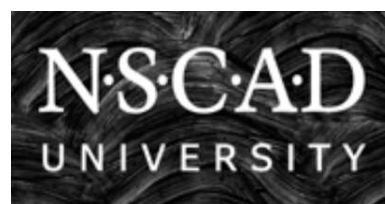




FLASH FORWARD PHOTOVOICE PROJECT: RESEARCH REPORT

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Thank you to The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC)
for the financial support of this program

The logo for The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC). The letters 'CYRRC' are in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. The letter 'R' is replaced by a silhouette of a family consisting of a man, a woman, and two children, all in the same yellow color.

ABOUT: THE RESEARCH TEAM

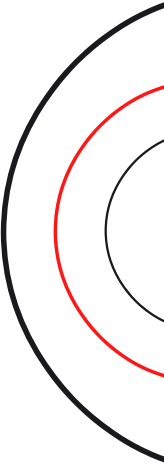
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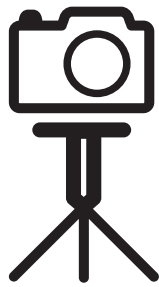


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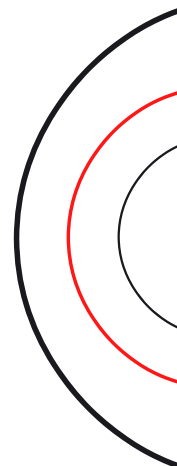
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BACKGROUND



The Syrian Canadian Foundation (SCF) is a Toronto based nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering newcomers and people of diverse backgrounds while promoting cross cultural exchanges within Canadian society. Through a variety of offerings and partnerships including the Flash Forward PhotoVoice Project, SCF aims to serve refugee youth who face significant challenges. Many have low educational attainment or interrupted schooling, live in poverty, face social isolation or reside in ghettoized neighbourhoods, experience bullying, discrimination and violence (especially at school), and engage in anti-social behaviours that lead to police encounters. SCF has worked directly with youth participants since their arrival to Canada and has developed strong relationships with families and communities.

Other programs available to refugee youth tend to focus exclusively on school performance. Due to a lack of trust, many families do not allow their children to attend these offerings. Through leveraging strong community partnerships, the **Flash Forward PhotoVoice Project** was created to help alleviate some of the issues faced by newcomers. By providing spaces where refugee youth can express themselves artistically, develop skills, and build confidence and a sense of belonging in their new communities, this project aims to help refugee youth establish social connections to the wider community. These connections can ultimately help foster more positive long term integration experiences.

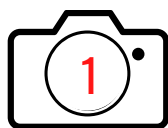
RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project mobilizes refugee youth to document their integration experiences in their new home and express their perspectives through photography.

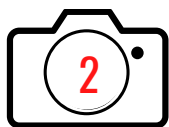
It is guided by the following research question:

What are Syrian refugee youth's integration experiences in Mississauga and how can PhotoVoice be used to visualize and communicate these experiences to wider audiences?

GOALS & OBJECTIVES



Provide an educational and artistic platform for Syrian refugee youth to share their perspectives and integration experiences through photography



Foster a healthy and creative support network for refugee youth



Enable positive visibility of Syrian refugee youth and their communities to help refute negative stereotypes



Develop evidence-based practices for youth engagement and their meaningful participation in research

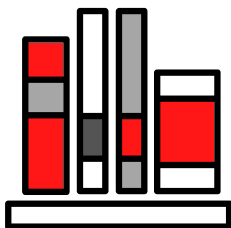
PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE



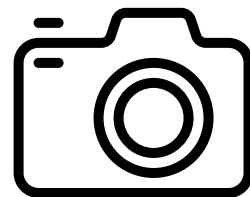
Mobilize public dialogue on how to build social connections and solidarity across difference



Encourage cross cultural exchanges and add youth voices and images to enrich existing diversity of the city



Add fresh perspectives to the Mississauga Artscape through promoting refugee youth photography



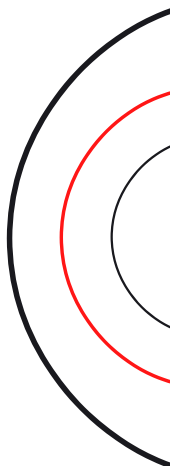
Generate new knowledge on the usefulness of PhotoVoice as a research approach with specific populations such as refugee youth

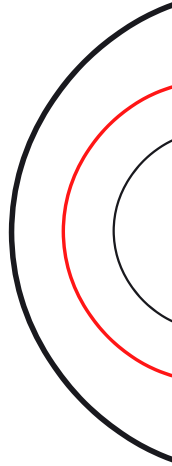
METHODOLOGY

This project used PhotoVoice to engage 16 Syrian refugee youth aged 16-21 who were living in Mississauga. PhotoVoice is a research tool informed by participatory visual methodologies (PVM). It is a creative, community-based framework that positions young people as capable social agents with the capacity to make valuable contributions to issues of concern in their lives. PhotoVoice uses photography, discussion, and critical reflection to access and represent the needs, experiences, and knowledge of groups whose voices may be marginalized. The knowledge emerging from participant reflection is both given a platform from which to be voiced and amplified in creative ways that are heard.

Over 24 weeks, a professional photographer and a project coordinator provided participants with weekly photography classes (2-3 hours), mentorship, and workshops in communication, creative expression, and presentation skills.

Each session focused on different topics including camera use, photography genres and approaches, prompts/exercises (e.g., explore a local landmark through photography), and analysis of the images. The youth were tasked with the creation of a body of artwork by applying their newly acquired photography skills. In order to be successful, they were encouraged to develop new ways of interacting with their surroundings by fostering an understanding of their unique experiences and social positions. The project culminated in an online exhibition presenting participant stories and photographs to the community and public, which includes the families of refugee youth, refugee community leaders, local artists, educators, researchers, local politicians and ministries, police, settlement workers, and the media.





A total of four focus groups were conducted with refugee youth participants at the beginning (2019) and end of the PhotoVoice project (2020). These focus groups surveyed the youth and assessed if the project objectives were met. A total of 16 young people with refugee experience participated in the focus groups; 12 young women and four young men.

Discussions were audio-recorded and then translated from Arabic to English and transcribed. This work was underpinned by confidentiality and informed consent.

In the pre-program focus group, the participants were divided into two groups (seven participants in group one; eight participants in group two). A common question guide was used to structure the two sessions. Each of the focus group lasted between 40-60 minutes. They were conducted in Arabic, which helped to ensure that participants were able to express themselves and communicate their responses comfortably and effectively.

Two focus groups were then conducted 24 weeks post-program using a common guide. These focus groups also lasted between 40-60 minutes and were conducted in Arabic.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Skill Development

Before the start of the workshops, two focus groups were conducted to ask participants about their expectations and what they hoped to achieve by the end of the program. When asked to consider why they wanted to participate in this project, the majority of participants expressed interest in learning something new and developing a new skill:

"We want to learn photography, it's something nice."

"I liked photography before, and I used try on my own using YouTube before, once I found out that there was a workshop, I said if there is someone that can fix my mistakes- (it's) better than me learning on my own. That's why I was excited to join and after the first session- I was more excited to know that there were other things - skills to learn."

Photography itself was an appealing form of expression to the youth.

"I feel like everyone has a form of expression, mine is photography. I like to take pictures to reflect how I see things."

Changing Perspectives and Combatting Negative Stereotypes

For those who felt that people see them differently than who they truly are on the inside, photography played a role in helping them express their feelings, thoughts and experiences. One participant emphasized their interest in learning how to edit photos to reflect their feelings and state of mind.

"When you put dark colours it shows depression and sadness but with bright colours it shows happiness."

The youth expressed that through editing, the meaning of the photo can be made more visible and understandable. Photography can be used as a powerful tool to refute stereotypes by representing narratives that otherwise may not be seen.

Photography can also provide participants control over how they want to present themselves and their communities to the world. When participants were asked about the positive aspects they would like to share about their communities through photography, one participant emphasized portraying a positive image of Syria.

"I would like to share the good things about my country, more than that there is a war. There are a lot of people who think that in war-torn countries, the people there are not good. I want to show that we are better than that"

To change and improve the world around them, ending war and solidarity across difference were emerging themes.

"Stop wars. People are greedy and they want land and money. They make wars happen, a lot of people get killed, and countries hate each other... Then the people that did nothing start hating each other."

"Co-exist. You don't have to agree with people's thoughts but at least respect that they are human like you."

"They (people) should think of others. Teach your children to love people and not be racist."

Preliminary Program Feedback and Lessons Learned

After 24 weeks of 3 hour sessions, another two focus groups were conducted. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in the program.

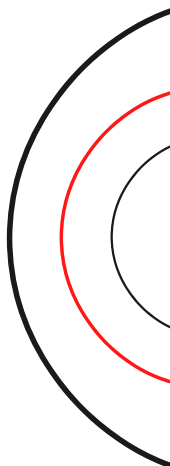
"I like the experiments- I used to like taking photos but this made me like it more."

Participants noted different photography skills like "depth", "lighting" and the right "angle" as new tools and skills they can use to interact with their surroundings and express themselves.

Participants were also asked to point out the photographs that stood out to them most throughout the program.

"I took a photo of the lake and the waves and I liked it so much because my family was there and every time I look at it, it just reminds me of my family."

In addition, participants were asked to reflect on the structure of the PhotoVoice workshops.



While some pointed to the discussions on social skills as a positive element, others stressed that they would like to increase the time dedicated to taking photos. They found expressing themselves through photography more beneficial.

"Here we talk more than taking photos, what I would do is...have photography be more than talking. When we talk its fun but photography- we didn't work on it too much."

"I would focus more on taking pictures."

Other participants found greater value in the specific skills they discussed in the workshop component of the program.

"I used to take photos using snapchat (filters), and I used to not be able to take photos without it, but recently after this program I started taking pictures without snapchat... I used to feel that all my pimples and stuff show...now I take pictures without snapchat (filters)."

This particular participant found it especially useful to learn how to accept yourself for who you truly are, without filters or societal standards of beauty.

Another participant found that the important social skills and topics discussed (i.e. bullying) were important for **all** newcomers to learn.

"Everyone. Not because of photography, but because we talked about other topics that other people don't know about... for example when we talked about bullying or self confidence."

Further, PhotoVoice provided refugee youth with transferable skills. For example, participants found that they were able to apply their photography skills in school related assignments to get better results. These included taking pictures for a commercial or of teachers at a Remembrance Day event at school. They highlighted that using lighting and angle techniques they learned helped them succeed in school assignments.

Resilience

Refugee youth face many integration challenges (i.e., bullying, self-confidence, building social connections). When asked about the people that support and help them face these challenges, participants pointed to their parents and close friends. Emerging out of these focus groups was also the theme of resilience.

"I look at the half full side of a cup- I look at the positive side- the good in the things that happen to me, I always think that anything that happens is good for us. this helps me a lot . Anything that happens is good for us"

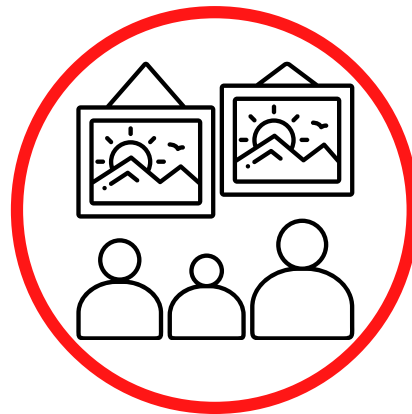
"There are challenges. But you can overcome them alone. Its not necessary that someone helps you with it. Last year I started high school and the challenge was to make new friends- because when you start high school all your friends go to different schools. I don't like to talk a lot to people- so it was a little hard. I like to listen more than talk. I overcame it. I started to talk a lot. My friends taught me (to overcome being shy)- they talk a lot and I participate with them. I met a lot of people at school."

"Face fears- if (I'm) scared of something to do it so I can stop getting scared. If I am scared of animals I will search more about them to see them and stay around them so I know they wont hurt me."

PhotoVoice provided refugee youth the space to express themselves artistically and develop important skills. These skills and experiences (with PhotoVoice) varied across different participants

Albeit, this is where the strength of programs like this lie. Refugee youth- with their own integration experiences- came together in a safe and supportive space, to express themselves artistically. In what follows is a visual representation of how refugee youth reflected and communicated their integration experiences through photography.

PHOTOVOICE ONLINE EXHIBITION



Visual Tales of Integration

The Flash Forward Photovoice project will culminate in a virtual exhibit where refugee youth will have their photos displayed.

The Online Exhibit is available at
<https://www.syriancanadianfoundation.ca/flash-forward-online-exhibition/>