



## **SELECTION OF GOOD PRACTICES IN CANADA**

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February 2008**



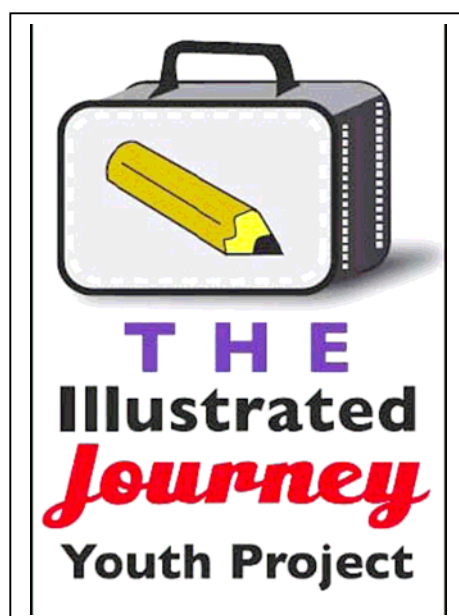
## GOOD PRACTICE 07

### “Illustrated Journey Youth Project”

#### INTRODUCTION

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project engages and supports immigrant and refugee youth facing multiple barriers to integration. The project brings together twenty youth with comic book artists in collaborative work. The project allows for these youth to enjoy a team-based, fun art project while exploring and dealing with issues that affect their lives such as the experience of displacement and of integration to a new culture and society. The project responds to La Boussole’s current objective of addressing the needs of a growing immigrant and refugee clientele, of which youth are one of the most vulnerable groups.

La Boussole, the non-governmental organization that is hosting the project, has existing on-site programs in the areas of employment, community and social support through which it provides excellent services to youth and other clients in general. The challenges that immigrant/refugee youth face are far-reaching and multidimensional, and therefore require interventions with greater scope beyond these existing programs. Unfortunately, programs that target the specific and special needs of immigrant and refugee youth are limited. The aim of the project has been to provide a safe and caring environment where the youth can find the assistance and support they need to deal with their challenges, achieve healing and grow as balanced and productive citizens. Furthermore, it is hoped that the youth stories and insights will increase public awareness and support around immigrant and refugee youth issues, and possibly inspire better programs, practices and policies.



## **1. PROJECT PROFILE**

### **1.1 Project Promoter(s)**

The project is hosted by La Boussole. La Boussole is both a social service agency and a community centre. Its mission is to assist members of the francophone community in need. The only francophone social service provider in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, La Boussole has over 10 years of experience providing services of community, economic and social integration to disenfranchised and multi-barrier francophone individuals and families, including immigrants and refugees.

### **1.2 Project Name**

“The Illustrated Journey Youth Project”

### **1.3 City(ies) where it has been implemented**

Vancouver, BC

### **1.4 Level**

Local

### **1.5 Period of implementation**

Project Stages: The project has three stages.

The youth attend to workshops every Saturday from October to December 2007, then from January to March 2008 and then in April their comics are published and there will be a public exhibition.

### **1.6 Budget**

The budget is of CD\$125,000 and will cover salaries/benefits, professional fees, rent/utilities/telephone, equipment / supplies / postage, printing / photocopying, publicity / promotion / distribution, production costs, capital, evaluation/dissemination.

### **1.7 Initial and permanent funding agencies**

- Vancouver Foundation;
- CKNW Orphans' Fund
- La Boussole

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE**

### **2.1 Main objectives of the project**

#### **Goal 1**

To engage and support 20 immigrant and refugee youth facing multiple barriers to integration, and to empower youth with tools so they can explore and reflect on their lives, the challenges they face, and possibly resolve them.

#### **Goal 1 Objectives:**

- Involve youth in a fun collaborative comic book art project in a supportive and creative environment of peers and caring adult mentors of artists, youth workers and researchers.
- Equip youth with story telling and comic book art skills as a tool of self-expression and self-reflection.

- Provide long-term support and mentorship for up to eight months, plus counseling and other services as needed.
- Connect youth to relevant social services, community and public resources as needed.
- Provide a safe space where youth can discuss and reflect on their experiences.

### **Goal 2:**

Break silence, isolation and marginalization, and enhance public awareness and support around immigrant/refugee youth needs.

### **Goal 2 Objectives:**

- Organize a public exhibition of youth work so youth can share their stories and insights with a wider public including other youth peers, service providers, and policymakers.
- Compile youth stories and insights in a manual that will be disseminated through the project website.
- Share other formal documentation and reporting of youth experience through the website and in print to interested parties.

## **2.2 Target group(s)**

This project targets youth facing multiple or serious adaptation challenges so as to provide them with a safe, creative and positive space of long-term support and mentorship where they can talk, reflect and possibly deal with these challenges. Youth are selected based on the extent of their needs and on diversity criteria. The project engages a multicultural group of 20 youth, francophone and non-francophone. It is hoped that the experience of getting involved with other youth in the comic book art self-narratives and self-reflections under long-term support and mentorship of adult artists and counsellors will contribute not only to enhancing youth self-expression, social skills and connections, but also to bringing some resolution and healing. While comic art has been used as medium of engaging different marginalized youth, such as First Nations youth, there is as yet no other project involving specifically the type of immigrant and refugee youth clientele served by La Boussole.

## **2.3 Number of beneficiaries**

Twenty in total, including 7 youth from Vietnam, 2 from Latin America (Mexico and Colombia) and 6 youth from different countries in Africa (Burundi, Congo, Togo)

## **2.4 Summary of the Practice**

The Illustrated Journey is a community art project that brings together comic book artists and youth who are in the process of settling and integrating in Canada. The youth participants, with the mentorship of the artists, representatives from the host organization, professors and volunteers, learn how to share personal stories and talk about issues through illustration. In this way, issues like language barriers, cultural alienation and social isolation are addressed in a fun, creative and transformative way.

The project has three stages:

1. In the first stage, the youth attend workshops every Saturday for three months to learn drawing techniques (October-December 2007). They learn the importance of art and comic book art as a common language to express and communicate with others to overcome language barriers;
2. The second stage runs from January 2008 to March 2008 where every Saturday the same youth attend further workshops. In these workshops they bring their stories and with the help of the organizers, artists and other youth they document and start their comics.

The artists will be assigned participants to work together in finishing the details and provide guidance for the youth comics.

3. In the last stage, the comics will be published and there will be an exhibition. The participants, artists, volunteers, media and other non profit organizations that give services to migrants will be invited to celebrate the completed works at an opening launch.

### **Activities**

- Activity planning, completion of youth/artist recruitment
- Workshops, comic jams, monthly & end of stage1 evaluations
- Close support, personal stories, monthly/stage2 evaluations
- Focus groups, exhibition of comics, final evaluation/reporting

### **Results**

Three specific participatory evaluation methods were used with the Illustrated Journey Project. A fourth method (video) was also used as both an evaluation method and documentation tool. Each description of these methods articulates why this approach was taken, positives and negatives associated with its application, and suggestions for future implementation.

Collage: The first method of participatory evaluation was to create collages. The goal of this activity was to assemble posters with images from magazines, posters and other media. Participants were required to select images that reflected important aspects of their involvement with the Illustrated Journey Project. This included requesting them to select pictures representing their feelings, situations or places that they felt relevant as expressions related to what they liked about going to the workshops. Another poster was created using the same process. This required selecting images that expressed what they would add to the workshops to make the space more comfortable and safe to tell stories and share.

This method created some pressure associated with providing immediate results or outcomes in terms of the way youth participated and gave their feedback. It was a technique that invoked a number of assumptions of how we expected the youth would participate and what they felt. While all the youth were engaged in choosing images and writing words on blank paper that we gave them (to add comments not explicit in the images alone) there were interesting outcomes.

Questionnaire: The next participatory evaluation method involved use of a questionnaire. The format adopted smiley faces-depicting yes, no, and 'kind of' as responses. It was decided to focus on addressing one or two of the main objectives of the Illustrated Journey project. Language barriers and lack of social networks and spaces for expression were common responses. The implementation of this method was achieved by dividing the overall group of participants into smaller groups according to their dominant language. This made it easier for translation and more comfortable for the youth to ask questions and share in smaller groups. All the questions and answers were attempted or answered as relevant and significant.

Brainstorming: This participatory evaluation method was also conducted in small groups according to language (French, Spanish and Jarar). It was the final strategy that was implemented with all participants in the project. Four questions were written on a large sheet of poster paper and group members were requested to write their comments or have them translated and written on the sheet. The basic idea of this method was to obtain feedback about the ways in which the workshop helps communication, promote shared stories and facilitate reflections about personal feelings during and after the workshops. The strategy of encouraging participants to write down their own answers aimed to

strengthen the ownership of the project as well as to promote leadership among the group. At the end of the activity one or the whole group were requested to present their ideas to everyone. This approach made a big difference. Sharing the brainstorming enhanced commonalities and opened an opportunity of learning from each other. The things most expressed were that:

-Drawing is not only a way to express feelings and getting to know each other but also to improve English.

-The participants thought it important to share stories, to understand the differences and similarities of their experiences, as well as to learn about other cultures and to connect and build together.

-The participants indicated that they felt excited and good when they are in the workshops and they would like to stay for more hours.

Video: Much of the creativity of the Freirian approach, also called popular or empowerment education, has been in the development of codes (sometimes called triggers or discussion catalysts) that codify the generative themes into a physical form (using pictures, videos, role-playing, and so on). In this case participants can “see” their reality with new eyes and consequently develop alternative ways of thinking and acting. Multiple dialogue and communication methodologies, such as photo documentary research. (Agosto Boal’s) Theater of the Oppressed to characterize conditions; and video portrayals of research results, rather than written reports, are all expressions of this approach.

### **3. STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES, CONDITIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR POTENTIAL REPLICABILITY**

The project for me was a project that since the beginning was community based just from seeing how refugees and migrants designed it and planned it for and with other newcomers.

- One of my recommendations as a result of my own personal involvement and reflection in this project is to be aware that social change and social transformation is a slow process. To remind ourselves constantly how process is also the outcome and being driven to the outcomes will lead us to miss the participant’s needs or their ownership of the project.
- Logistics and coordination are crucial to the success of a project, nevertheless we believe in assessing the needs according to the objectives of the project to invest the time and resources in a better way. The project is for and with youth who face issues of integration as newcomers. It would be important to consider flexible criteria and profile for the youth recruitment. This not only will help to coordinate in advance the logistics and individual needs of the youth; but also considering that there are only limited spaces for youth to participate it would be important to target youth who face the most barriers and obstacles to integration and who indicate that they themselves are committed to the project.
- As for the recruitment of artists to be involved, we believe that the project is building a positive process with the committed and talented two artists that the project has. Nevertheless, it would be enriching and necessary to look for support and involvement of more artists. A need to develop a criteria and profile to bring artists is also important; flexible criteria to bring in artists who can relate to the experiences of the youth and who are socially committed in addressing the objectives of the project. It is important as

an outcome of the project to end with an individual comic book from each of the participants but more important is the process and the special attention that the artists and all the organizers give to their stories and how they validate and recognize them so that the youth strengthen their self-confidence.

- Another idea to reinforce the commitment of all the participants is to do a collaborative envisioning. Dreaming is always inspiring to start action and social transformation. The passion and commitment of the organizers as well as of the youth is clear, but it is important to express and define the values and beliefs that everyone has in relationship to all the aspects of the project from the beginning and through the process. We would suggest having a brainstorming session about what are our negative and positive assumptions of what youth means, about art as a tool for social change, about social change, about the objectives of the project, about what we think that are the most difficult issues that immigrants face in Vancouver. There are many aspects that could be envisioned, like the expectations and constraints but most of all the assets, skills and resources that each one of the people involved can bring to the project. This exercise can happen with the organizers, with the youth or/and all together from the start and throughout the process.
- The project is meant to address issues of language barriers so, it is crucial to the project to give priority to translators and generate fluid communication to make the space comfortable and safe for the participants. Drawing is a good strategy to overcome these barriers but if they want to share their stories and fully understand the artist's instructions as well as give their feedback, giving them the access to translators for them to communicate their needs must be a priority.
- Drawing exercises are encouraging a space for storytelling and sharing. We could design activities that involve drawing to bring their important, happy, sad or daily stories and give time for them to show their drawings and talk about them with the rest of the participants. In small groups we could develop activities where they use drawing as part of the activity to have fun and get to know the others in the group better.
- It is important to design activities that could encourage and strengthen youth leadership. Delegating and giving responsibilities of the activities and project could be useful to develop their confidence and enhance leadership.
- Ongoing evaluation through the process and stages is necessary to improve and meet the needs and expectations of the participants. It is also important to develop ownership and control from the youth. It is important to share the feedback to promote accountability and continuity.