



Guelph-Wellington Newcomer Youth Mental Health Study

Project Led by: Report Prepared by: Project Funded by:

Local Immigration Partnership: Creating a caring, vibrant community where everyone thrives. Centre for Community Based Research: Research that makes a difference. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: Building a better Canada. Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada: Construisons un meilleur Canada.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine newcomer youth understandings of mental health and services in Guelph-Wellington as well as provide recommendations for how to foster positive mental health outcomes for newcomer youth.

Methods & Approach

- Surveys**
 - 67 newcomer youth respondents
- Interviews**
 - 12 newcomer youth participants
- Focus Groups**
 - 8 service professional participants
- Literature Review**
 - Reports and peer-reviewed articles

A community-based approach was taken throughout all phases of the research. A steering committee of service professionals and newcomer youth guided the study and a community forum shared research findings and prioritized recommendations.

Research Questions

1. What does it mean for newcomer youth to have good mental health or mental health problems? What factors are involved? How has the global pandemic impacted mental health? (**Understanding Mental Health**)
2. When newcomer youth are experiencing a mental health problem, which organization in the community do they go to for help? Who else do youth naturally turn to for support? (**Understanding Mental Health Services and Supports**)
3. What suggestions are to foster positive mental health outcomes for newcomer youth in Guelph-Wellington? (**Future Directions**)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Understanding Mental Health

Good mental health looks like:

- Close relationships and community involvement
- A balanced life (balancing responsibilities with self-care and a balanced emotional life)

Mental health challenges look like:

- Withdrawal from people
- Physical ailments such as poor hygiene and sleep disturbance
- Frustrations with settlement
- Mood and trauma-related feelings

Good mental health comes from:

- Close relationships
- Supportive communities
- Income and employment

Mental health challenges come from:

- Acculturation stress
- Language barriers
- Discrimination and racism

The pandemic created:

- Social isolation
- Virtual learning challenges
- Employment stress

International students reported:

- Homesickness
- Stress about deciding whether to return to their home country or remaining in Canada

"It was a really difficult time, when everything was locked down and we just sat at home. I only had one friends that I made here. I had no job, only school. I couldn't go outside or meet with anybody because of social distancing...I hate it... I felt like I wanted to go back home. "

| Newcomer Youth Participant

Most survey respondents (79%) named close relationships with friends and family as a contributor to good mental health.

2. Understanding Mental Health Services and Supports

Newcomer youth participants were more likely to turn to friends and then family for mental health support than professionalized services.

Many newcomer youth participants have not accessed mental health services. If they had accessed services, they were most likely to go to University of Guelph services and had overall positive experiences.

Most common barriers:

- Internalized stigma and shame
- Difficulty discussing mental health due to language and cultural differences
- Service navigation (lack of awareness of services and impersonal referrals)

Less common barriers:

- Unaffordable services and not all services take student insurance
- Long waitlists
- Uncertainty of what to expect at appointments
- Cultural bias of supporters
- Negative experience with services
- Available services are not designed for them

"I think there is an element of shame. We're taught to sort of take control of our own emotions. Just suck it up and don't express it. Of course, it is not that common, but I think shame can be a factor that stops people from seeking help."

| Newcomer Youth Participant

The most common services attended by survey respondents were the University of Guelph Wellness Department/Counselling Services (37%) and CMHA (28%)

61% of survey respondents think "being able to talk about your problems and ask for help" contributes to good mental health.

3. Future Directions

To better support newcomer youth, research participants suggested:

- 1. Raise parents' and the wider community's awareness and normalize mental health**
Educate parents of newcomer youth and the wider community on mental health, and promote open discussions.
- 2. Provide more peer support**
Create spaces for youth to speak more openly about mental health, help each other, and create their own systems of support.

- 3. Design services that are more culturally responsive**
Gain understanding of cultural backgrounds to design services better, with the goal of building trust over time with newcomer youth.
- 4. Improve service navigation**
Make information more widely available about mental health services, and improve collaboration between services to build trust with youth.

"We should change people's attitudes about mental health issues. This is the first step. We should have more discussion... Having emotions is okay. Experiencing mental health issues is okay. It is normal."

| Newcomer Youth Participant

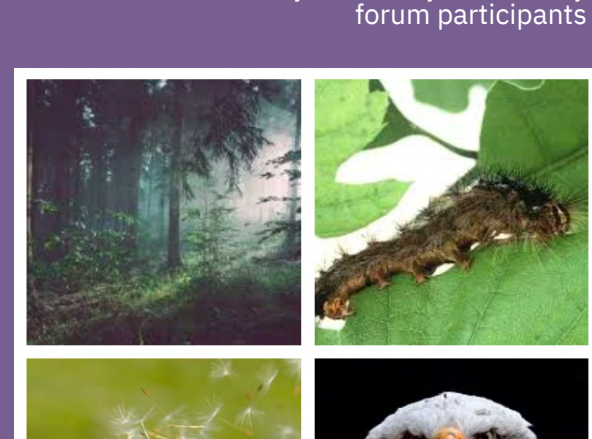
"Promote services targeted towards newcomer youth with staff who can speak multiple languages, or staff who understand situations that are specific to newcomer youth and international students."

| Newcomer Youth Participant

Community Forum Collective Poem

I have rose into a beautiful flower that can't be dimmed.
 Thrill and enjoyment, walk toward
 Dandelion seeds can explore anywhere, any places.
 Shine, bright, inspire and independent.
 Finding light in a brewing storm.
 Eyes upwards, to light and goodness.
 Creating deep and meaning roots by branching out.
 Puffy under the sun running freely.
 A flower that makes you happy during your shiniest moments.
 Hope is closer.
 I will grow stronger when I find my roots.
 I am a tree, ready to touch the sky.
 Warmth in the cold.
 Stuffed away and the freshness within exposed.
 I am relaxed, brighter, and beautiful.
 Space for all of us to glow.
 A wave always returns to the seashore.
 Clouds to part and move and travel.
 To face the future with a strong sturdy will.
 Fruit hanging patiently to be picked.
 A sun that shines bright, inspires everyone to be independent.
 Our World is Magnanimous and Beautiful.
 Green fresh open beyond and conquered! I did it!
 I am happy within and ready to uplift others.
 Firmly grounded and ever reaching.
 Green fresh open beyond and conquered! I did it!

Activity facilitated by Melanie Schambach and Michelle Peek from Art Not Shame. Poem collectively written by community forum participants



Thank you to Steering Committee Members:

- Cyndy Forsyth, Integrated Services Youth Hubs
- David Miotto, Lutherwood Employment Services
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- Saba Safdar (Ph.D), University of Guelph
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