

Developing Skills, Building Relationships: The Social and Employment Outcomes of ISANS' Immigrant Youth Employability Program

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: This study evaluated the outcomes and benefits of ISANS' Immigrant Youth Employability (IYE) Program – a newcomer youth employment program offering a mix of classroom learning and on-the-job training.

OBJECTIVE: to better understand who IYE participants are (youth and employers) and their reasons for participating in the program; to explore the experiences of IYE participants; to provide a robust account of the program; and to identify ways to strengthen the program.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Although the IYE program had been well-received, its success had not been systematically demonstrated. This study provides a robust account of the program's outcomes while identifying ways in which it could be strengthened.

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

This was a mixed methods study. A quantitative survey was distributed to 101 IYE youth who had participated in the IYE program. Twenty-six people participated in the survey. Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 32, with the average being 25.5 years. The majority of respondents were female (73%). Time elapsed since graduating from the IYE program ranged from 5 to 30 months, with the average being 15 months.

In-person qualitative interviews were conducted with seven youth and four employers who had participated in the IYE program. Interview data was analyzed using an open-ended coding approach.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Impacts of the IYE Program

- The IYE program helped youth obtain meaningful—albeit low paying—jobs immediately after completing the program or later when they switched from less satisfying jobs to jobs with better prospects.
- Of the respondents, 71% were employed at the time of the survey. Of those, 60% worked in the same sector as their IYE training and 40% worked for the same employer from the IYE program.
- For survey respondents who had recently changed jobs, 80% found that the skills learned in the IYE program helped them in that process.
- Participants attached great importance to their jobs. Feelings of being valued, being successful, and gaining professional and personal development at work helped participants feel more connected to other Canadians.
- However, participants reported that their salaries were insufficient to support a family or to connect to their communities, resulting in lower happiness in their job and sector.

Motivations to Participate in the IYE Program

- For youth, the most common incentive for participating in the program was to obtain employment. Improving English language proficiency, developing skills, and learning about the Canadian workplace culture were the other motivators.
- For employers, motivations included a sense of giving back to the community, government wage subsidy, a need to mitigate labor shortages, and a need to diversity the workplace. All employers were approached by ISANS to participate in the program.

Strengths of the IYE Program

- For youth, key strengths of the program included the quality of the instructors, being introduced to different types of jobs, connecting to networks, and gaining skills to find jobs. Participants also appreciated the equipment and salaries they received during the program.
- Respondents felt the program length, including time spent in the classroom and in practicum, was too short. This may have limited the extent to which the program could help participants meet their goals.
- For employers, benefits of the program included the opportunity to meet labor needs, diversify the workforce, and access government wage subsidies.

Overall, there was a high indication of satisfaction for the IYE program from youth and employers. Participants also offered a number of suggestions for how the program could continue to be improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the number of placement hours to give youth time to apply their new skills and knowledge.
- Reduce the waiting time between classroom learning and agency placement.
- Program staff should conduct regular check-ins to monitor youth's progress and integration and to identify concerns of youth and employers.
- Organize cultural education for participating organizations to ensure smooth integration and reduce discrimination among co-workers.
- Develop more connections with businesses and organizations in the community to provide more placement options.

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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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