs?
7. How do you feel about the settlement supports you have received to date? Can you make some suggestions to organisations of ways they could make their programs more accessible and attractive to you? What could they do to make it easier for your kids to attend?

8. Coming back to yourselves, what can you do as parents to improve your situation? How do you keep your families strong? What are your dreams and hopes for the future? What do you still need to be the kind of parent you would like to be?
9. Is there something else you'd like to mention that I haven't asked about?

*Appendix D: Youth/Settlement Worker Interview Questions*

1. Before we start, do you have any questions about me or the research project?
2. Which organisation do you work for? What is your position at [...] and how long have you worked here? How does this organization work within the larger context of service providers?
3. What services do you typically offer to youth? What age group does this include? How do youth get to know about your programs? Do refugee communities use these services?
4. What other programs are available to African refugee youth in Vancouver? Does your organization offer programs or services for African youth? Do you work with these? In what capacity? Are you aware of any organisations that serve Africans specifically?
5. What is the demographic profile of the African youth you have served (nationality, gender, language, religion, etc.)? What do you think are the most significant barriers to accessing/retaining African youth who might take part in your programs? Any differences for immigrants/refugees, boys/girls?
6. Describe any gaps in service/program provision that you have identified through your work. Could you speak about some of the barriers preventing access to services? Are there specific challenges for youth coming from African countries? Do you have a sense of how these needs change over time? How do you help youth overcome the barriers to participation you have identified?

7. How do you assess whether your programs are effective? Do you know if they are well received in immigrant/refugee/African communities?
8. What would you like to learn from the African refugee youth and parents who will take part in the focus groups held in the second phase of this project?
9. How could your organisation improve its provision of services to African youth and families in Metro Vancouver?
10. Are there any policy changes from governments that you would recommend to improve the participation of African youth in programs designed for young people?
11. Do you have any future projects or programs you would like us to know about?
12. How would you like to see this research used?
13. Is there something you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you?