



**FRESH VOICES**

Fresh Voices Evaluation Report  
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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Fresh Voices is an initiative of Vancouver Foundation. The initiative works closely with youth, settlement service organizations and various levels of government. To achieve its goals, the initiative engages diverse young people from racialized immigrant and refugee communities, adult allies, and collaborates with key decision-makers to affect systemic change. Fresh Voices offers a way for immigrant and refugee youth from across B.C. to engage in dialogue and action to identify and remove barriers to their success and sense of belonging.

Fresh Voices has played a significant role in advancing the voices of racialized immigrant and refugee youth in BC over the past 5 years. In this short time, Fresh Voices has been able to engage hundreds of immigrant and refugee youth, community partners, and policy makers in dialogue about how our society and systems can better serve immigrant and refugee communities.

As Fresh Voices continues to grow, the Youth Advisory Team (YAT) and staff decided to reflect on their past and engage in an evaluation process. The evaluation included individual conversations and interviews with 21 stakeholders such as community partners and team members, a focus group within the core Youth Advisory Team (YAT), and 101 survey responses from participants in Fresh Voices Forums. The information collected came together to tell a story that will help Fresh Voices build off its success and grow in new ways, whether that is in the community at large or through legacy learning pieces that inform Vancouver Foundation's youth engagement work in different areas.

Key findings that emerged during the evaluation process were:

## **Importance of strong youth voices**

The most consistent reflection on Fresh Voices from staff, community partners, policy makers, and youth was the importance of youth voice. Among those surveyed, 88% agreed or strongly agreed that Fresh Voices creates leadership opportunities for immigrant and refugee youth. Having youth lead the process of developing and articulating policy recommendations designed to improve their lives is a unique and celebrated feature of the work.

## **Desire for continued and expanded youth leadership and training opportunities**

While youth leadership is one of Fresh Voices' great strengths, there remains room for growth in this area. Participating youth have learned new leadership skills and feel ready to take on additional responsibilities. To help them play an even more significant role than they already do, many youth identified a need for more mentorship, support, and training.

## **Leadership and a valued perspective on issues facing immigrant and refugee communities**

The inaugural Fresh Voices Summit in 2011 created space for immigrant and refugee youth to discuss the frustrations and stigma associated with the English as a Second Language (ESL) label

and identity. It was at this summit that young people expressed their desire to senior staff from the Ministry of Education to consider re-framing E.S.L and valuing the additional language assets and skills that newcomer students bring to Canada. Fresh Voices played a leadership role in encouraging the BC Ministry of Education to change the name “English as a Second Language” to “English Language Learning”. This was one of the first major policy recommendations put forward by the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team after hearing from over 150 peers who spoke at the 2011 summit. While Fresh Voices has been successful in engaging policy makers in dialogue about the subsequent policy recommendations identified in the Fresh Voices 2013 report, these recommendations have yet to be implemented and movement in this area is perceived as slow by much of the core team.

At the same time Fresh Voices has been able to create a powerful reputation for itself as a leader and resource on issues affecting immigrant and refugee youth. Fresh Voices team members are regularly asked to speak to the media about the emerging trends in immigration. During the evaluation process, community partners and policy makers spoke about consulting Fresh Voices on issues of relevance to young people. Several stakeholders spoke about wanting to see the model expanded to other parts of the province and country. Even those stakeholders who were critical of certain aspects of Fresh Voices expressed a desire to continue working with the initiative, recognizing that it has helped establish a platform for immigrant and refugee youth in policy making.

### **Focus on education**

While there are many issues and challenges affecting immigrant and refugee youth, when survey respondents were asked about priorities education emerged at the top of the list. Both external and internal stakeholders repeatedly identified education as a key issue. Not surprisingly, the majority of Fresh Voices’ public campaigns and perceived successes in shaping policy have related to education policy, for example, the Make It Count Campaign regarding graduation credits and changing E.S.L to E.L.L.