

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK ROOTS OF SAFETY

DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society
Greater Vancouver, British Columbia

Area of Practice:

- Safety and Anti-Violence

Video:

<https://youtu.be/SnxOzybmwBI>

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

DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, established in 1978, is a registered charitable organization serving diverse communities in Surrey, Langley, Delta, White Rock, and surrounding areas in British Columbia. The organization provides comprehensive support to immigrants, refugees, and other vulnerable populations through culturally sensitive, multilingual programs. DIVERSEcity offers an array of services, including newcomer settlement services, refugee services, language training, employment services, mental health support, and initiatives addressing gender-based violence. In addition to serving individuals and families directly, DIVERSEcity also supports service providers, community organizations, and other interested parties. As an experienced community connector and convener, DIVERSEcity builds partnerships, fosters networks, and facilitates collaboration across sectors. Its work aims to strengthen community connections, promote inclusive practices, and contribute to the overall well-being of the people and communities it serves.

The impetus for developing the Roots of Safety program came from feedback provided by immigrant and refugee clients, as well as settlement sector representatives. Clients affected by gender-based violence who had previously engaged with mainstream services, such as calling the police or moving into transition homes, expressed that these traditional interventions often did not adequately meet their needs and sometimes created more distress and isolation due to cultural insensitivity. Additionally, representatives from the settlement sector emphasized the need for culturally responsive safety planning protocols tailored specifically to newcomers. Recognizing these critical gaps, in 2019, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society partnered with University of British Columbia's Counselling Department to develop and pilot the Roots of Safety program, aiming to create a culturally safe, trauma-informed, and empowerment-focused model that respects and integrates clients' cultural values into safety planning processes.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

Roots of Safety

Description:

Roots of Safety is a culturally responsive, trauma-informed safety and empowerment planning model designed for service providers in the settlement and anti-violence sectors who support immigrant and refugee populations impacted by gender-based violence. The model equips these service providers with a structured yet adaptable framework to facilitate culturally appropriate conversations, enhancing clients' safety while respecting their cultural backgrounds and individual circumstances. Central to this model is the "three columns" approach, which involves: (1) identifying client strengths, (2) clearly outlining the challenges or risks they face, and (3) collaboratively developing a tailored empowerment plan that links strengths directly to the identified challenges. This approach was inspired by the Australian Signs of Safety program, in which Roots of Safety trainers received training. Except in high-risk situations where the safety of the client or their children may be compromised, the Roots of Safety model supports culturally relevant safety planning even if the client chooses to maintain connections with their partner.

The Roots of Safety training for service providers typically requires four hours and can be delivered either as a single four-hour session or split into two consecutive days of two-hour sessions. Extended workshops are occasionally offered for a deeper exploration of case studies and more detailed program elements. Training sessions are usually conducted in groups and can be facilitated in-person or online. Following the training, Roots of Safety trainers offer ongoing support, including personalized coaching sessions, step-by-step guidance on initial implementation, refresher sessions as needed, and access to additional training materials.

Goal(s):

The primary goal of the Roots of Safety program is to train service providers working in the settlement and anti-violence sectors to effectively address the safety and empowerment needs of immigrant and refugee clients. A longer-term goal of the program is for clients themselves to internalize the process, independently identify their strengths and challenges, and formulate personalized safety and empowerment plans.

Target Client Group(s):

The primary target clients of the Roots of Safety program are service providers in the settlement sector, anti-violence organizations, and other community organizations, who typically serve immigrant and refugee populations. Ultimately, the end beneficiaries of the program are immigrant and refugee clients themselves.

Delivery Partners:

The program was developed in collaboration with the University of British Columbia (UBC), but the delivery is conducted by DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society.

Human Resources:

The program is delivered by training coordinators at DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society.

Funding:

The Roots of Safety program was first funded by the Government of Canada through Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). Currently, the Roots of Safety training for service providers is funded as part of Stories of Strength, a related program that uses the same model to also train community members who, in turn, support their respective communities (see the Transferability section below). Stories of Strength is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

Several features contribute to the effectiveness of the program. The program uses a structured and culturally agile approach to safety and empowerment planning with a clearly defined visual framework consisting of three columns: identifying clients' strengths, acknowledging challenges, and developing empowerment plans tailored to clients' unique contexts. These columns help clients and service providers visualize strengths and challenges, creating a deeper understanding of how strengths directly relate to specific risks or challenges, thereby facilitating targeted interventions. The program also uses an appreciative inquiry method, which consists of using a solution-focused and

strength-based questioning to actively support clients in recognizing their resilience and potential, rather than emphasizing problems. Additionally, the program's communication approach is non-judgmental, non-blaming, and non-shaming to foster trust and openness, encouraging honest dialogue about sensitive issues. Furthermore, the incorporation of cultural humility ensures service providers remain continuously mindful of their clients' cultural perspectives and values, further enhancing trust and cooperation. Finally, the trauma-informed practice, which addresses underlying causes of behaviours rather than merely symptoms, further enhances the program's effectiveness by providing sustainable solutions.

Efficient:

Several key elements make the Roots of Safety program efficient. It provides a clear, practical, and easily implementable framework that service providers can quickly integrate into their existing practices. The three-column visualization approach efficiently guides service providers and their clients through complex issues, enabling focused, structured, and meaningful conversations within relatively short intervention periods. Additionally, ongoing coaching and support for trained service providers ensures consistent and efficient implementation across multiple agencies. The program also offers flexibility in training formats, conducted both online and in person, to actively accommodate the diverse needs of trainees.

Relevant:

Roots of Safety directly addresses critical gaps identified in mainstream safety planning practices for immigrants and refugees affected by gender-based violence. Conventional approaches – such as calling the police, relocating families to transition homes, or changing schools – often fail to consider cultural values and social connections, inadvertently causing additional distress and isolation. By offering a culturally responsive empowerment planning tool, the program acknowledges and integrates cultural and social values, ensuring interventions are respectful and meaningful to clients' lived experiences. Additionally, Roots of Safety supports service providers who require effective, culturally agile strategies for engaging immigrant communities in sensitive discussions about safety, relationship conflict, and empowerment, directly addressing their need for practical and adaptable tools.

Sustainable:

Several factors ensure the sustainability of the Roots of Safety program. First, the training is concise, standardized, and easily replicable, enabling ongoing and efficient delivery within diverse organizations. Second, the integration of post-training coaching, refresher sessions, and comprehensive support materials ensures that trained service providers can consistently apply the Roots of Safety methods over time. Third, the flexibility of offering both online and in-person training formats facilitates continued access and reduces logistical barriers, supporting sustained implementation within organizations and communities.

Transferable:

The Roots of Safety model is highly transferable and can be effectively implemented within any immigrant-serving agency where goal setting and empowerment planning are required. While originally designed to address gender-based violence, the model is also suitable for supporting newcomers experiencing various settlement challenges, such as housing, employment, medical care, and community integration. By emphasizing strengths-based empowerment planning, Roots of

Safety can easily be adapted to support individuals, families, and entire communities, even in the absence of violence-related concerns. Importantly, the program does not require trainees to have clinical counseling backgrounds or specialized professional roles; rather, it is designed so that individuals from diverse professional and community backgrounds can successfully implement the approach.

An example of the program's transferability is the Stories of Strength program, which builds directly on the Roots of Safety framework. In this initiative, trained community members ("champions") deliver empowerment planning presentations and workshops within their respective communities. These champions facilitate culturally tailored discussions, activities, and self-care practices, addressing a variety of community-specific needs. The Stories of Strength program has successfully reached seniors, adults, and youth from diverse immigrant backgrounds. Champions help community members recognize their strengths and collaboratively address challenges, demonstrating the broad adaptability of the Roots of Safety approach across different cultures, age groups, and community settings.

Additionally, the Roots of Safety training is suitable for implementation in communities of varying sizes, from large metropolitan areas to smaller rural regions, given its adaptability to different service contexts and the universal relevance of its empowerment-based methodology.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The Roots of Safety program is innovative and forward-thinking because it integrates empowerment planning into culturally agile practices that address underlying factors of vulnerability rather than merely focusing on immediate problems. This approach moves beyond conventional interventions by prioritizing clients' strengths and resilience, and explicitly acknowledging intersectionality and trauma-informed principles. Additionally, the program emphasizes capacity building among service providers, equipping them with adaptable and practical tools applicable to multiple contexts – not limited to crisis management. This comprehensive approach, which positions clients as active experts in their own lives, promotes sustainable interventions adaptable to various client contexts and community settings.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

Roots of Safety is distinctly different from other safety and empowerment practices by prioritizing culturally agile responses to gender-based violence, specifically for immigrant and refugee populations. Unlike mainstream protocols that often advocate contacting authorities or transitioning clients into unfamiliar community resources – which can unintentionally isolate or distress clients – Roots of Safety respects clients' cultural and relational contexts by facilitating safety planning that maintains community and family ties when appropriate. Its clear three-column structure, grounded in recognizing strengths before addressing challenges and planning safety, also significantly differs from deficit-focused or problem-centered interventions. This structured yet adaptable approach allows service providers to quickly and respectfully engage clients, resulting in interventions that align better with the cultural expectations and comfort levels of diverse communities.

High Client Uptake:

The Roots of Safety program has demonstrated strong client uptake among service providers. Within DIVERSEcity itself, 95% of staff have received training in the Roots of Safety model. In total, over 180 community service providers – including DIVERSEcity staff and external service providers from several community partners – have been trained. High uptake is further reflected in the continued requests for training from organizations across the community.

High Client Retention:

Service providers who participate in Roots of Safety training typically integrate and maintain the approach within their ongoing client services. The training's concise format, practicality, and ease of implementation have contributed to service providers consistently applying the Roots of Safety model in their day-to-day professional practice.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

The Roots of Safety program has demonstrated clear and measurable successful outcomes for both service providers and immigrant and refugee clients. For service providers, pre- and post-training evaluations indicated a marked improvement in their ability to effectively identify and address client safety and empowerment needs. Providers reported that the program's tools seamlessly integrated into their daily practice, resulting in a significant shift toward more culturally agile and client-centered approaches. Feedback from organizational leadership further confirmed observable improvements, noting increased staff confidence, more sensitive handling of complex cases, and enhanced overall service delivery.

For immigrant and refugee clients, the program outcomes were positive. Evaluation data indicated that 70% of participating clients experienced improvements in personal well-being, self-esteem, and resilience after engaging with service providers trained in Roots of Safety. Qualitative feedback highlighted clients' increased sense of empowerment, improved ability to navigate challenges, and strengthened community connections. Furthermore, clients emphasized that they felt understood and that they valued that the support received was culturally appropriate.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The evaluation and performance measurement strategy for the Roots of Safety program used both quantitative and qualitative methods and involved two distinct groups: service providers and immigrant and refugee clients.

During the initial implementation and development phase of the program, the team at UBC and a community-based evaluator collected evaluation data. For service providers, pre- and post-training surveys were administered to measure changes in their knowledge and capacity to implement the program effectively. Additionally, service providers participated in an advisory council, offering critical feedback on the usability and effectiveness of program tools, resources, and overall implementation strategies.

For immigrant and refugee clients, initial evaluation methods included qualitative group interviews. These interviews gathered detailed insights into clients' experiences, empowerment, resilience, and

perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Selected immigrant and refugee clients also completed a six-month follow-up survey designed to assess the long-term impacts of the program.

Currently, the Roots of Safety training continues to be evaluated through an external evaluation of the Stories of Strength program, which includes pre- and post-surveys with trained service providers, community champions, and immigrant and refugee clients.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society

<https://www.dcrs.ca/>

Roots of Safety

<https://www.dcrs.ca/our-services/gender-based-violence-services/roots-of-safety-service-planning/>

Stories of Strength

<https://www.dcrs.ca/our-services/gender-based-violence-services/stories-of-strength/>