

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK KARMA CONNECTIONS YOUTH PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH)
Vancouver, British Columbia

Area of Practice:
Services and Supports for Immigrant Youth

Video:
<https://youtu.be/wMyzprKvbE>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

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PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH) is a community-based organization that focuses on connecting people and strengthening the neighbourhoods in South Vancouver. Its mandate is to develop harmonious relationships among community groups of different cultural, economic, religious, and social backgrounds. Programs and services are determined by conditions within each community and by the needs and interests of the people living in that community.

SVNH currently offers a variety of programs and services that support individuals and families, such as seniors' wellness, youth leadership, licensed preschool and out-of-school care, parenting and family resource programs, settlement services for newcomers, food security, literacy, adult day programs, community engagement events, and more. Each year, around 5,600 individuals participate in these programs, which are run in partnership with almost 700 volunteers.

The impetus for developing Karma Connections was the need among youth to receive additional support for entering the workforce. The program started in 2013 and, at that time, it aimed to serve both newcomer and Canadian-born youth. However, over time, SVNH recognized that the need to receive support for entering the workforce was particularly high among newcomer youth. Newcomer youth often require additional support to strengthen their interview skills; to increase their understanding of work safety, etiquette and worker rights; to connect to community organizations/resources; and to write a proper resume and cover letter. Moreover, SVNH recognized that many of the newcomer youth whom they had been serving had come to Canada at an older age and did not have the time to accumulate sufficient volunteer hours to graduate from high school. For this reason, in 2017 the target client group of Karma Connections changed to newcomer youth only. Karma Connections now offers newcomer-specific content in which newcomer youth learn about employment and volunteering in Canada while fulfilling their volunteer hours required for high school graduation.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

Karma Connections

Description:

Karma Connections is a 2-week program composed of pre-employment training workshops and group volunteer placements for newcomer youth. It is offered three times a year during summer and spring break. Newcomer youth first receive training to help them strengthen their interview skills, and to learn about resume and cover letter writing, as well as workplace safety and responsibilities. Then, they participate in field trips for group volunteering at various community partner organizations. In total, over the course of the program, newcomer youth volunteer for 30 to 39 hours. At the end of the program, newcomer youth receive a volunteer certificate for the hours that they have dedicated to the program. The program helps them develop their interpersonal and leadership skills, gain feedback on their performance and identify areas for improvement, and build rapport with the other participants. It also helps them connect to future employment/volunteering opportunities outside of SVNH.

Goal(s):

Karma Connections aims to equip newcomer youth with information on what employment looks like in Canada, including their rights as employees, how to begin their job search, the type of documentation needed for the job search, and what to expect during an interview. Moreover, the program aims to introduce newcomer youth to volunteering to help them improve their soft skills (such as teamwork, leadership, communication skills, and time management) and to create a bond with the community.

Of note, the program does not intend to be an employment readiness program such that youth complete the program and are ready to begin their employment search right away. Instead, the program intends to support newcomer youth to understand work in Canada, improve their employability, and build confidence in the skills they have developed and knowledge that they have gained.

Target Client Group(s):

The target client group of Karma Connections includes newcomer high school students aged 13 to 18 years (grade 8 to 12).

Delivery Partners:

Karma Connections works with the following partners:

- Fresh Roots Urban Farm
- Covenant House
- Greater Vancouver Food Bank
- Ritchie Bros Auctioneers
- Pacific Spirit Park Society

Human Resources:

Karma Connections is managed by a Newcomer Youth Settlement Counsellor, who is responsible for recruitment, promotion, program delivery, and field trip arrangements. In addition, Karma Connections is delivered with the help of 4 to 5 community partner organizations.

Funding:

Karma Connections is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

The combination of pre-employment training workshops and group volunteer placements contributes to Karma Connections' effectiveness. During the group volunteer placements, youth get to apply the skills and information they have learned through the pre-employment training workshops. Furthermore, the skills that youth develop through the group volunteer placements enable them to strengthen their resumes and their ability to speak about their skills in future job interviews. In this way, Karma Connections offers a circle of sustainability, where the pre-employment training workshops support youth's growth in their group volunteer placements, and

the group volunteer placements strengthen their ability to communicate and gain vital experience for seeking employment.

Efficient:

Several factors contribute to the efficiency of Karma Connections. First, the Newcomer Youth Settlement Counsellor, the facilitator of the program, works closely with the Employment Counsellor at SVNH. This ensures that the pre-employment training that newcomer youth receive includes up-to-date information on what current employers are seeking when hiring new employees.

Second, at the beginning of the program, youth receive a schedule for the entire program outlining the dates and content of the program. Karma Connections develops this schedule for 3 to 4 months before the program is launched. This ensures that the content is relevant and all volunteer placements for the youth are secured. In addition, in this way, the youth receive all of this information at the beginning of the program so that they know what to expect.

Finally, settlement staff at SVNH also share with youth their own volunteering and job search experiences. Thus, Karma Connections provides youth not only with the tools needed to search for employment, but also examples and a point of contact for the future should they require additional support in their job search, even once the program has ended.

Relevant:

Karma Connections addresses newcomer youth's need for employment training to help them enter the workforce. To ensure that the program meets the specific needs of each newcomer cohort, Karma Connections collects feedback from previous cohorts that went through the program and engages in consultations with the Employment Counsellor at SVNH. Also, at the beginning of the program, the youth are asked to fill out a goal-setting worksheet to gauge their expectations of the program, what skills they want to work on, and what goals they hope to accomplish. The program facilitator considers the feedback throughout the program and amends the content as needed.

Sustainable:

The program facilitator builds and sustains relationships with local not-for-profit organizations to continue with community partnerships that are needed for the program. As the program continues to develop and COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift even further, SVNH hopes to continue building partnerships with additional local organizations and businesses to make the program as holistic as possible.

Transferable:

The program can easily be replicated by anyone with knowledge and understanding of the barriers faced by newcomer youth and current employment trends. To replicate the program successfully, it is also important to ensure that group volunteering opportunities at nearby community organizations are available.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Karma Connections facilitator had to consistently change program delivery to comply with provincial health orders and fit the needs of the youth. This included having hybrid programming where program participants had online and/or in-person one-on-one appointments with the Settlement Counsellor or Employment Counsellor for resume writing support

and mock interviews. Online sessions were shortened to recognize the screen fatigue youth faced during that time. When in-person programming was once again possible, the program had half the number of youth as were typically seen in previous years due to the small room capacities, and smaller volunteer groups that organizations were able to accommodate. These adaptations demonstrate how the Karma Connections program content can be effectively delivered through different mediums. However, facilitators have found that youth are much more receptive to the pre-employment training content when it is delivered in-person as opposed to online.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

Karma Connections regularly adjusts the content of the pre-employment training workshops to meet the needs of the youth. For example, if the cohort consists of mostly youth in grade 10 who have no experience writing resumes, the facilitator will allocate more time introducing what a resume is, what to include, and why it is important in the Canadian context. If the cohort comprises mostly grade 11 and 12 students who know about resume writing and may even have one, the facilitator may allocate more one-on-one time with participants to improve their resumes.

The program relies heavily on community partnerships to facilitate group volunteer opportunities for newcomer youth. SVNH has built strong relationships with several local community organizations. As a result, the program is able to provide the youth with a diversity of volunteering opportunities, which they most likely would not be able to experience otherwise. Also, Karma Connections regularly invites guest speakers to deliver some of the pre-employment workshops. This offers a variety of speakers to program participants and makes the program more engaging for them.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

The combination of pre-employment training workshops and group volunteer placements makes this program stand out compared to other programs that may focus on just one component. Similarly, the fact that the volunteer placements take place in a group setting allows the newcomer youth not only to learn more about their community but also to make new friends. Furthermore, compared to other programs, Karma Connections targets a narrower, more specific demographic.

High Client Uptake:

SVNH has partnerships with three high schools which help to regularly promote Karma Connections through administrative staff and settlement workers at the schools. As a result, when recruitment for the program begins, there is a pool of interested newcomer youth already available. Newcomer youth are recruited based on their commitment and readiness to start their journey to employment. Furthermore, many newcomer youth who went through the program themselves end up referring their friends. Through these recruitment methods, Karma Connections receives a large number of applications and always reaches full capacity. Karma Connections is mandated by IRCC to meet a target of 35 unique clients per year.

High Client Retention:

Karma Connections has high client retention. Newcomer youth are engaged throughout the program through different volunteer field trips and group pre-employment training workshops. Newcomer youth not only value the information and experience that they gain through the program, but also enjoy connecting with the broader community and making new friends. The fact that newcomer

youth are also awarded a volunteer certificate for the hours that they have dedicated to the program is another factor that helps maintain attendance throughout the program.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

Overall, newcomer youth who participate in the program report that they enjoy volunteering and that, as a result of the program, they feel more connected to their community. This is especially relevant given that many newcomer youth experience social isolation when they arrive in Canada and they hesitate to participate in community activities due to the language barrier and unfamiliarity with Canadian culture. Karma Connections helps newcomer youth to overcome this social isolation. As a result of the program, they feel more connected to their new living environment and also welcome it. Moreover, program participants also get the chance to meet other newcomers, all with different experiences settling into Canada, and share their experiences with each other.

In the latest cohort (March 2022), 90% of the program participants reported that they would recommend this program to other newcomer youth, 76% felt more comfortable applying for jobs and reported having a better understanding of work in Canada, 70% felt more comfortable seeking support for their job search, and 92% reported that they had met new friends and practiced their English communication skills.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

Karma Connections collects data at three points in time. At the beginning of the program, newcomer youth are asked to complete a goal setting worksheet to assess their program expectations, goals and skills. During the program, newcomer youth are asked for verbal feedback to determine what content they liked and did not like, what they learned and how they think that they will be able to apply the knowledge and skills gained in the future. At the end of the program, newcomer youth are asked to complete feedback forms to evaluate the program overall. The feedback forms include different types of questions, including short answer questions, rating scale questions, and multiple-choice questions. Newcomer youth are asked about their perceived employability and how the program assisted their settlement in Canada. The feedback gathered is used to measure the overall success of the program and to determine what content and field trips benefitted the youth the most. This information is then taken into consideration for the next cohort.

In addition, some youth who attend the Karma Connections program move on to participate in other settlement programs offered at SVNH. This allows the Youth Settlement Counselor to check in with the youth regarding their progress in obtaining employment and provide additional support.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH)

www.southvan.org