

Flash Forward PhotoVoice

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: In this study, refugee youth used photography to document their integration experiences in Mississauga, Canada.

OBJECTIVE: To provide an educational and artistic platform for Syrian refugee youth to share their integration experiences through photography; foster a healthy, creative support network; create positive visibility of Syrian refugee youth; and to develop evidence-based practices for youth engagement in research.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Syrian newcomer youth face significant challenges – including low educational attainment or interrupted schooling, poverty, social isolation, bullying, discrimination, violence, and engagement in anti-social behaviours that lead to police encounters. This project connected youth to their community and developed their skills, confidence, and sense of belonging by providing spaces in which they could express themselves artistically.

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

This project used PhotoVoice to engage 16 Syrian refugee youth aged 16-21, living in Mississauga, Ontario. PhotoVoice uses photography, discussion, and critical reflection to access and represent the needs, experiences, and knowledge of groups whose voices may be marginalized. Over 24 weeks, youth participated in weekly photography classes, mentorship, and workshops in communication, creative expression, and presentation skills. The project culminated in an online exhibit where participants presented their stories and photographs to the community.

Four focus groups were conducted with the 16 youth participants at the beginning and end of the project. The focus groups were conducted in Arabic to help ensure that participants could express themselves with ease.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Participants valued the skill development aspect of the workshops.

- Following the workshops, youth noted that the photography techniques they learned helped them succeed in school assignments.
- Youth also benefited from the social skills and connections that the workshops provided.

Photography was an appealing form of expression for participants.

- Photography helped youth express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences; this expression was especially useful for those who felt that people saw them differently than how they truly were on the inside.
- Youth saw photography as a powerful tool to refute stereotypes by showing narratives that otherwise may be invisible or erased.
- Photography also provided the youth control over how they present themselves and their community to the world. They talked about the importance of portraying a positive image of Syria.

Common themes in youths' photography included: changing and improving the world around them, ending war, and building solidarity across differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More accessible artistic programming should be made available for youth. Safe and supportive spaces where youth can express themselves artistically are beneficial for refugee youth's wellbeing.
- More opportunities for refugee youth to learn new skills are needed. Youth valued the practical skills they learned from the photography workshop.
- Arts, such as photography, should be further used and explored as a method to empower refugee youth and support their integration. Artistic expression is a useful tool for refugee youth to express their thoughts and feelings and process their experiences.

[View Project Webpage](#)



ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of researchers, service providers, and government partners working together to produce and share research that facilitates the integration of young refugees and their families in Canada and beyond.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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