

**Title:** Towards a New Model of Working with Older Immigrant Youth: Lessons Learned from a Demonstration Project

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**WP Number:** 11-09

**Research Question:**

What are the service needs and challenges of refugee youth and young adults? What service model would best facilitate their successful settlement in Canadian society?

**Importance:**

Although only about 10 percent of newcomers coming to Canada are refugees, they face more barriers than other newcomers in the settlement process for a variety of reasons. This is particularly true of refugee youth and young adults. Their capacity to make decisions and manage the pressures of transition are impacted not only by their refugee status and experience but also by their lack of social support, their difficulties in cultural adjustment, and the practical demands of survival. Unfortunately, however, these needs are not being effectively met in regular youth programming and settlement services thus far. In view of the predicaments of this group of youth, the British Columbia government has funded some demonstration projects to explore a better way to service them. This paper reports the findings of a university-community collaborative study of one of these projects.

**Research Findings:**

Findings reported in this paper were based on a study of a demonstration project, FreeRunning (FR), a program customized for refugee youth and young adults. The findings indicate that refugee youth and young adults have many needs, including language acquisition, cultural adaptation, stable income and housing, social support, and employment. However, compared to other youth, refugee youth have relatively more unsettled, dynamic, and fluid life conditions that tend to interfere with their participation in social programs. Upon their exit and during the three-month follow-up interview, most of the participants reported a positive outcome. In general, participants were satisfied with the program, though many desired more occupational training and employment opportunities. The positive results indicate the FR team's effort to adjust the program to meet the complex needs and dynamic and fluid life conditions of the participants. Learning from the experience of these participants and the challenges of operating the program during its first year, we propose a service model for refugee youth that emphasizes a flexible design, as programs based on a highly structured, routine model may not fit well with their unsettled conditions.

**Implications:**

Although this study was only limited to a small group of participants in one demonstration project, the findings may shed light on the unique needs and challenges of many refugee youth. Satisfying their settlement needs may require integrative and flexible programming. Based on the success of this project (as reflected by the responses of the participants), the evidence-informed model proposed in this paper may inform future policy and program design for this unique group of youth.