



# The Bridge Guide

## Le guide Azimuts

A collection of reflections, best practices, and resources from practitioners who work with immigrant girls and young women

Compilation de réflexions, de ressources et des meilleures pratiques de celles qui travaillent avec les filles et les jeunes femmes immigrantes



La Fondation filles d'action tient à remercier le Programme d'établissement de Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada pour l'important soutien financier accordé pour la création de cette publication.

Girls Action Foundation would like to acknowledge the Settlement Program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada for their important financial support in realizing this publication.

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# The Project behind this guide

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This publication is just one part of a larger project called, *The Bridge: Build, Exchange, Collaborate for Immigrant Young Women*. The Bridge Project, like most of our projects at Girls Action, is based on work done with grassroots organizations and practitioners. For the purposes of this project we partnered, collaborated and consulted with those working with immigrant girls and young women. The goal of the Bridge Project is to provide resources, networking opportunities and training to communities across Canada who want to support the empowerment of their girls and young women, connect girls and young women with mentors and peers, and provide new programs in communities. The project aims to raise awareness and offer insights into the issues faced by immigrant girls and young women as well as to highlight their strengths and amplify their voices.

Girls Action produced four resources as part of the Bridge Project:

**The Bridge Guide:** A collection of reflections, best practices, and resources from practitioners who work with immigrant girls and young women

**I Am Here:** A zine compilation of girls' and young women's experiences and thoughts on immigration expressed in their own terms

**The Bridge Tipsheet:** Working with immigrant girls & young women to support empowerment & well-being



## The project behind this guide

**Immigrant Girls Research Review:** A compilation of research on immigrant girls and young women's issues

If you like this publication, be sure to check out **Our Communities Our Words: Collaborating for Racialized Girls' Empowerment**, which is a collection of reflections, practices and resources offered by women who work at the grassroots with racialized girls and young women across Canada.



# Le projet à l'origine de ce guide

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*Cette publication s'inscrit dans un projet plus vaste intitulé La Traverse : bâtir, échanger et collaborer pour les jeunes femmes immigrantes. Le projet La Traverse, comme la plupart des projets de Filles d'action, est réalisé en collaboration avec des organismes et celles qui travaillent avec les filles et les jeunes femmes immigrantes sur le terrain. L'objectif du projet La Traverse est de fournir des ressources ainsi que des occasions de réseautage et de formation à des praticiennes de diverses communautés au Canada qui souhaitent promouvoir et soutenir le renforcement du pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes, permettre à ces dernières de rencontrer des mentores et des paires et mettre sur pied de nouveaux programmes dans leurs communautés. Par ce projet, nous cherchons aussi à sensibiliser la population aux enjeux que rencontrent les filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes, à mettre en valeur leurs forces et faire entendre leurs voix.*

*Filles d'action a produit quatre documents ressources dans le cadre du projet La Traverse :*

**Le guide Azimuts** : *Un recueil de réflexions, de pratiques exemplaires et de ressources provenant des praticiennes qui travaillent auprès des filles et des jeunes femmes immigrantes*

**Le fanzine Azimuts** : *Un zine qui compile les expériences et les réflexions de filles et de jeunes femmes au sujet de l'immigration, dans leurs propres mots*

**Les conseils et astuces Azimuts** : *Conseils pour travailler au renforcement du pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes immigrantes*



## Le projet à l'origine de ce guide

***La revue de littérature sur les filles immigrantes** : Une compilation de recherches qui portent sur les enjeux auxquels font face les filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes*

*Si vous appréciez cette publication, n'hésitez pas à consulter le guide **Nos communautés, nos histoires : travailler ensemble pour renforcer le pouvoir d'agir des filles issues de communautés ethnoculturelles**, une série de réflexions, de pratiques et de ressources auxquelles ont contribué des femmes qui travaillent avec des filles et des jeunes femmes de communautés ethnoculturelles de partout au Canada.*



# About this Publication

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This publication is intended for youth workers, program coordinators and facilitators, educators, counsellors, policy-makers, researchers and anyone who works with and cares about the empowerment of immigrant girls and young women.

The Bridge Guide is a collection of reflections, strategies, and resources from organizations and individuals working with immigrant girls and young women across Canada. These contributors, collectively called our “community colleagues”, work in a variety of contexts and settings and each offer a different experience and expertise. The intention of this guide is to raise awareness and advance the thinking about the realities and strengths as well as the challenges facing immigrant girls and young women. We also want to share tools and approaches for empowering immigrant girls and young women based on the varied programming experiences of our contributors.

Our community colleagues were asked a series of questions such as: *What are the issues and challenges that the girls face? What strategies do you use to respond to these issues? In what ways are the girls resilient and strong? Why is it important to talk about the realities of immigrant girls in the first place?* And so on. In compiling the results it was important to honour the original responses of our community colleagues. We have therefore tried to limit the amount of editing in the contributors’ responses as much as possible, though some edits have been made.



## **About this Publication**

We acknowledge that when we speak about issues related to immigration and identity, words are important, and that different people will use different words depending on their own contexts, communities, and experiences. We also know that girls and young women may or may not identify with the terms “immigrant” or “newcomer” or “new arrival”, and that they may have entirely different ways of describing their identity or experiences. If your preferred terms and language are not reflected in this guide, we hope that you will still find the content useful to your work. At Girls Action, we are in a constant process of thinking through issues related to words and identity.

**We highly value your thoughts and insights on the matter, so please let us know what you think by writing to: [info@girlsactionfoundation.ca](mailto:info@girlsactionfoundation.ca)**



# À propos de cette publication

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*Cette publication s'adresse aux travailleuses jeunesse, aux coordonnatrices de programmes, aux éducatrices, aux animatrices, aux intervenantes aux responsables de l'élaboration de politiques, aux chercheuses et à toutes les personnes qui travaillent en faveur du renforcement du pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes immigrantes.*

*Le guide Azimuts est un recueil de réflexions, de stratégies et de ressources auquel ont contribué des organismes et des personnes qui travaillent pour les filles et les jeunes femmes immigrantes dans tout le pays. Les contributrices, que nous nommons « collègues sur le terrain », travaillent dans toutes sortes de contextes et de milieux. Chacune d'entre elles porte un regard propre à son expérience et à son expertise. Ce guide vise à sensibiliser et approfondir la réflexion sur les réalités, les forces et les défis propres aux filles et aux jeunes femmes immigrantes. De plus, nous partageons dans ce document des outils et des approches de renforcement du pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes, qui répondent à leurs réalités et qui proviennent des expériences de divers programmes et communautés au Canada.*

*Nous avons posé plusieurs questions à nos collègues sur le terrain, telles que « Quels sont les défis et les problématiques que les filles rencontrent ? », « Quelles stratégies employez-vous pour relever ces défis ? », « Comment se manifestent la force et la résilience des filles ? », « Pourquoi est-ce important de parler des réalités des filles et des jeunes femmes immi-*



## **À propos de cette publication**

*grantes ? », etc. Nous avons pris soin de faire honneur aux réponses originales données par nos collègues sur le terrain en limitant les ajustements effectués au moment de la compilation. Quelques modifications ont toutefois été faites.*

*Nous reconnaissons que le choix des mots est important lorsqu'on parle d'immigration et d'identité. Nous savons aussi que les filles et jeunes femmes ne se reconnaissent pas forcément dans les termes « immigrante » ou « nouvelle arrivante » et qu'elles peuvent avoir une toute autre façon de nommer leur identité ou leurs expériences. Si vous ne trouvez pas les mots et le langage que vous préférez dans ce guide, nous espérons du moins que le contenu sera utile à votre travail.*

*À la Fondation filles d'action, nous réfléchissons continuellement aux questions reliées au choix des mots et à l'identité. Nous accordons une grande importance à vos opinions et commentaires à ce sujet.*

**N'hésitez pas à communiquer avec nous pour partager vos réflexions :  
[info@girlsactionfoundation.ca](mailto:info@girlsactionfoundation.ca).**



## Our Community Colleagues:

the practitioners and organizations that made this guide possible

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Our community colleagues are the dedicated organizations and individuals that made this guide possible through their local work with immigrant girls and young women. They work in a variety of settings, and each brings a different perspective, an important voice and a diversity of best practices garnered from their experiences working with girls and young women. Here is a bit more information about our community colleagues and what they do.

## Nos collègues sur le terrain :

*les praticiennes et les organismes qui ont rendu ce guide possible*

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*Nos collègues et partenaires communautaires sont les organismes et individus qui ont rendu ce guide possible par leur travail local auprès des filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes. Elles travaillent dans une variété de contextes et apportent différentes perspectives et une diversité de pratiques exemplaires issues directement de leur travail avec les filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes. Voici un peu plus d'information à propos de nos collègues sur le terrain et leurs activités.*



**Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker**

**ANTIDOTE: MULTIRACIAL AND INDIGENOUS GIRLS AND WOMEN'S NETWORK**

Established in 2002, Antidote is a grassroots network and community based organization of over 150 multiracial girls and women in Victoria, B.C. Their members represent diverse voices, ages, ethnocultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, and affiliations in the community. They work with youth, families, schools, community groups, service providers, policy-makers and researchers to promote the visibility and needs of racialized minority and Indigenous girls and women.

Antidote targets barriers facing racialized, immigrant and indigenous girls and women by supporting their psychosocial well-being, engagement and leadership skills. Their projects are based on participatory, change-focused methods. Antidote fosters intercultural education and community building through the use of creative multimedia tools such as documentaries, theatre, photography, poetry, art and digital media. [www.antidotenetwork.org](http://www.antidotenetwork.org)

**Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker**

**IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Immigrant Services Society of B.C. (ISSofBC) was incorporated in 1972 as the first immigrant-serving agency in the province. Since that time, ISSofBC has grown to be the largest multicultural, immigrant-serving agency in western Canada. The society provides a variety of services to Lower Mainland immigrant and refugee communities, and works with over 23,000 clients per year. [www.issbc.org](http://www.issbc.org)

**Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation**

**OASIS CENTRE DES FEMMES**

*Oasis Centre des femmes a pour mission d'éliminer la violence et d'améliorer la situation des femmes francophones de la grande région de Toronto et de Halton-Peel. Le centre offre des services variés qui visent à promouvoir l'autonomie des femmes tout en les soutenant dans leurs démarches, et sensibilise la communauté à la violence faite aux femmes.*

*Oasis Centre des femmes est un organisme féministe reconnu dans la communauté, par son expertise et sa capacité à offrir des services complets et de qualité aux femmes francophones. Par son engagement proactif, Oasis crée des services accessibles et diversifiés afin de répondre aux besoins émergents.*

*Les services du centre sont confidentiels et gratuits pour toutes les femmes âgées de 16 ans et plus, qui éprouvent des difficultés, qui sont touchées par la violence ou par des abus.*

*Les intervenantes travaillent selon les valeurs de respect et d'intégrité, dans une approche féministe et de justice sociale.*

[www.oasisfemmes.com](http://www.oasisfemmes.com)

**Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique**

**LA PASSERELLE-IDÉ**

*La Passerelle-IDÉ souhaite accroître la capacité des jeunes francophones à faire face à toutes formes d'obstacles et d'exclusion sociale et à favoriser leur développement personnel et professionnel afin d'améliorer leurs conditions de vie. Notre mandat est*



*d'offrir un encadrement adéquat aux jeunes, entre 16 et 35 ans, en trouvant des solutions appropriées à leurs besoins afin de favoriser leur intégration sociale et ensuite leur pleine participation économique pour un développement durable au sein de la communauté. Nous travaillons aussi à bâtir des mécanismes favorisant un accès aux ressources équitables et efficaces afin de lutter contre l'exclusion sociale.*

[www.passerelle-ide.com](http://www.passerelle-ide.com)

**Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION**

SCADDING COURT COMMUNITY CENTRE

Scadding Court Community Centre has created FuSION, a program designed to respond to the combined pressures of settlement stress, poverty, discrimination and isolation that negatively affect young women's health. FuSION provides intensive training for young women to develop leadership, advocacy and outreach skills and work with others to create women-only programming and increase newcomer young women's participation in local facilities. [www.scaddingcourt.org](http://www.scaddingcourt.org)

**Julia Chan, Artistic Director**

DIASPORA DIALOGUES

Diaspora Dialogues supports the creation and presentation of new fiction, poetry and drama that reflect the complexity of the city back to Torontonians through the eyes of its culturally diverse communities. The Young Writers from the Edge program allows professional writers from the Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities to work intensely with a group of young writers to get to a place of honest reflection

and expression as they explore emotional and intensely personal topics related to immigration, race, religion, mental health, or family conflicts in a safe environment.

[www.diasporadialogues.com](http://www.diasporadialogues.com)

**Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker**

CULTURELINK SETTLEMENT SERVICES

CultureLink Settlement Services is a settlement agency that aims to foster positive interaction and understanding between host communities and newcomers/refugees. Refugee and newcomer youth who have been in Canada for fewer than three years have many issues to deal with such as poverty, language barriers, and social isolation. Rebecca Butler is the youth coordinator for CultureLink's Newcomer Youth Centre. She oversees projects such as a peer leadership training program for youth, a community garden project that brings together newcomer teens and newcomer seniors, and a winter sports program that helps familiarize newcomer and refugee youth with Canadian winter sports.

[www.culturelink.net](http://www.culturelink.net)

**Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**

Wariri is completing her Masters in Social Justice Education and Community Development at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). Prior to her studies, she volunteered and worked with NGOs worldwide to learn, connect and organize in creative and strategic ways to promote social action and well being for oppressed populations, focusing on children, youth and girls/women's issues.



**Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

Jessica was previously a Research Coordinator with the University of British Columbia. In this capacity, she worked with various academic units, namely: The Institute for Health Promotion and Research (IHPR) and The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP). Her work focused on the integration<sup>1</sup> of immigrant families into mainstream Canada and its accompanying mental health challenges. Such research work brought her in contact with the mothers and daughters of various immigrant communities: Chinese, Korean, Afghanistan, Iranian, Pakistan, and South American (mainly Brazilian). In addition, Jessica Chan was the Editor-In-Chief of Ricepaper Magazine, Canada’s premier Asian-Canadian arts and culture magazine. In this role, she worked directly with young immigrants and Canadian-born Asians, giving voice to the evolving topic of minority identity through literature. Jessica Chan is a law school graduate from Dalhousie University. She is currently working on her first young adult novel.

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Chan defines integration as “to learn, absorb, and come into harmony with a culture, be it mainstream society or a minority society. I believe that integration occurs on both ends—the accepting society and the adjusting immigrants. The introduction of new people to a society brings change, and with change comes the need to adjust and “re-harmonize” society.

Integration requires both parties to understand their differences, and harmonize themselves through their similarities. I believe that my definition of integration supports a view of “inter-culturalism” rather than “multi-culturalism”.

**Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator**  
CENTRE FOR SPANISH SPEAKING PEOPLES

Cecilia’s passion is for art and for empowering youth through artistic expression. She has been involved in a variety of arts-based programming, event planning and health promotion programs and training both in

Canada and in Latin America. She is the co-ordinator at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples Youth Program, lovingly termed “El Centro” by the youth in the program. El Centro has become a space where Latina-Hispanic youth can utilize a variety of free resources that include tutoring, leadership training, and arts-based initiatives. It promotes the expansion of life skills, the establishment of strong youth leaders, and the creation of solidarity within the Latina-Hispanic community.

[www.spanishservices.org](http://www.spanishservices.org)

**Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

Nadia is a poet, writer and arts-based empowerment facilitator who focuses on issues of identity, diversity, participatory process and non-violence. Her workshops have reached many communities—from Portland, OR to Cortes Island, B.C. to Johannesburg, South Africa. She has worked with youth in detention, rehab, on probation, in foster care, in US “failing schools”, in local community centres, at camps, at conferences, and at almost every school in the B.C. Lower Mainland. She was named one of B.C.’s 100 most influential Indo-Canadians in 2008.

**Karima Kadmiri, Program Coordinator and Facilitator**

GIRLS CLUB- GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION

Girls’ Club is a weekly empowerment and violence prevention program for girls, aged 10 - 12 at Barclay Elementary School, in the Parc-Extension area of Montreal. Eighty percent of the participants are from immigrant families. Combining popular





education and arts-based activities, the girls explore themes related to identity, body image, self-esteem, violence, dating, pop culture, the media, and more. Girls' Club provides a safe space for girls to come together, have fun, chat, ask questions, and be themselves! Girls' Club is participant-led, as the girls themselves are responsible for choosing the subjects they wish to explore, and deciding on action strategies to address the issues they face.

[www.girlsactionfoundation.ca](http://www.girlsactionfoundation.ca)

**Karima Kadmiri, Coordonnatrice et animatrice  
du Club des filles**

*CLUB DES FILLES - FONDATION FILLES D'ACTION*

*Le Club des filles est un programme hebdomadaire qui a lieu à l'école primaire Barclay dans Parc-Extension à Montréal. Le programme a pour but la prévention de la violence et le renforcement du pouvoir d'agir des filles âgées entre 10 et 12 ans. Environ 80 % des participantes sont de familles immigrantes. Par des activités artistiques et d'éducation populaire, les filles explorent des thèmes comme l'identité, l'image corporelle, l'estime de soi, la violence, les relations, la culture populaire, les médias et bien plus encore. Le Club des filles est un espace sûr où les filles peuvent se rencontrer, avoir du plaisir, échanger, poser des questions et surtout, être elles-mêmes! Le Club des filles permet aux participantes de choisir les sujets dont elles veulent parler et de décider des stratégies d'action qu'elles veulent employer afin de répondre aux enjeux auxquels elles font face. [www.fondationfillesdaction.ca](http://www.fondationfillesdaction.ca)*



# The Importance of The Work

Girls Action asked our community colleagues to begin by reflecting on why it's important to talk about the realities and experiences of immigrant girls and young women. Their responses provide context, illuminate a number of intersecting issues facing immigrant girls and ground the important work that they do with their girls.

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## ***L'importance du travail auprès des filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes***

*Filles d'action a demandé à ses collègues sur le terrain de réfléchir et de s'exprimer sur pourquoi il était important de discuter des réalités et des expériences des filles et des jeunes femmes immigrantes. Leurs réponses ont mis en lumière plusieurs des problématiques qui touchent les filles immigrantes, en plus de mettre ces enjeux en contexte et en lien avec le travail concret essentiel qu'elles effectuent auprès des filles.*

The value of talking about the experiences of immigrant girls may be summed up in two words: expression and community. I have worked with recent immigrants and (their) subsequent generations of daughters. One of the recurring themes in each cultural group is the “aloneness” these young women and girls feel. The readers and writers for Ricepaper (a national quarterly magazine devoted to showcasing Asian-Canadian artists, writers, performers and innovators) often exclaimed, “I thought I was alone in my experiences until I read your magazine. I didn't know there were others like me. Thank God!”

It seems that this fear of being alone is compounded if the girl or young woman live in a rural district with less of a minority community. Having a conversation about their fears—be it in a community hall, focus group, or through the pages of a magazine—helps to establish that they are part of a bigger whole. Talking about their issues makes the problems seem less insurmountable, and gives them a forum for self-articulation.

I think there's a need for these girls to find their way in this new society; talking about their experiences allows for a reimagining of how their culture fits in Canada, as well as seeing how “now we can make our own mark and contribute to Canadian society”. This process is invaluable, as it marks the transition from newcomer to citizen of the land. Such expression gives immigrant girls and young women a stake in their lives here in Canada.

**– Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**



*L'immigration est à mon avis un phénomène assez complexe. Nous découvrons chaque jour de nouvelles problématiques qui étaient jusque là inconnues. Les inégalités entre les sexes sont une partie intégrante de la plupart des sociétés. Nous constatons que le vécu et les impacts sont différents pour les filles et jeunes femmes. La plupart des études se concentrent sur le vécu de l'homme ou de la famille en tant qu'unité. Il est essentiel de mettre à jour le rôle qui est dévolu aux filles et aux jeunes femmes dans ces situations. Ceci nous aidera aussi à avoir une meilleure vision des effets de l'immigration et de rendre visible la réalité de ces filles et jeunes femmes pour ainsi mieux les outiller.* –**Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes**

*Les jeunes femmes immigrantes de minorité raciale et ethnoculturelle représentent un groupe dynamique et ambitieux dans la mosaïque canadienne. Elles sont confrontées à nombre de défis liés à leur statut d'immigrantes, mais également à leur sexe. C'est ainsi qu'elles sont les premières touchées par « la polarisation du travail se retrouvant ainsi dans la sphère dite secondaire » (Hélène Cardu, 2008), par le chômage, la pauvreté, le racisme et la discrimination. Afin de pallier à ces problématiques, ces femmes développent des stratégies individuelles ou en communautés, l'objectif final étant une adaptation et une intégration réussie au sein de leur pays d'accueil.*

*Évoquer les défis, les forces et les succès des jeunes immigrantes est donc important, dans la mesure où cela permet de mieux connaître leurs besoins et de développer des stratégies plus adaptées afin de faciliter leur insertion*

*tant professionnelle que culturelle.*

– **Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique, La Passerelle-IDÉ**

Immigration and refugee issues are an integral part of Canadian society on a socio-political, socio-economic and cultural level. There are a lack of programs that are specifically targeted for girls and young women in Ontario and Quebec that have an anti-oppression framework and that are provided outside of governmental institutions. Most of the program development regarding immigrants come from employment services and ways to “integrate immigrants” in Canadian society. Employment is very much needed, but the need for other services in relation to emotional well being, cultural and political involvement is also very much a reality for immigrant girls and young women.

Immigrant and refugee girls have unequal access to the opportunities and choices that non-immigrant citizens have. For example, this can be seen in the employment opportunities that are often limited to minimum wage; the devaluing of experience and training that took place outside Canada; the need to redo training and/or education because our previous education and/or training is not recognized; and the lack of equal access to health care and housing. It is then difficult to feel empowered and to contribute to Canadian society equally; this can also be heightened if one is an immigrant or refugee of colour, because of the barriers caused by racism. There is a need for an approach that enables immigrant girls to participate and be directly involved in the decision making in their lives.

–**Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**



## **The Importance of The Work**

### **L'importance du travail auprès des filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes**

*Contrairement aux femmes immigrantes ou aux hommes immigrants, il n'existe pas beaucoup d'organismes ou de structures qui travaillent spécifiquement avec les filles et les jeunes femmes immigrantes. Elles vivent des réalités qui font qu'elles se retrouvent souvent isolées, essayant de trouver leur place dans la société d'accueil tout en répondant aux attentes de leurs familles. Il est important de donner des espaces de paroles aux filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes et de leur permettre de s'épanouir en tant que filles et jeunes femmes. – Karima Kadmiri, Coordinatrice et animatrice au Club des filles, Fondation filles d'action*

By providing these girls with a private space to discuss issues, we give them the opportunity to create change by giving them a voice in our community. The young women are able to share experiences and are given various opportunities that they otherwise would not have had in other settings. The value is the growth that we see in the girls over the course of their participation; the female bonding that is different from co-ed programs, and the confidence that is built.  
– **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

The value is in the process of giving voice. Without choosing the words, it is difficult to define what the issues, challenges, successes and experiences may be. For the one who is speaking, it leads to a sense of validation, of being heard, and it helps give shape to one's thoughts and feelings which previously may have been hard to pin down. For the one who is listening, it may strike a chord or increase empathy and understanding. – **Julia Chan, Artistic Director of Diaspora Dialogues**



# The Issues

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Our community colleagues reflected on the multiple issues and challenges that emerge in their work with immigrant girls and young women. These issues have been identified from practitioner observations, as well as from the girls and young women themselves.

While we strongly believe that girls face multiple, overlapping and often interconnected issues, we have tried to organize these issues into categorical themes to help readers navigate this section. Many of the issues brought forward by our community colleagues could have easily been placed in more than one categorical theme, however we chose to organize the issues into one theme only to avoid repetition.

These themes were identified in part by Girls Action and in part by practitioners working with immigrant girls and young women. Some of the community colleagues' responses may have been categorized by Girls Action and not by the colleague themselves.

# Les enjeux

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*Nos collègues sur le terrain ont réfléchi aux nombreux enjeux et défis que rencontrent les filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes. Ces problématiques ont été identifiées à partir des observations des praticiennes, ainsi que des expériences des filles et jeunes femmes dans le cadre de leur travail ensemble.*

*Nous savons que les enjeux rencontrés par les filles sont multiples, imbriqués et souvent inter reliés. Bien que ces enjeux pourraient se retrouver sous plusieurs thèmes, nous avons choisi de les classer sous un seul thème pour éviter les répétitions et faciliter la lecture.*

*Ces thèmes ont été identifiés en partie par Filles d'action et en partie par les contributrices. Certaines des réponses fournies par nos collègues peuvent avoir été classées par Filles d'action et non pas par les collègues elles-mêmes.*



## Interlocking Oppressions *Les oppressions imbriquées*

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It's really about the intersectionality of the issues: the realities that you face as a young woman, the reality that you face as a young woman of colour, the reality that you face as a queer woman, the reality that you face as a woman with a different ability, the reality that you face as a woman who has different literacy levels and then, on top of all of that, the reality that you face as an immigrant or refugee. It's very challenging because your "newcomer" status is almost like another label that follows you around in all the realms of your life. Therefore, this will affect your educational opportunities, your employment opportunities and your social networks. If you do not fit in the mold that is expected of you and if you want to do other than "what you are told to do" your options are very limited.

These issues also exist because they are a way of controlling people, in this case controlling immigrant girls and young women. If one's resources are limited, well the government and people in power have more control over an oppressed population. It's due to the institutional racism that is such a part of Canadian society. It's due to the capitalist and imperial frameworks that this society runs on. If it's always all about profit for a certain class and type of person, well the other will be left behind...left in the margins...  
– **Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**

As a facilitator, I think that girls and young women in general, face constant discrimination and sometimes harassment in their everyday lives. For the immigrant and refugee girls that I work with, they face daily discrimination like racism and xenophobic comments. One of the girls in my group recently got fired for wearing a headscarf.

– **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Facilitator, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

Immigrant girls and young women of colour encounter racism. Often times coming from countries where they were part of the dominant class, many of them have not encountered racism and discrimination. This is often their first time experiencing such behaviour, and with no support and often without the language and understanding of what they are experiencing, this can lead to feelings of tremendous isolation. – **Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker, Antidote**



## Language, Culture and Identity

### *La langue, la culture et l'identité*

Our youth are processing and coping with the shock and trauma of feeling isolated and lonely when they don't have the language skills to express themselves. This is our biggest issue. They quickly learn to "act normal" (their phrase, not mine) to survive and keep traces of their culture hidden beneath the surface. But when they're given the opportunity to talk about it they're excited to analyze what they want to preserve and what they'd like to change in their culture in relation to their lives in Canada. A lot revolves around the relationships they (are allowed to) have. We have conversations with the girls about "what girls are expected or supposed to do" versus what they actually do or what they want to do. They want to fit in, whether that means dressing like their peers, staying out late, going to university, or dating. Most of our time is spent on self-definition.

– **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

There are challenges in mixing newcomer girls and non-newcomer girls. Sometimes stereotyping happens in these situations. When the girls share a similar ethnic background, they make more of an effort to bond, but this is not always the case cross-culturally. Through the use of different educational resources such as workshops on anti-oppression, teambuilding and various recreational activities, relationships are

formed between all the girls. We make a point to address these issues and have the girls voice their concerns.

Newcomer youth also face language barriers, so we connect with Youth Employment Services to set up translation in our organization. – **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

Language is the basis for connection, and understanding of the norms and expectations of social life. Living in one language/culture at home and another in "the world" (say at school or work) can mean the development of a mask or set of masks that allow that shift of context to become possible. The benefit of this coping mechanism is flexibility and an intuitive reflexivity on the needs of the external world. The cost is a loss of personal attention to needs, and the rejection of a complex and unique inner world. – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

Immigrant girls and young women face many challenges related to "language and culture". For example, these girls may come from immigrant parents who are not well versed in either English or French. In such cases, the girls are thrown into these new languages alone, and are forced to learn a new tongue, but are unable to use it to communicate with



their parents. Language is very reflective of a society and its way of life. As time progresses, these girls may experience a growing gap between themselves and their parents. English or French can represent the link that these girls have to their friends and school outside of their homes. If their parents are unable to share this link, the language can come to be a barrier between parent and child. For instance, the girl may use English or French to shut her parents out of her “outside life” as she integrates more into mainstream Canadian society. The girls may also rebel against their own/Canadian culture, or rebel against their parents if they’re mad at them for making them move to Canada.

The girls might have to translate for their parents outside the home. This may cause embarrassment to both parties—the parents for needing to rely on their child, and the child for having parents who rely on their children to function in mainstream society.

Parents who struggle with English or French may not be able to maintain the respect of their children as they once did. Often, immigrants who held professional jobs (like doctors or lawyers) in their home countries work in menial jobs in Canada. This fact, coupled with the language barrier, can work to change children’s views of their parents. It becomes difficult for a girl to respect a parent who cannot communicate at parent-teacher meetings, or stand up for their interests where conflict arises in the community outside of home.

– **Julia Chan, Artistic Director, Diaspora Dialogues**

Cultural issues more than language affects our girls now. I would say that has changed from ten years ago, when language was a bigger issue. Our young women are so smart and resilient that they’ve adapted to keeping both languages (English and Spanish). I’ve seen more boys lose their native tongues, and this is because of the different roles assigned to girls and boys in the home. A lot of our girls face pressures to maintain (Colombian) culture at home after being in the world. But the Colombian culture they are pressured to maintain, it’s not a present-day Colombian culture, because what is that even? We don’t know because we’re not there. But the girls have to maintain an idea of a Colombian culture from when their parents were growing up there. This changes a bit for the girls who were born here. Because their parents have more experience with the culture here they have a different frame of reference. – **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

There is lack of access to appropriate ESL (English as a Second Language) courses and support for certain youth. In B.C., youth 19 and older get one year free access to ESL classes but one year is not enough to learn English at a level that will ensure equal access to the same jobs as people who are fluent in English (or French). This results in the newcomer youth being pushed into low paying temporary or labour jobs that they might not otherwise choose. In addition, the ESL course is usually filled mostly with older people because youth under 19 learn English during elementary and high school, so the youth who are 19 and older have little to no





interaction with people their own age and this creates isolation. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

One of the challenges is the lack of understanding in the larger community. The girls wanted to go to a swimming pool but they needed a pool that was only for girls. This was impossible! So the girls totally missed out on an activity they really wanted to do. No community centres offered a girls' only time slot. Lack of understanding from the community comes up a lot. They get upset at how little understanding there is in Canada about their cultures. Some girls get really disappointed at how little halal meat there is, or when strangers make assumptions about their culture when they ask questions like "Are you oppressed?" because the girl wears a headscarf. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

*Les défis que rencontrent les filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes se retrouvent au niveau de l'intégration mais aussi au niveau du respect de leur culture d'appartenance et de leur individualité. La société leur renvoie constamment une image de personne différente, qu'elles n'appartiennent pas à cette société. Par exemple, le fait de toujours se faire demander quelle est leur culture d'origine, comme si elles n'allaient jamais être canadiennes, alors qu'on est dans une société multiculturelle. De plus, il y a beaucoup de stéréotypes reliés aux origines des jeunes femmes quand elles entendent : « tu viens de tel pays donc tu es comme ça ». – **Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibili-***

### **sation, Oasis Centre des femmes**

*Il y a plusieurs défis par rapport aux conflits identitaires, à la langue, aux valeurs matrimoniales, et dans les relations avec la famille. Le conflit identitaire se trouve confiné entre deux projets de socialisation contradictoires : deux cultures, deux pays, deux modèles, deux langues. Il y a le modèle culturel du pays d'origine des parents, qu'ils portent en eux et désirent transmettre à leurs enfants et celui de l'école et de l'environnement culturel d'accueil quotidien, qui transmet de son côté, les habitudes et le modèle culturel de la société d'accueil.*

*La langue est le premier vecteur de la culture et l'expression de l'identité. Souvent, les filles apprennent la langue maternelle à la maison et doivent l'utiliser afin de communiquer avec leurs parents. Communiquer avec les parents dans leur langue peut être une façon de les rassurer sur l'adhésion des enfants à leur modèle éducatif. Cela permet également d'établir avec eux une complicité et de les rassurer sur l'affection qu'on leur porte. Par contre, pour se faire comprendre à l'extérieur, les filles doivent parler la langue de la société d'accueil.*

*Les filles peuvent également être le lien entre les parents et la communauté d'accueil au niveau de la langue. En effet, dans les cas où les parents ne parlent ni français, ni anglais, les enfants jouent le rôle de traducteurs entre les parents et l'autre instance, qu'elle soit gouvernementale, scolaire, médicale ou autre.*

*Selon mon expérience personnelle et professionnelle, j'ai remarqué que la mère assure la transmission culturelle dans de nombreux cas. Par contre, l'éducation qu'a connue la mère, son enfance et adolescence, différent*



*nettement de l'environnement social dans lequel évolue la fille. Pourtant la communication mère/fille est souvent bien présente et maintenue. Cependant, il existe un domaine de discussion qui reste tabou, celui de la sexualité et des relations amoureuses. Et pour ce qui concerne le père, selon mes expériences, plusieurs facteurs se conjuguent, et parfois le père est placé dans une situation où il est dépassé par ce qui lui arrive. Par sa condition socio-économique, il peut dans certains cas se situer aux échelons inférieurs de la société d'accueil. Son comportement se baserait alors sur des normes et des valeurs auxquelles il pourrait s'accrocher désespérément, alors que dans son pays d'origine, ces mêmes valeurs pourraient connaître des mutations certaines. Les attitudes et le comportement de la fille peuvent secouer le père, parce qu'ils le touchent dans ce qu'il a de plus cher : sa dignité et son honneur, alors que la jeune fille ne cherche qu'à vivre comme ses copines de la société d'accueil, une vie banale d'adolescente. – Karima Kadmiri, **Coordonnatrice et animatrice au Club des filles, Fondation filles d'action***

*Les différences entre la culture d'origine et celle d'accueil peuvent entraîner un choc culturel. Les références sont différentes, comme dans le cas des rapports entre les sexes et dans les rapports intergénérationnels. Au niveau intergénérationnel, c'est souvent plus hiérarchisé ; parfois quand tu es une jeune fille tu n'as pas droit à la parole, tout passe par les parents. Alors qu'ici, les jeunes ont plus la parole, on leur enseigne qu'ils peuvent prendre leurs propres décisions.*

*Le fait de se retrouver en contexte de double minorité – au sein de la communauté anglophone en tant que francophone et au sein de la communauté francophone comme immigrante peut aussi être un choc. Même si elles ont la capacité de s'exprimer en français il est nécessaire d'avoir une connaissance de l'anglais dans la majeure partie des provinces. Ceci peut être une cause de marginalisation, étant donné que nous travaillons avec des jeunes femmes francophones à Toronto.*

*Dans les écoles francophones, tout le monde parle français car c'est un pré-requis. Mais on s'est rendu compte que malgré le fait que les filles parlent français, elles vivent une marginalisation car elles ne parlent pas anglais, la langue qui est parlée en dehors des cours. Si tu ne parles pas anglais, tu es marginalisé, tu n'es pas « in », tu n'es pas accepté, et ce, malgré le fait que ce soit une communauté francophone. La communauté francophone est petite à Toronto, donc au niveau de l'emploi, il faut au moins être bilingue.*

*Le manque que je vois c'est au niveau des programmes pour les filles en français. On voulait créer un espace pour les jeunes femmes pour qu'elles puissent s'exprimer en français. C'est la mission que je me suis donnée en ce moment. Un espace où elles pourront se retrouver entre francophones et avoir cette égalité de services avec le milieu anglophone. Mais on a encore du travail à faire à ce niveau là. – Gnilane Turpin, **Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes***



## Education and Employment *L' éducation et emploi*

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Post-secondary school is still a big challenge because of poverty. Not knowing what your options are, or not liking the options that are available to you as females (like going into hairstyling, etc.) are also issues. Young women take on these jobs to help support their families, but it's not what they really want to do. Going to school also depends on how willing parents are to let go of the help around the house. – **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

Some girls have internalized that they can't or shouldn't think about higher education. Some parents don't really encourage them to pursue certain careers. It's difficult to trace where these ideas come from—whether they're from their families or from themselves or from somewhere else completely. One student is always running herself ragged, and when I asked her if her parents were expecting her to do well, she replied that it was just for herself. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

Integrating into the mainstream Canadian public school system is difficult, especially if a girl shows different levels of advancement in various subjects, for example, being in Advanced Placement in math, while in a beginners' class for English. There's often a social stigma attached to students who may be brilliant but who cannot communicate in English.

On another level, an immigrant girl who sees her (former lawyer) father performing janitorial duties at the local mall may have a difficult time understanding the value of getting an education. It would be hard for the girl to appreciate how her father's law school education played a part in helping to secure her family a better life. As a result, these girls may be unwilling to go for further education, or go into certain professions. On the flip side, these girls may be motivated to do the opposite—to go into their parents' former professions so as to over-compensate for what has happened to their parents. – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

There are no programs to help newcomer young women access post-secondary education nor any guidance to help them make long-term and meaningful career plans for the future. Instead, there are provincially funded programs to find them low-paying service type jobs quickly, like work at fast food restaurants.

The girls and young women also face financial difficulty at home. Many times these young women feel the pressure to find a job quickly to help their families; this pressure is increased if they are the only ones in the family who speak English.

Not only is it difficult to deal with the family pressure, but there are also conflicting



messages from the new host country. For example, if the girls are refugees, they receive government support for one year. Not only are they not used to getting this kind of support (sometimes they come from cultural norms where such support is seen as charity), but the welfare workers will also humiliate them. The employees at the welfare office will tell the young women that they are lazy and should get a job. But no one offers support about how they can find a real career and get the skills needed to find work other than menial labour.

Financial difficulty at home is also influenced by the fact that many of the young women I work with have come to Canada as refugees and lost one or more of their family members back in their home countries. When the girls and young women arrive here, they end up being the ones who deal with managing the household, taking care of younger siblings and serving as translators for the rest of their family as well. Their many responsibilities leave them no time to focus on their future and on the possibility of accessing post-secondary education. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

*Les jeunes immigrantes qui arrivent au Canada doivent faire face à de nombreux défis. La plupart d'entre elles se rendent compte que leurs diplômes, leurs expériences de travail et leurs compétences ne sont pas reconnues. La seule alternative qu'elles ont est soit d'accepter un emploi moins qualifié et moins rémunéré, ce qui les place dans des situations de sous-emploi; soit d'acquérir des diplômes et une expérience de travail canadiens. Ces*

*exigences représentent autant d'entraves à leur accès au marché du travail et dans le cas des minorités visibles, elles font partie des barrières raciales à l'intégration. Toutes ces difficultés peuvent rendre l'intégration de ces femmes très difficile. C'est d'ailleurs ce que suggèrent les chiffres de la Sécurité Sociale canadienne qui démontrent que les jeunes immigrantes, plus que les Canadiennes nées au Canada, souffrent d'un taux de chômage élevé, ont des revenus légèrement inférieurs et dépendent plus de l'aide sociale. Cette situation peut animer en elles des sentiments de frustration qui peuvent mener à l'isolement et à « l'anéantissement de leur intention d'appartenance et de contribution à la société d'accueil » (Milton Tanaka, 2005). – **Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique, La Passerelle-IDÉ***

# Violence

## La violence

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We work on coping with racism and homophobia and the girls' experiences of being both victim and perpetrator. These issues are so prevalent in our communities and schools. In our program, the youth begin to understand these issues and they see how they hurt others. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

We have workshops where we bring in police officers to discuss our rights. In these workshops we talk about violence in our neighbourhood. The challenges we see are on a personal level. Some of the newcomer girls have never witnessed fistfights for example, and we deal with that through one-on-one counselling. – **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

Getting funding to conduct proper studies on immigrants and the violence they experience is hard. Canada's immigrant population is varied. When doing research on violence and immigrant girls, a researcher has to ask: Should the data sampling be taken from a general cross-section of all Canadian immigrants? Or should the data focus on specific immigrant groups and their culture? Immigrants from one culture may face different types of violence from immigrants of another culture. As a result, taking a cross-section of data responses from a mixed group of

immigrants may yield inaccurate results, or worse, result in statistics that may mislead a researcher and lead them to formulate an ineffective study. But if a researcher focuses on too specific a group of immigrants the funders may be reluctant to fund such a narrow study.

There are not many statistics on violence within immigrant communities. Violence, especially sexual violence, generally goes unreported. It was difficult to find research subjects who felt comfortable opening up about their experiences with domestic violence, or even general violence in their communities (language barriers notwithstanding). It was doubly difficult to get marginalized young girls and women to talk about violence they may have encountered or witnessed. This was particularly the case for young women who came from conservative backgrounds. Their mothers generally did the talking on behalf of their daughters.

This leads to another problem: the lack of proper statistics means that our government cannot make informed policies that address violence and immigrant women. Unless this is addressed, this issue may continue to fall by the wayside in Canada.

Note: All comments on funding are based on my experiences working as a Research Coordinator in 2003. CIHR policies may have changed since then. – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**



## **Violence - La violence**

We run a violence against women program, so we see domestic violence and the circle of violence. We need to support young women that get into dangerous relationships. We need counsellors that speak the language, but when that happens, we run the risk that the situation is going to be leaked, and there is a legacy of secrets that is at risk. Perhaps the mothers of the young girls don't know about their situations, or they are more worried about people knowing their own business. We have to create spaces where girls feel comfortable talking about violence (usually an alternative space—an art space, or recreational space, or educational setting), and when we do, we realize how prevalent it is among our girls, and how hidden it is too.

– **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

I see self-esteem and violence prevention as inextricably connected. Until you know you have value, and that the people around you can see and appreciate you, you can be more vulnerable to violence, especially sexualized violence.

Not seeing an image of yourself in a text-book/media/training creates an internalized feeling of invisibility. That invisibility can translate into a lack of trust or belief in one's own worth. That lack of self-esteem is perceived as a weakness of the person, rather than a failure of the system. – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**



## Health and Sexuality *La santé et la sexualité*

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My main health focus is HIV prevention, so when our community hides behind the curtain of “we’re not having sex”, that means that people in the community are not getting sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing. We need to accept that we are having sex, (and so were our parents when they were our age) and stop pretending that we aren’t.  
– **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

We noticed a disparity in the type of sexual education between the home and the school. At home, the young girls do not talk with their parents about sex or sexuality. At school, sexual knowledge is presented as part of the girls’ education, as essential information. This dichotomy raises problems for the young immigrant girls, who are caught in-between. Sometimes, their parents might feel that the educators were overstepping their bounds, and refuse to let their girls go to school. At school, certain topics (such as condoms) might be presented as personal protection in health education. At home, however, the topic might be seen as invasive and an affront to religious teachings (for example, for parents who assume that there should be no loss of virginity before marriage). – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

Queer issues in general are not addressed in schools, and they have virtually no language

or ability to talk about it. So as we progressed in the group, and talked about queer issues the girls gained both an understanding and the language to talk about them, so queer issues became more normal to talk about.

– **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

There is not enough appropriate professional emotional support and counselling for some of these girls and young women. There are counsellors available, but they aren’t culturally or gender appropriate. The girls and young women I work with often come from wartorn countries and the counsellors are not always trained to deal with these realities. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

One of the studies I worked on at HELP [The Human Early Learning Partnership at the University of British Columbia] dealt with the mental health impacts of integration<sup>2</sup> into Canada on immigrants who had previously held high-ranking professional jobs in their home countries. One of the recurring issues we identified was the increased mental strain and decreased self-esteem experienced by these immigrants. Our study focused on professionals who, in immigrating to Canada, were forced to take on menial jobs.



More often than not, these former professionals showed signs of mental strain, worrying about how to provide for their families. The adjustment in lifestyle (luxurious in their home country, basic in Canada) sometimes created resentment in their families. In some cases the women of the household might be compelled to find jobs outside the home when they had previously been homemakers. This forced reversal in gender roles created a growing disparity between men and women. Often, the men have a harder time being supported by their wives. Sometimes, this affected their children, as the fathers might take out their mental stress at home. Some mothers reported that their daughters looked up to them in their new roles as breadwinners, but had grown to resent their homebound fathers.

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Chan defines integration as “to learn, absorb, and come into harmony with a culture, be it mainstream society or a minority society. I believe that integration occurs on both ends—the accepting society and the adjusting immigrants. The introduction of new people to a society brings change, and with change comes the need to adjust and “re-harmonize” society.

Integration requires both parties to understand their differences, and harmonize themselves through their similarities. I believe that my definition of integration supports a view of “inter-culturalism” rather than “multi-culturalism”.

– Jessica Chan, Laywer and Community Contributor

*Tous ces obstacles peuvent entraîner chez les jeunes filles et les femmes les éléments suivants :*

- *Une plus grande détresse psychologique due à la fatigue causée par leurs efforts d'adaptation pour faire face à leur nouvelle situation. Elles peuvent alors être tiraillées entre les deux cultures et ce qu'elles veulent être.*
- *Un sens d'impuissance face à leur incapacité à fonctionner aussi efficacement dans la nouvelle culture que dans leur culture d'origine.*
- *Une perte et une solitude provenant d'un manque d'expérience partagée avec leurs paires.*
- *Des sentiments de refus d'une nouvelle culture qui peut affecter leur estime de soi.*
- *Une confusion du point de vue des attentes de rôle, des valeurs et de l'identité.*

– Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes





## Leadership, Mentorship, and Community Engagement *Le leadership, le mentorat et l'engagement communautaire*

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It's hard to balance school, jobs, and the need to help with preparing the dinner. We need civic and community engagement, it creates support networks, but does it happen? When are we supposed to do this, in all our spare time? – **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

The youth always want me to talk and participate as well but since I am not a newcomer I have a very different answer than them when the exercise is to “describe your first day in Canada”. It's difficult for me when I am not able to relate to those experiences but I think we are still able to connect about different experiences and find different ways to relate to each other. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

A lot of leadership and mentorship happens on a parent-child level. An instance of this would be young girls who witness the success of their mothers' second career. Often times, immigrants may have to take on a job that is related to, but of lesser status, than their former careers back home. (for example, a woman who was a judge in Iran may become a lawyer in Canada, or a doctor may sit exams to become a nurse). These mothers are leaders by example to their daughters.

Organized religion also plays a huge role in promoting leadership and mentorship amongst immigrant women. This is particu-

larly so when a church, mosque, or temple has established social groups for women and youth. Often, women may meet other females who have become leaders within their religious groups. – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

There is not enough mentorship and role modelling by strong women of colour. This is the most valuable antidote to the destabilization caused by the systematic invisibilizing of immigrant women of colour. – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

*Il faut également noter le manque de modèles féminins de minorités raciales ethnoculturelles dans des postes de pouvoir. Les jeunes femmes immigrantes doivent donc faire face à des défis économiques, sociaux, culturels et politiques. Elles sont témoins de la frustration de leurs parents ou aînées, victimes d'un cercle vicieux d'entraves pour l'accès à l'emploi (exigence de diplômes et d'expériences canadiennes), elles sont conscientes des obstacles qu'elles devront affronter et beaucoup considèrent l'acquisition de compétences canadiennes comme la clé d'une intégration réussie.*

*L'un des principaux obstacles dans le soutien au pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes est le manque au niveau des institutions. Notre souhait serait un renforcement de*



## **Leadership, Mentorship, and Community Engagement** **Le Leadership, le mentorat et l'engagement communautaire**

*la mobilisation de ces structures afin de mieux accueillir et répondre aux besoins des jeunes femmes issues des communautés raciales, culturelles et francophones. Par ailleurs, les pouvoirs politiques devraient adapter leurs priorités et reconnaître la particularité de ces jeunes femmes afin que leurs politiques soient plus inclusives. Par ailleurs nous déplorons un manque de moyens et de continuité des actions d'intervention auprès de ces jeunes femmes. Nous saluons, à cet effet, les efforts de la Fondation filles d'action de Montréal.*

**– Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique, La Passerelle-IDÉ**



## Issues that matter to the girls *Les enjeux considérés importants par les filles*

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The girls and young women are concerned with: socio-economics and issues of employment; sexual and reproductive health rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and two-spirit issues; girls and women's rights; and racism and anti-oppression. The girls I work with are interested in issues that are pertinent to women of colour and black women specifically, for example, issues like Afrocentricity and racism in education, the work place and the arts; using the arts as a social justice tool; indigenous knowledge and culture (not only in Canada but also in African countries); and queer issues as they affect black women and girls. These are all aspects of their reality that they live every-day. – **Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**

Immigrant girls and young women are concerned with access to services and education, employment and employability as well as having a way to be heard. Furthermore, I find that they are very concerned with social justice initiatives, sexual health, HIV/AIDS and supporting multi media arts projects. These issues are relevant in their lives. Victoria, B.C. is so small, and they experience racism first-hand. So when the girls get to get together and hear that other girls share those experiences—this really ignites the spark to want to do something about it. – **Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker, Antidote**

The young women I work with report issues of boredom, apathy, confusion, extremely awkward relationships with parents and guardians, vulnerability to older men, drug use, self-harm and addiction to media (social and entertainment). – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

*À La Passerelle-IDÉ, les filles sont préoccupées par le mutisme, le manque d'information, la méconnaissance de l'informatique, l'isolement, la pauvreté, le manque d'autonomie financière, les questions liées à la coutume, l'exclusion, l'unilinguisme, les problèmes intergénérationnels et familiaux, telle les mères seules. – Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique, La Passerelle-IDÉ*

*Une des préoccupations des filles est leur intégration sociale et le développement de leur identité entre deux cultures, tout en respectant les deux et en étant bien. Aussi, elles trouvent important de se sentir libre d'être elles-mêmes, respectées et acceptées par la famille aussi bien que par la société d'accueil. – Karima Kadmiri, Coordinatrice et animatrice au Club des filles, Fondation filles d'action*



# The Strategies

How do practitioners support girls and young women in addressing these issues and challenges? Here, our community colleagues document the practices, approaches and tools they use to support the empowerment of immigrant girls and young women.

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## Les stratégies

*Par quels moyens les praticiennes aident-elles les filles et jeunes femmes à affronter ces problématiques et ces défis ? Ici, nos collègues documentent les pratiques, les approches et les outils qu'elles utilisent pour contribuer à renforcer le pouvoir d'agir des filles et jeunes femmes immigrantes.*

Leadership and mentorship is our focus. We see mentorship as a cycle of passing along knowledge. We have various phases to our program. Once a group has completed all workshops and participated in event planning, they are then ready to become mentors. Our program recruits new participants and the mentors will work with them throughout the program. This offers the young women the opportunity not only to learn from staff and facilitators, but also from young women mentors who are relatable and who have completed the program.

Employment is another focus of our program. We work together on interview skills, job skills and their resumes. A lot of the young women take the career course in high school and still lack the skills they need. Girls volunteer at our centre or with younger youth in youth programs to gain new skills and to help them in their future job searches. A lot of the girls have been repeat participants, and they go on to facilitate the program. – **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

At Antidote, we use a multifaceted approach that deals with all of the issues that immigrant girls face in one way or another. Our main strategy is to use an intergenerational framework in all of our work. It is a really unique and successful approach that supports girls to engage with other immigrant and racialized women who are successful in their fields. We facilitate these connections by holding events, conferences and workshops that are intergenerational—so the girls can develop links with older women on their own terms.



We have also created several partnerships with various local queer and sexual health organizations (South Island Pride Centre Society [SIPCCS], the Anti-Violence Project [AVP], and Options for Sexual Health). It's exciting to partner with organizations that represent and speak to queer communities. A Queer Liaison position was created on the board and queer issues, sexual health, healthy relationships, and sexual and gender identities will be put in the forefront of our dialogue with the community. Often different identities are siloed into separate communities, often leading to isolation or the compromising of one community for another. Through this project we hope to break barriers and speak to the experiences of hybrid identities, build a bigger community, and expand and strengthen our foundations of solidarity and alliances. Challenges that we will face during this project will be debunking the stigma surrounding queer sexual identities in immigrant communities, and also raising issues regarding race in Victoria's predominantly white queer community. Antidote has a presence at queer events in Victoria and many people have thanked us for creating visibility for queer racialized immigrants in other marginalized spaces.

We are also creating workshops on sexual and gendered violence along with a community action plan to create safer spaces for queer people of colour and Indigenous peoples. These projects are developed and facilitated with an anti-oppressive, decolonizing, transnational feminist lens that is based on youth empowerment. – **Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker, Antidote**

*Au Club des filles on a plusieurs approches :*

- *Les programmes spécifiques pour les filles. Les filles et les jeunes femmes ont besoin d'espaces inclusifs et sécuritaires où elles se sentent libres de s'exprimer et d'être elles-mêmes. Ce type d'endroit permet aux filles immigrantes d'exprimer librement leurs réalités.*

- *L'éducation populaire. Cette approche met l'emphase sur un processus d'apprentissage qui n'est pas du « haut vers le bas ». Le but principal de l'apprentissage est de créer des changements sociaux positifs, qui reposent sur les besoins des personnes impliquées dans le processus. Ce sont les filles qui déterminent quels sont les enjeux et problématiques qui sont importants pour elles, et ce sont elles qui déterminent la meilleure façon pour créer un changement.*

*L'éducation populaire :*

- *Reconnaît que les filles sont les expertes de leur propre vie ;*
  - *Valorise les diverses expériences et connaissances des filles ;*
  - *Crée des occasions pour les filles afin qu'elles développent leur leadership et passent à l'action.*
- *Reconnaître les filles comme agentes de changements. Lorsque les filles et les jeunes femmes créent des liens entre elles au-delà de leurs différences et entre leurs diverses communautés, elles apprennent les unes des autres. Elles découvrent que leurs problématiques à l'échelle locale font en fait partie d'enjeux beaucoup plus vastes. Influencées par l'interdépendance*



*des problématiques, les filles et les jeunes femmes peuvent alors provoquer des changements à une plus grande échelle.*

- *Les arts médiatiques sont un bel outil d'expression pour les filles (comme la production de vidéos, la photo, les fanzines, etc.). Les projets d'arts médiatiques sont un moyen pour les filles et les jeunes femmes de se faire entendre sur des enjeux qui sont importants pour elles. Par exemple pendant la journée nationale d'action au Club des filles, les filles réécrivent des contes traditionnels (cendrillon, petit chaperon rouge, etc.) en les réinterprétant de façon à refléter leurs réalités et expériences multiculturelles. Un autre groupe a produit une vidéo de courtes pièces de théâtre, pour illustrer leur réappropriation de trois contes de fées classiques. Ces courtes pièces réinterprètent les contes de fées traditionnels de façon à refléter les réalités et expériences des participantes du Club des filles.*

**– Karima Kadmiri, Coordonnatrice et animatrice au Club des filles, Fondation filles d'action**

*Notre expertise se traduit surtout par de l'intervention individuelle à travers l'accompagnement de la jeune femme dans son cheminement psychologique, émotionnel, et aussi l'accompagnement pour les différentes démarches administratives pour tout ce qui concerne l'immigration. Nous avons créé un livret d'information intitulé « Partageons nos expériences » à l'intention des femmes immigrantes et réfugiées de Toronto. (Vous pouvez consulter la section sur les ressources pour plus d'information sur ce livret.)*  
**– Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communau-**

**taires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes**

*Premièrement, nous avons une approche culturellement adaptée dans le cadre de nos programmes d'intervention auprès des jeunes femmes. Les jeunes femmes sont elles mêmes vectrices de leurs changements, nous les impliquons en leur donnant un sens de leadership dans la réalisation de projets d'intervention qui les touchent. Nous avons développé un outil de formation en compétences culturelles que nous adaptons en fonction des priorités et des nécessités des jeunes femmes pour répondre à leurs besoins.*

*Nous avons un accompagnement et un suivi personnalisé et culturellement adapté. À cet effet, la collaboration avec les différents partenaires tels que Woman Health, Oasis, Centre francophone, Réseau de Femmes d'Affaires, Dalton and Peel de Mississauga et Collège Boréal est capitale dans notre démarche, surtout en ce qui concerne certaines interventions beaucoup plus cliniques.*

*La communauté sénégalaise de Toronto a mis en place un système de tontine qui est à la fois un moyen pour toutes les femmes de se retrouver mais également une structure qui aide les nouvelles immigrantes à s'intégrer et à profiter du réseau crée par la communauté pour rechercher un emploi, un stage ou recevoir des conseils avisés de personnes ayant une grande expérience du pays. Une autre initiative dont les jeunes immigrantes peuvent tirer profit est le programme Nouveaux Horizons pour les aînés : Histoire et perspectives des aînés ethnoculturels francophones,*



*initié par La Passerelle-IDÉ en collaboration avec le RDEE. Par l'entremise de ce projet, plusieurs témoignages de vétérantes de l'immigration francophone ont été recueillis dont le parcours devrait inspirer les nouvelles immigrantes. Y sont soulignées l'importance de l'instruction, la recherche de l'excellence, la volonté de relever les défis ou encore la nécessité de s'adapter à son environnement comme tremplin vers une autonomie financière et un épanouissement personnel. Comme le dit si bien Gisèle Pham, directrice du Collège Boréal, « si une porte est fermée, il y en aura toujours une d'ouverte quelque part, [d'où la nécessité de] pousser [ses] limites au maximum ». – Léonie Tchatat, Directrice Générale et Développement stratégique, La Passerelle-IDÉ*

To be able to start working it's important to have adequate outreach resources because being a newcomer and a refugee can be a very isolating experience, so getting to the people in need is crucial.

Some of the communities that I have worked with do not adhere to western psychology or have negative associations with it. However, there was a need for emotional well-being. I have supported girls' empowerment through "informal" counselling, both one-on-one and in groups. I say "informal" because it was not done within a psychological institution. The counselling was done informally when I went to some of the girls' homes or even met them at coffee shops. We formed a "support group" together. Sometimes the counselling was as simple as just having conversation. I also used resources available to me, like the arts and popular education tools, especially

when doing group workshops.

Finally, it's important to create programs that have a long-term approach where one can do follow ups, and not just do an activity and then disappear. – **Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**

*Les parents peuvent être un obstacle important. Quand je veux soutenir le pouvoir d'agir des filles, il faut que je m'assure d'entretenir une bonne relation avec les parents, qu'ils soient en confiance avec le travail que l'on fait, qu'ils se sentent rassurés par le fait que je ne travaille pas de façon à engager les filles dans une activité ou des idées qui ne rejoignent pas leurs valeurs. Les parents sont en général très réceptifs dans le cadre de ces programmes spécifiques aux filles. Il est important de bien leur faire comprendre les objectifs du programme et de les intégrer à différents niveaux. – Karima Kadmiri, Coordinatrice et animatrice au Club des filles, Fondation filles d'action*

*En ce qui concerne les jeunes filles nous nous adressons principalement aux écoles. Intégrer certains programmes dans le cursus pédagogique est un moyen d'avoir directement accès aux élèves. Nous avons aussi recours aux partenaires pour relayer l'information. Les anciennes participantes à nos programmes nous sont aussi très utiles pour relayer l'information. – Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes*

We focus on the girls' strengths and use



that to guide the program. The girls bring programming ideas to the table based on their skills and interest. For example, one girl wanted to engage the group in Indian-style dance, so she shared her knowledge and experience and she lead the activity.

We also hold workshops on job skills, drug prevention, theatre, sexual health, nutritional cooking, as well as about cultural practices. We also facilitate discussions with nurses about puberty and breast cancer. We do a lot of team-building activities as well as shared leadership activities. All these methods are successful because the girls are the ones who make the decisions about their own learning. – **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FUSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

Young women in my community are not encouraged to gain the breadth of knowledge, experience, self-awareness, or trust that is required for the development of imagination. This means that they are not participating in the creation of the world as it will be. They are left subject to the imagination of people who are enfranchised within the system of achievement and education.

I use hip hop, fashion, and other expressive arts to create programming and help young women express their needs. - **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

We really believe in the girls, and we put them in the forefront (like in public speaking roles and media interviews, etc.). We prepare them to succeed in these new environments and present them with new opportunities so

that they feel confident in taking on these roles. We also have resources that are available to support this kind of work, like the Unlabeled Fashion Manual and the We're Just Saying Girls Club Manual. We created them because there were no other resources like that out there. (Please see the resource section for more information.) – **Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker, Antidote**

In the context of Diaspora Dialogues work we encourage teens to express themselves through narrative and/or poetry. Writing provides a space for reflection and the gathering and expression of one's feelings, ideas and experiences. Narrative offers an accessible way for readers (who may be of different gender or from different cultures than the writer) to connect with what is being said. From there the hope is that we move onto dialogue and an exchange of ideas, which is a very important next stage. We think it's important to foster intercultural dialogue in a city as diverse as Toronto. To do this, we use writer-mentors from many different cultures, genders, and backgrounds. We offer a range of workshops, for example, one week may focus on fiction, another on spoken word poetry, and the third on playwriting. We want to introduce teens to exploring writing in more than one form, to spark creativity and to encourage interdisciplinary work. Since the ultimate goal is to get them writing, the focus of the workshops is on practical writing exercises. All workshops culminate in a final reading event to which friends, family and the public are invited. We encourage them to read their work from a stage at this event. We treat them as professional writers, paying them a reading fee as we would with any other writer we engage





for an event. Time and again we find that by doing this the teens gain tremendous confidence in their abilities. Getting over the hurdle of reading in front of an audience (terrifying for many people of any age) is energizing, it builds confidence, and spurs them on to continue with their writing.

We do not censor what teens want to write about, and we choose a diverse range of writer-mentors who respect and encourage free speech. It is important for the teens to find their own voices and express their own opinions, even if they are different from the status quo or from what is considered politically correct, or from what they may have been raised to value. And in fact, many of them don't choose to write about culturally specific or particularly personal topics, focusing instead on fantasy, romantic relationships, and the emotional turmoil common to all teenagers in the process of growing up.

If a teen's first language is not English, it is our hope that the writing workshops offer an opportunity to develop her English skills in a safe and exploratory environment. We offer the workshops outside of class time so that the writing is not tied to grades or evaluation. The workshops give the girls an opportunity to explore things particular to their gender and culture. One young woman wrote about feeling proud of how she looked while riding the bus. Another young woman wrote a play in which she was able to dramatize the tensions of living within a Western culture that clashed with family values from another culture, and how those tensions intersect with being a teenage girl. For those who have difficulty or hesitation around expressing their opinions and feelings directly, creative writing can feel like a safer

way to speak because of the buffering process of fictionalizing one's experiences.

A successful career in the arts is a challenge for anyone, and doubly so for anyone from a marginalized community of any kind. These workshops, which are free, give teens a chance to learn about writing as a viable career from professional writers of culturally diverse backgrounds. Even if they don't go on to pursue a writing career, the teens get the benefits of trying on a creative voice and a taste of what it means to share one's voice with the community.

The teen years are a critical time for girls in terms of shaping their sense of identity and developing their own voice. Giving them access to a mentor can go a long way toward helping them to develop their own sense of leadership. – **Julia Chan, Artistic Director, Diaspora Dialogues**

Language tends to be the largest barrier in conducting workshops and focus groups. As a result, we try to have translators from the participants' communities present. It is always good to have someone on hand who can speak the participants' language. It is better if that someone is from the participants' community. This someone becomes the cultural bridge and a figure of trust for both participants and workers. – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

It's important to have facilitators that the girls can identify with—people who share similar experiences. The girls open up faster and can move forward faster when there is a com-



mon understanding and shared experience between her and the facilitator. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

The biggest thing is making the space. The youth have reported that the big value in the program came from being part of a community where they can be themselves. It's a closed group, so they know exactly who to expect every week and they built relationships with each other. Even though we had workshops, field trips, and guest speakers, it was learning to trust each other that created a peer learning and coping situation. They learned how to communicate with each other, and we learned how to get them to communicate. They're already planning to get together on their own, outside of the group, and that was a welcome and unexpected outcome.

Our sports component exists to keep newcomers physically active in the wintertime. It can be terrifying to experience the Canadian winter for the first time, and a lack of physical activity leads to depression. We go skiing, skating, and the program has been well used and a lot of fun. We also spend part of our time teaching nutrition and healthy eating, because some of our youth eat a lot of fast food, usually because their parents are working and junk food is perceived as the cheapest and easiest option. We also have a program called Taking Green Roots, which is designed to create a discussion about the environment with newcomers, where we talk about food and food systems, about where food comes from and how to make healthy choices for our bodies and the environment.

In the summertime, we have a multicultural gardening project at Wychwood Barns in Toronto, (with the STOP Green Garden project which features a greenhouse for food banks). Thirteen youth and 21 seniors who are loosely grouped together, based on language, get together to plant and grow seven gardens. The intergenerational partnership functions through relationships built between these two groups, which have a lot to learn from each other. The young people act as translators for the seniors, and the seniors conduct cooking classes to keep traditional methods alive for another generation. Because it's a park and an art space, the rest of the community walks through and observes this happening every week. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

I run an immigrant and refugee girls and young women's support group, called Ladies Night. The program is designed for immigrant and refugee young women who have been in Canada for less than 2 years and who are having challenges with the integration process. Ladies Night is a space where the girls mentor each other, learn new skills, get to know Vancouver but most importantly it provides them with a space to talk and share their experiences. The girls have full decision-making power about the program—they chose the activities, the food and the times when it is best to meet. The program provides them with bus tickets, food and money for workshops and field trips. We go to places that they wouldn't normally have access to because of their financial situations. The girls are thankful that the program is helping them discover the city and giving



them something in their lives apart from school and family obligations. Not only are they having fun and enjoying life but they get to know other immigrant and refugee girls.

In the group we run an activity called Community Asset Mapping to help the girls identify their own strengths and what they bring to the group, to their families and to their community. We then talk about how those strengths can translate into something they might want to do in the future. We ask the girls to draw a person that would represent them. On the inside of the person, they are asked to write or draw all of the things they know how to do or are good at. On the outset we ask them to tell us about all of the things they would like to learn about or explore in more depth. When the girls present back to the group we highlight the kinds of things the girls want to have more information about, but we also use the strengths and knowledge the girls already have so that they can mentor each other. For example, if someone wanted to learn to belly dance and there were other girls in the group that already knew how to belly dance we would organize a session in which the girls got to teach one another.

To go even further in supporting this exchange, we will put the girls in contact with a potential mentor so they can ask them questions and learn more about careers they are interested in. This draws little on our limited resources, but is a powerful experience for the girls. It is also successful when we have youth workers at Ladies Night who are doing post-secondary education and who can act as mentors and role models for the girls. I also take unplanned opportunities to work-

shop ideas with the girls. For example, we went to see a movie at the mall and while standing in line we starting looking at the sizes and skin colours of mannequins. We began to question and critique beauty ideals that are all around us. The girls would bring up really interesting points like “We don’t look like them! Why do we buy those clothes?”

We did a healthy relationship workshop and it was really well received. The group had a lot to talk about. “Healthy relationships” was something they had never really thought about, like how they interact with families, partners and friends. They were having powerful realizations in the workshop like “Oh— maybe it’s because we aren’t communicating properly”. Here is a link to the workshop we did: [http://teensexualhealth.vch.ca/workshop\\_modules/relationships\\_II.htm](http://teensexualhealth.vch.ca/workshop_modules/relationships_II.htm)

We also did an anti-discrimination and anti-racism workshop. When one of the girl’s in the group got fired from her job for wearing a headscarf, we went over the situation as a group to learn about racism and discrimination, acceptable and non-acceptable working conditions, along with labour rights and legal rights. I also offered the girl options like taking legal action if she wanted to. Since this occurred I have been trying to arrange a more formal workshop on labour rights because it is a huge need in the lives of immigrant and refugee young women. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

Right now all of our programs are mixed with



newcomer girls and non-newcomer girls. The peer leadership program is our main project and the girls become leaders and create change when they are given the tools to do so. Newcomer girls' challenges can be similar to non-newcomer girls', but there are also unique social pressures depending on their background, status, and how they got here; this can affect the way they cope with and interpret violence and homophobia. Even in mixed groups, girls build peer support networks where they can talk about racism and discrimination in ways that they can't with parents, teachers, or at school. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

Our approach employs a mix of approaches like empowerment through art, anti-oppression principles, transformative education, non-violent communication, and coaching. These practices allow participants to remain in control while absorbing tools and methods for promoting self-esteem and imagination. – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

If you can catch people when they arrive from the airport it means that you know everything from the beginning—the poverty, the issues, everything is clear all at once

We have a space that is just for girls where they can feel safe to talk about girl issues (though I also see pros to co-ed programming). Our program is successful for a few reasons. We do quantitative and qualitative evaluations and take the girls' feedback into account for the next round of programming. We are also very successful in reaching out

to young people because we provide immigration services to their parents. Families are more likely to trust their settlement officers, and follow up with recommended activities for their kids if they are located in the same building as their settlement services. Another successful outreach strategy has been lunchtime programs for girls who can't attend afterschool programs. Our most successful activities with our girls take place after we have gotten to know them. We also have Spanish-speaking tutors from York University to help the girls with their homework. Finally, our arts-based program feeds into leadership training that then leads to employment. A lot of our girls are in the Co-op system, where during their last two years of high school they can work during class time and not after school and get credits for their work experience.

When I program I spend the first three weeks taking care of trust-building issues and ice-breaker issues so that we all know each other really, really well. We also maintain a close relationship with the parents, and then we plan the programming to take that into consideration. Because our program is arts-based, we are able to find creative solutions. For example, there was a group of girls who were identified as bullies, so we gave them disposable cameras and sent them on a project in Kensington Market. They had to talk to different people while taking the pictures, so they were building their social skills without even knowing that they were doing so.

– **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**



# The “Defining Moments”

Sometimes, we experience moments which make us come to a new realization or understanding. Often these moments inspire us to take action or to approach a situation differently. Girls Action asked the community colleagues to describe an instance of a moment of truth or clarity that arose while working with girls.

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## Les moments déterminants

*Parfois, nous vivons des expériences qui nous amènent à renouveler, changer ou approfondir notre compréhension de certains enjeux. Ces moments nous inspirent souvent à passer à l'action ou à aborder une situation avec une nouvelle approche. Filles d'action a demandé aux collègues sur le terrain d'évoquer des expériences de ce type, des moments de vérité ou de clarté qui sont survenus dans le cadre de leur travail avec les filles.*

The defining moment for us is watching the transformation of each teen when they are up on stage reading what they wrote with the support of our program. Many of them start with visible nervousness, but as they progress they straighten up, their voices become stronger, and the pleasure that they experience from facing their fears and literally finding their voices is palpable. That moment, for everyone, is the defining moment of why we offer these workshops. In addition, girls find that the creative work they start to do through the workshops become a kind of touchstone or anchor in a world that may otherwise feel chaotic for them. – **Julia Chan, Artistic Director, Diaspora Dialogues**

We learn so much from the youth. As a facilitator, I came into this work with an education and an idea about the way the program was going to go, but those plans had to be completely revised if I was to truly engage youth. Teenagers are specific about how they learn, they need to feel like they are a part of it, or it doesn't work. When they are given that power to feel implicated in their learning, they really take ownership of it. We've all had to find new ways to learn that break away from patterns that have been ingrained in us. For example, early in the program the room would be set up like typical classrooms and they would call me “Miss”. But we all learned to change these practices in order to ensure that this work is youth-driven. Many of the youth have told me that their lives would have come apart without this program, so that's a major defining moment. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**



## The “Defining Moments” Les moments déterminants

“We came here for a better life, and we’re just surviving.” This statement by one of my clients was an eye-opener for me. Canada receives lots of new immigrants, but we don’t always help them achieve the dreams that brought them here in the first place. Who dreams of leaving their homeland to become a busboy or janitor? We need better integration<sup>3</sup> programs that help immigrants put their existing skills to use.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Chan defines integration as “to learn, absorb, and come into harmony with a culture, be it mainstream society or a minority society. I believe that integration occurs on both ends—the accepting society and the adjusting immigrants. The introduction of new people to a society brings change, and with change comes the need to adjust and “re-harmonize” society.

Integration requires both parties to understand their differences, and harmonize themselves through their similarities. I believe that my definition of integration supports a view of “inter-culturalism” rather than “multi-culturalism”.

– **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

I organized a career day event for girls aged 10 to 12-years-old who don’t really have much access to resources. There were about thirteen amazing women who do different jobs. When I saw all the girls looking at those

women, and the women asked them “So, what do you want to do?” The girls answered enthusiastically, “I want to be a doctor! I want to do what you do!” And it was amazing for me to witness that moment, I said to myself, “OK, now I know why I’m doing this.” – **Karima Kadmiri, Girls Club, Girls Action Foundation**

I think about the sheer numbers of parents that want services for their kids. We usually hear from their moms first, or from a teacher, or from a parole officer. Those are the moments, when other adults in the community are saying that the children are not getting the skills that they need; when you’re being told that the kids that you are working with have a 40% dropout rate, but it’s actually a 40% pushout rate, because the kids don’t have the support that they need to stay in school. But it’s exciting, to see your girls grow up and get into schools and not need you anymore. – **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**



# Girls' Strengths and Assets

The community colleagues were also asked to reflect on the resilience of girls and young women that they have seen through their work.

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## Les forces et les atouts des filles

*Nous avons également demandé à nos collègues sur le terrain de témoigner de la résilience des filles et jeunes femmes qu'elles ont côtoyées dans le cadre de leur travail.*

The girls who come to our program constantly bring new and fresh ideas and perspectives, and share the education that they've received. After trust is built, they're honest and open, and they question everything, they never take the easy route. – **Chantalle Gomes, Youth Engagement Worker and Program Coordinator of FuSION, Scadding Court Community Centre**

*Les filles et les jeunes femmes immigrantes s'impliquent et s'intéressent à tout projet qui aidera au renforcement de leurs capacités mais aussi à leur reconnaissance en tant que membre de la société canadienne. Par exemple, elles prennent des cours d'auto-défense. Ça leur donne un sentiment de sécurité, de pouvoir. Certaines des filles du groupe avaient une estime de soi assez faible, mais à la fin du cours elles sont ressorties avec une estime plus forte. Et surtout, elles savent qu'elles sont capables de faire tout ce qu'elles veulent.*

– **Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes**

Some girls show their strength by working beyond their parents' expectations others rebel against school and their parents. Some get involved in school activities like sports and the arts, or they show their strength just by opening up and talking about issues. Some dream about moving out and getting jobs and saving money. They are also resilient when they find strength that they didn't know they had. They also find strength in the bonds they have with each other.

The youth really step up and leverage the leadership skills they receive at our program



## **Girls' Strengths and Assets** **Les force et les atouts des filles**

into being leaders in their own schools. They are able to recognize that feeling of loneliness that they felt in their own lives, and approach other youth to help them make the transition into their new life. – **Rebecca Butler, Youth Program Worker, CultureLink Settlement Services**

These girls and young women are strong, and I see their strength and resilience through the communities and networks they have built for themselves. The fact that these girls and young women continue to live in Canada speaks volumes. I see that they are determined to have a better life no matter what. These girls continue to support their families, children, and parents, all the while battling cultural confusion, discrimination, homesickness, and whatever else Canada might throw at them. – **Jessica Chan, Lawyer and Community Contributor**

They get engaged in the community. As soon as the girls' program ends, they have lined up other programs to go to within the community. One of the girls joined the multicultural group in her school; she wants to bring awareness about her culture to other people so they can understand why she does things the way she does. Three of the girls from my group are joining the leadership program we offer. – **Nathalie Lozano, Program Coordinator and Youth Worker, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia**

The girls are quick to take on an advocate's role and this comes from the confidence they build through the program and from the connections they make with peers and mentors.

The girls feel accomplished and competent to take risks. They are also amazing public speakers, they wow audiences—they know what they want to say and they are able to say it with confidence. – **Manjeet Birk, Executive Director and Youth Worker, Antidote**

In the last nine years that I've worked with immigrant girls a lot of girls that have been mentored have gone on to become mentors themselves and have also started their own careers. For example, many of them are now social workers! – **Cecilia Alejo, Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples**

The girls are creating awareness and education programs, participating in the arts as a social justice tool, they are mobilizing themselves and others to be seen and make their voices heard, they are educating their families and friends through conversation and dialogue. – **Wariri Muhungi, Community Organizer**

The girls show solidarity with each other and a willingness to look at difficult topics. They ask questions, return to programming, and they express complex and multiple truths. – **Nadia Chaney, Poet, Writer and Youth Facilitator**

I think of girls who have a passion and who are able to pursue that passion. Girls who feel that they are important, and who have a sense of belonging. For example, they feel that must be a good role model in a younger sibling's life, that they must make dinner. Religion and the community can be





a source of resilience too. – **Cecilia Alejo,**  
**Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish**  
**Speaking Peoples**

*Nous remarquons une grande résilience des femmes, qui face à ces situations seront toujours plus à l'écoute des besoins de leurs familles que de leurs propres besoins. Cependant, il semble aussi qu'il existe un lien assez fort entre les femmes d'une même communauté, par la création de réseaux informels d'entraide et de soutien. Ceux-ci pourront se charger de relayer l'information sur les services disponibles et les ressources, mais aussi apporteront un support moral et psychologique. Selon les communautés, ces réseaux peuvent se retrouver au sein d'associations religieuses ou culturelles.*

– **Gnilane Turpin, Agente aux relations communautaires, prévention et sensibilisation, Oasis Centre des femmes**



# Resources Ressources

## **We're Just Saying - Girls Club Manual**

BY ANTIDOTE

We're Just Sayin' is a group for girls, by gurlz. The manual helps facilitators lead leaders into community action for social resistance and social justice. Given the tools to think critically using a gender and anti-racist analysis, girls and young women are able to convey themselves through artistic mediums, such as filmmaking, zine making and fashion design. We're Just Sayin' is a safe space where the voices of young racialized and Indigenous girls are amplified and heard, where their words matter and where their words become.

For more information and to obtain a copy contact [info@antidotenetwork.org](mailto:info@antidotenetwork.org)

## **Unlabeled Fashion Manual**

BY ANTIDOTE

The Unlabel Fashion Workshop is antidote's annual community event focusing on fashion deconstruction. Unlabel is a fun, creative and inspiring workshop where girls and women from racialized and Indigenous backgrounds explore their complex identities by "un-labeling" clothing, recreating fashion and remaking clothes. This workshop builds community solidarity and capacity by bringing together community members in a positive, safe space.

For more information and to obtain a copy contact [info@antidotenetwork.org](mailto:info@antidotenetwork.org)

## **Colonize this!**

Daisy Hernandez of Ms. magazine and poet Bushra Rehman have collected a diverse, lively group of emerging writers who speak to their experience—to the strength and rigidity of community and religion, to borders and divisions, both internal and external—and address issues that take feminism into the twenty-first century. This impressive array of first-person accounts adds a much-needed fresh dimension to the ongoing dialogue between race and gender, and gives voice to the women who are creating and shaping the feminism of the future. (Description from Seal Press)

## **The Newcomer/Immigrant Queer & Trans Ontario Youth Guide**

This booklet is designed to help young gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, questioning and queer newcomers find relevant services and organizations that can help with their settlement, community development and social integration in Ontario. An online version is in the works, but to get free copies contact Suhail at: [soynewcomer@sherbourne.on.ca](mailto:soynewcomer@sherbourne.on.ca) or 416-324-5080 [www.soytoronto.org/current/express.html](http://www.soytoronto.org/current/express.html)

## **Rapport de recherche de Relais Femmes: projet pour l'intégration des femmes immigrantes**

[www.relais-femmes.qc.ca/files/Femmes\\_relais.pdf](http://www.relais-femmes.qc.ca/files/Femmes_relais.pdf)

## **« L'analyse des enjeux des femmes immigrantes et réfugiées francophones vivant en Ontario séparées de leurs enfants »**

*Recherche-action du Mouvement ontarien des femmes immigrantes francophones (Mofif).*



[http://francofemmes.org/aocvf/documents/MOFIF\\_Enjeux\\_francais\\_2008.pdf](http://francofemmes.org/aocvf/documents/MOFIF_Enjeux_francais_2008.pdf)

**« Partageons nos expériences – Livret d'information à l'intention des femmes immigrantes et réfugiées de Toronto »**

PAR OASIS CENTRE DES FEMMES.

Texte en français, anglais, swahili et lingala.  
[www.oasisfemmes.org/comm-publications/publications/livret\\_immigration.pdf](http://www.oasisfemmes.org/comm-publications/publications/livret_immigration.pdf)

**Vidéo Somos Latinas!**

Vidéo de Filles d'action en collaboration avec l'organisme CAFLA (Centre d'aide aux familles latino-américaines)  
[www.kickaction.ca/node/3230](http://www.kickaction.ca/node/3230)

**Vidéo Rêves des jeunes filles**

Vidéo de Filles d'action en collaboration avec le BCHM (Bureau de la communauté Haitienne de Montréal)  
[www.kickaction.ca/node/1800](http://www.kickaction.ca/node/1800)

**Vidéo J'ai quelque chose à dire**

- CENTRE ONTARIEN DE PRÉVENTION DES AGRESSIONS (COPA)  
 DVD d'information sur la diversité et l'inclusion à l'usage des écoles  
[www.safeatschool.ca/index.php?q=fr/about](http://www.safeatschool.ca/index.php?q=fr/about)

**“YOU ARE HERE”** BY ONTARIO COUNCIL AGENCY SERVING IMMIGRANTS (OCASI) for newcomer francophone youth who need support to find community health centres, jobs, and education facilities along with information on healthy relationships, what to do if they are in danger, and more.  
[www.newyouth.ca](http://www.newyouth.ca)

**« VOUS ÊTES ICI »** PAR LE ONTARIO COUNCIL AGENCIES SERVING IMMIGRANTS (OCASI), à l'intention des jeunes immigrantEs francophones qui ont

*besoin de soutien pour trouver des centres de santé communautaires, de l'emploi, des services d'éducation, de l'information sur les relations saines, quoi faire si elles/ils se trouvent en danger, etc.*  
[www.nouveauxjeunes.ca](http://www.nouveauxjeunes.ca)

**Projet la traverse groupe en ligne**

Le groupe en ligne du rojet La Traverse vise la collaboration de nos efforts afin de rassembler des ressources, de partager nos connaissances et d'acquérir de nouvelles habiletés, et ce, dans le but de soutenir le leadership et le pouvoir d'agir des filles et des jeunes femmes immigrantes.  
[www.fillesdaction.ca/fr/group/the-bridge-project-projet-la-traverse](http://www.fillesdaction.ca/fr/group/the-bridge-project-projet-la-traverse)

**The Bridge Project online group**

The Bridge project online group is a collaborative effort to increase resources, knowledge and skill-building opportunities that support the leadership and the empowerment of girls and young women from immigrant communities.  
[www.girlsaction.ca/en/special-projects/the-bridge-project-2009](http://www.girlsaction.ca/en/special-projects/the-bridge-project-2009)

**Leadership Empowerment Activism Program (LEAP)**

LEAP is an 18-month training program that offers training, mentorship and support for women who face multiple systemic barriers because of aspects of their identity (i.e. race, ethnicity, class, sexual and gender identity) in:

- anti-oppression
- community organizing
- transformative leadership
- popular education
- creative expression
- group facilitation

[www.vsw.ca/LEAP.htm](http://www.vsw.ca/LEAP.htm)



**Huellas: Documenting our Rootprints**

HUELLAS is a multimedia, cultural, identity and arts-based violence integration/prevention project for Latino(a)/Hispanic Youth in Toronto. Huellas is a three-year social participatory research program that focuses on the arts as the tool to communicate and understand the reality of Latino/Hispanic youth's lives in Toronto.

[www.hispaniccouncil.net/y-e\\_youthE\\_huellas.html](http://www.hispaniccouncil.net/y-e_youthE_huellas.html)

**MUJER**

MUJER, is an organization that promotes the integral development of Latin American Women, emphasizing their rights and freedom.

MUJER promotes programs, resources, and services that respond to the needs of Latin-American Women.

[www.mujer.ca](http://www.mujer.ca)

**The Power of Hope: Youth Empowerment Through the Arts**

The Power of Hope is a non-profit organization that delivers arts-based experiential learning programs to teens from diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds.

<http://powerofhope.org>

**Women's Health In Women's Hands**

Women's Health In Women's Hands (WHIWH) Community Health Centre provides primary healthcare to black women and women of colour from the Caribbean, African, Latin American and South Asian communities in Metropolitan Toronto and surrounding municipalities.

WHIWH are committed to working from an inclusive feminist, pro-choice, anti-racist,

anti-oppression, and multilingual participatory framework in addressing the issue of access to healthcare for our mandated priority populations within a framework encompassing gender, race, class, violence, sexual orientation, religion, culture, language, disability, immigration status and socio-economic circumstances.

[www.whiwh.com](http://www.whiwh.com)

**Centre d'encadrement pour jeunes filles immigrantes**

Founded in 1998, the Centre d'encadrement pour jeunes filles immigrantes is a non-profit organization based in St-Laurent. It wants to accelerate and help the integration of young immigrant women by promoting their autonomy. Their goals include offering information on Québec to prevent cultural chock and/or limit its consequences, working to intercultural closeness through learnings, offering specific services to girls aged 12 to 17 in order to optimize their contribution to an egalitarian society, insuring their participation to society by favoring their representation in all social, economical and political structures and helping them to gain capacities and abilities in order to realize themselves and access the labor market. One of their projects is "Equality in immigrant families". This project wants to contribute to the development of the teens' capacities by allowing them to development abilities to confront inequalities and promote egalitarian relations within their families and communities.

[www.cejfi.org](http://www.cejfi.org)

**Le Centre d'Encadrement pour Jeunes Femmes Immigrantes (CEJFI)**, fondé en 1998, est un organisme sans but lucratif situé à St-Laurent. La mission du CEJFI est d'œuvrer à l'intégration sociale, économique, culturelle



*et civique des jeunes femmes immigrantes de 12 à 35 ans, en favorisant une approche interculturelle.*

*Le CEJFI a pour objectifs de rejoindre les jeunes femmes immigrantes dans leur milieu de vie afin de les informer des possibilités existantes; offrir de l'information sur la société d'accueil aux jeunes femmes immigrantes afin de prévenir le choc culturel ou de limiter ses conséquences; assurer un accompagnement fonctionnel et psychosocial personnalisé aux jeunes femmes immigrantes et leur famille; orienter et aider ces dernières à acquérir des habiletés et des aptitudes leur permettant de valoriser leur potentiel distinctif et d'accéder au marché de l'emploi; assurer leur participation à la vie citoyenne et démocratique en favorisant leur représentation dans l'ensemble des structures sociale, économique et politique du pays; offrir des services spécifiques aux filles de 12 à 17 ans en vue d'optimiser leur contribution à une société égalitaire; et travailler au rapprochement des cultures d'origines et d'accueil à travers des apprentissages interculturels.*

[www.cejfi.org](http://www.cejfi.org)

### **Gashanti Unity, Toronto**

Gashanti Unity is a group of young Somali women in Toronto who wish to provide a safe space for girls and young women to develop their abilities and relationships. They want girls and young women to control their lives by promoting connectedness and belonging, building self-esteem, and building life-skills along with values and ethics. They also want to address the precursors of drug abuse and delinquency, prevent peer pressure and isolation, and provide education and job skills training. Their services include mentor-

ing programs, consultation and information services as well as sports and arts related activities. Their values include dignity, respect, integrity, unity, courage and learning. Some of their special programming includes the Iftiin Magazine to promote creative writing for Somali girls, the "Shah and Sheeko", a tea and talk where Somali girls can exchange about their common issues as well as "Inni Wa Hoyadeed", an intergenerational forum where mothers and daughters could exchange freely.

[www.gashantiunity.ca](http://www.gashantiunity.ca)

### **Association of Women's Action, Research and Empowerment, Vancouver**

Founded in 2006 after a summer pilot project devoted to the empowerment of racialized and immigrant young women, AWARE wishes to provide a platform for transformative personal and political dialogue and collaboration and community engagement. AWARE also: provide resources, incentive and motivation to take initiative and develop one's own empowerment projects; provide opportunities locally and globally to become involved in social justice and social activism; and provides opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connection. They facilitate workshops in schools, community organizations and conferences on various topics including media literacy, environment, race, the criminal justice system and health care. Their founding short documentary, Making HerStory is available.

[www.awarecanada.com](http://www.awarecanada.com)

### **No One Is Illegal**

This network of grassroots anti-colonial, immigrant and refugee rights collectives is based in different Canadian cities. It raises



awareness and mobilizes around Indigenous, immigrant and refugee issues. Their goals include: the end of deportations, detentions, security certificates and secret trials; the development of the communities' capacities to attain justice and dignity for themselves; and the access without fear to essential services for all undocumented people as well as the implementation of a full and inclusive regularization program for all non-status people. In Toronto, there is a campaign called "Education not deportation" to make elementary and secondary schools, safe and accessible places for all without fear of immigration authorities. In Vancouver, they produce a quarterly newsletter called Razorwire that is distributed across Canada. In Montréal, they report on CKUT 98.3 FM a local radio about their struggles for justice, dignity and self-determination.

[www.nooneisillegal.org](http://www.nooneisillegal.org)

### **Solidarity Across Borders**

Solidarity Across Borders is a Montréal-based network founded in 2003 by migrants, immigrants, refugees and their allies. They have four demands—the regularization of all non-status persons, the end of deportation, the end of detentions, and the abolition of security certificates. For the people in this network these are social justice and human right issues. To start with they want the regularization of all non-status persons as a social justice and human rights issues because of the arbitrary character and the increase in blatant human rights abuses and racial profiling in Canada. This community organization uses a variety of tactics from marches and demonstration to active resistance and petitions but they also produce newspapers and popular education material and organize cultural events. They have also intervened in public debates and have confronted decision-makers.

<http://solidarityacrossborders.org>

**KICKACTION.CA** is a bilingual online community for young women who think for themselves, take a stand, and act creatively to bring positive change to their communities and across the globe. Kickaction.ca is a Girls Action initiative.

**KICKACTION.CA** est une communauté en ligne pour les jeunes femmes qui ont des opinions à partager, prennent position et agissent de façon créative pour engendrer des changements positifs dans leur vie, leurs communautés et à travers le monde. Kickaction.ca est une initiative de la Fondation filles d'action.

**GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION** is a national charitable organization. We lead and seed girls' programs across Canada. We build girls' and young women's skills and confidence and inspire action to change the world. Through our innovative programs, research, and support to a network of over 200 partnering organizations and projects, Girls Action reaches over 60,000 girls and young women.

**LA FONDATION FILLES D'ACTION** est une impulsion créatrice, pour provoquer l'émergence de projets pour filles partout au pays et soutenir leur réalisation, pour inspirer les filles et les jeunes femmes à développer leurs forces et leur confiance en elles et pour ensemble, ébranler les idées reçues et changer le monde.

Par ses programmes innovateurs, ses recherches et son soutien à un réseau de plus de 200 organismes, la **FONDATION FILLES D'ACTION** touche plus de 60 000 filles et jeunes femmes – leur permettant ainsi de prendre conscience de leurs forces, découvrir leur capacité d'agir et acquérir la confiance nécessaire pour contribuer pleinement à la société.



FONDATION  
FILLES D'ACTION  
GIRLS ACTION  
FOUNDATION