

AN EVALUATION OF

# connex

— YOUTH MENTORSHIP

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT  
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Produced in partnership with



# CONTRIBUTORS

This work was authored and produced by the Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) in collaboration with the Connex Youth Mentorship program.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Connex Youth Mentorship Program (Connex) was a school-based mentorship program designed to connect newcomer youth within the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) to a supportive community within their school. The overall objective of the project was to pilot a program in hopes of better supporting and addressing the needs of newcomer youth than did the existing, and limited, programming found within York region. The Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) was contracted to conduct the evaluation of the three-year project. This report highlights that evaluation.

## Context and the Connex Youth Mentorship Program

Canadian research shows that the number of newcomer youth is steadily increasing and these youth face unique challenges that hinder their settlement and adaptation to their new country. Newcomer youth mentorship programs, including school-based programs, have been shown to have a positive impact upon the wellbeing of youth. Such programs can lead to enhancing one's sense of belonging and improved communication and connection with others, thereby facilitating the successful transition into schools and the broader community.

The Connex project was to deliver the program in four different cohorts in seven schools identified as having high needs across the various areas of York region. Meeting weekly, newcomer youth were brought together and exposed to a variety of programming and activities in the hopes of improving participant's confidence, sense of belonging, English skills, social skills, knowledge of Canadian culture and society, and understanding of post-secondary, volunteering, and employment opportunities. The designed evaluation was intended to capture these benefits and was outlined in an evaluation plan.

## The Connex Youth Mentorship Program

After developing an evidence brief and a program logic model, the evaluation consisted of both a process and outcome evaluation. The process evaluation captured what was occurring within the program, including who was reached and their level of satisfaction. The outcome evaluation captured the changes that participants experienced as a result of being involved in the program. The evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Multiple sources of data were also incorporated into the evaluation, including the Connex youth participants, teachers within the schools, the Connex staff, and the members of the Connex program advisory committee.

### Evaluation Findings

The process evaluation of the Connex program revealed that the Connex program reached a variety of youth in terms of grade, gender identity, racial and ethnic identity, and country of birth. Furthermore, the majority of those involved in the evaluation were newcomers who reported moving to Canada within the previous three years of their involvement with the program. Cohort 3 data collected at the beginning of the program identified that youth had unmet needs, with many reporting wanting to make more friends. Moreover, only about half of the participants noted that they felt they were part of their school community, liked going to school, and were confident speaking English.

The process evaluation further demonstrated, in addition to reaching its target population, that stakeholders were very satisfied with the Connex program. Program participants reported enjoying the program, having positive relationships with the Connex staff and with the other Connex participants, a supportive, open, and caring environment, and would recommend the program to others. This level

of satisfaction was echoed in the data provided by other stakeholders as well.

The outcome evaluation findings revealed many benefits to Connex participants. Many youth reported greater feelings of belonging within their school communities at the end of the program as a result of their involvement with Connex. Improved confidence in a variety of areas, including their English skills, social skills, and in themselves generally, was also reported by youth participants as a result of their involvement in the program. Additional benefits were also noted and included learning about Canadian culture and society, post-secondary, volunteering, and employment opportunities, and the importance of one's mental health and wellbeing. These benefits were mentioned across data sources and program stakeholders.

Although oftentimes outside the scope of program evaluations, benefits to the larger community were also noted among the findings from the evaluation. For example, Connex program advisory committee members noted their knowledge of newcomer youth issues, programs, resources, and services had increased as a result of their participation with the advisory committee. Furthermore, advisory committee members were more confident in their own ability to better serve newcomer youth and were more likely to refer the newcomer youth that they were in contact with to the available community supports and services. Interview data revealed that some Connex youth participants were in fact utilizing community programming available to them. Additional benefits occurred within the school community also, with teachers noting that the Connex program shared with them a great deal of information and provided them support during a time when there was an influx of newcomer youth.



## Program Legacy: Lessons Learned

There are lessons to be learned from all programs and from all evaluations, and the Connex program and its evaluation are no exception. The following highlight some of the lessons that were learned throughout the duration of the Connex project:

### Importance of Adaptability

Connex's flexibility, persistence, and creativity ensured the program continued to fulfill its mandate even as the pandemic and other challenges arose.

### Planning for Diversity

Connex participants were 'newcomers' but were otherwise diverse in terms of English fluency, dietary restrictions, and programming needs. This required accommodation and consideration, as did managing the rare tensions between students of varying life journeys. Being responsive to difference was important towards the service of all participants.

### Accounting for School-Based Variables

Connex benefited from being a school-based program, and the access to students and school infrastructure

that this offered. It further allowed Connex to educate teachers about the best ways to support their newcomer students. Connex learned that success within the school system depended upon the buy-in of teachers and other staff. Operating within schools also required particular administrative considerations - from logistical, such as determining the best time to run the program amid conflicting class schedules to more philosophical, such as the extent of integration with school curriculum.

### Extending the Program, Expanding the Benefits

Extending the program duration could enhance the leadership opportunities of the program by allowing the students to develop from participants of the program into more active facilitators and planners of it. Secondly, the relational benefits of the program would be multiplied through longer program duration.

### Facilitating Connex Staff Success

Staff working in a newcomer program would prosper from training in how to work with early English learners, and knowledge about the diversity of services available to newcomer students. It would also be valuable if they were in greater numbers, and if they could collectively converse in many of the first languages of their participants.

## Facilitating Equitable Relationships

Connex realized the importance of fostering relationships based upon equity. While it originally envisioned itself as a one-to-one mentorship program between more established newcomers versus new ones, these labels were removed once it became clear they were perceived as establishing a hierarchy of competence. As such, Connex was refigured into a less formal multi-directional group arrangement - one in which all participants simultaneously occupied both sides of the mentor-mentee relationship, allowing each student to reap the rewards of providing, as well as receiving, mentorship support.

## Resolving Funding Limitations

In any funded program, there are limitations on how and when money can be spent. Unfortunately, these restrictions

hindered Connex's ability to offer more field trips, a favourite among students. Hopefully, future programming is not bound in this way.

## Evaluation Learnings

Just as it is important to be adaptive and responsive to diversity when it comes to programming, so is the case for evaluations. Evaluations can be improved after they begin in order to better measure the outcomes the program aims to achieve. Furthermore, evaluation tools must take into consideration the participant diversity in order to ensure the appropriateness of the tools.

It is hoped that these lessons can be valuable to other programs implementing mentorship programs for newcomer youth.





# 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT FOR THE PROGRAM

The Connex Youth Mentorship Project (Connex) was a school-based mentorship program designed to connect newcomer youth within the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) to a supportive community within their school. Connex brought newcomer youth together to engage with their peers and connect with one another, and through these positive interactions, to support and enhance feelings of belonging and confidence while decreasing feelings of isolation, anxiety, and disconnection. The overall goals and objectives of Connex were to ensure that newcomer youth felt welcomed and were able to settle in their schools and in Canadian society.

Connex in-school activities included job search training, resume building, library visits, dance lessons, English conversation cafes, drama, and improv. Staff supervised and fully funded outings were also provided to participants outside of school hours. These outings were geared to help expose youth participants to unique opportunities they may not have yet experienced, such as trips to the CN Tower, the Toronto Aquarium, the Toronto Blue Jay's baseball game, and art galleries and museums. When possible, family activities also occurred to connect the families of program participants through social gatherings.

The York District School Board retained the Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) at York University to collaboratively develop and implement an evaluation strategy that allowed Connex to understand and monitor progress towards achieving its key outcomes. YouthREX supports Ontario youth-serving programs in research and evaluation. They enable programs to track and measure their intended outcomes and understand how they are successful and what needs improvement. YouthREX believes that evaluation is a powerful strategy for improving youth work practice, enhancing program delivery, addressing sustainability, and creating a culture of both equity and learning within organizations.

## Organization of the Report

This report is a culmination of the Connex program evaluation and has been divided into six sections. This first section will review the literature and provides the context for why a program such as Connex is needed. The second section describes the Connex program in detail and how it adapted over its three-year duration. The evaluation methodology is next reviewed, including the guiding process and outcome evaluation questions and the data sources used throughout the evaluation. The evaluation findings are highlighted in the following two sections, categorized according to process evaluation findings and outcome evaluation findings. The report concludes with implications and key learnings from the Connex evaluation that can be applied to other newcomer youth mentorship programs.

## Context for the Program

Canada is a diverse nation with an increasing number of immigrant and newcomer youth (Rossiter et al., 2015). Statistical research demonstrates that there are approximately 6.8 million immigrants in Canada, and in recent years, the nation has welcomed roughly 250,000 immigrants annually (Rossiter et al., 2015). According to Rossiter, “[b]etween 2008 and 2012, youth aged 15 to 24 years accounted for an average of 17 % of that number” and by 2016, it was estimated that immigrant youth and Canadian-born children of immigrant families would constitute 25% of Canada’s population under the age of 18 (Rossiter et al., 2015, p. 747). As newcomer youth communities are steadily increasing in Canada, it is imperative to have services, resources, and programs that facilitate and support their settlement needs in school settings and the wider community in order to foster positive outcomes.

The settlement and integration of newcomer youth is a long-term process that comes with many challenges (Rossiter et al., 2015). Newcomer youth face unique challenges in relation to social factors, including education,

culture, language, socioeconomic opportunities, and psychological wellbeing, which creates barriers and negatively impacts their settlement and adaption to their new country. Moreover, newcomer communities experience racism and discrimination in their schools and communities through inequitable treatment, which heightens feelings of exclusion and contributes to feelings of low self-esteem, depression, stress, poor academic success, school dropout, and substance abuse (Rossiter et al., 2015; YouthREX, 2018). As such, the multifaceted challenges faced by newcomer youth significantly impact their settlement experiences as they attempt to navigate a multitude of social, cultural, economic, and emotional/psychological struggles, all of which create barriers for immigrant and newcomer youth to effortlessly integrate and adapt to Canadian culture as well as in their community and school.

Education is a crucial factor to successful integration for newcomer youth (Rossiter et al., 2015). In fact, the transition to high school is a significant point in the lives of youth as it has as an impact on their future success (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012). Many factors, including but not limited to racism, discrimination, and socioeconomic and emotional challenges, impact their transition to high school. These stressors increase the risk for dropping out, low academic grades, and emotional distress (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Rossiter et al., 2015). Schools can provide newcomer youth with the supports and resources necessary to enhance their sense of self-worth, esteem, and sense of belonging, which may then contribute to academic success (Rossiter et al., 2015). This indicates a need for efforts to support academic success, as well as foster positive development and overall youth wellbeing (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012). Accordingly, as newcomer youth experience a multitude of challenges and social stressors, having school programs and services that facilitate successful transition and settlement into high school is imperative as it can greatly reduce negative settlement experiences for immigrant youth and support their academic and socioemotional welfare.

Mentorship programs have been identified as having many advantages to supporting newcomer youth and promoting healthy development while positively impacting their overall wellbeing (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). Research has identified that mentoring improves the emotional wellbeing and sense of self-worth of youth, which increases levels of school engagement, academic competence, feelings of connectedness, and motivation (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012). Hence, mentoring is a beneficial approach to engaging newcomer youth as it enhances their overall socio-emotional wellbeing and academic performance while allowing them to successfully transition into their school and connect with peers and also settle in their community.

School-based mentoring programs have been identified to have advantages including “minimal demands on mentors relative to traditional community-based mentoring, heightened supervision and thus fewer safety concerns, easy access for students, and potentially heightened cost-effectiveness” (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010, p. 123). The main disadvantage is explained to be “the lower intensity of mentoring provided relative to what is typically provided in community-based programs” (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010, p. 123), due to time constraints of school-based mentorship programs. However, Raposa et al. (2019) indicated that there are no differences between school-based mentorship and community-based mentorship programs, and in fact the limited time commitments can protect mentors from burnout and youth from disappointment. School-based mentoring programs that address the needs of newcomer youth have the potential to promote academic success and settlement through relationships with teachers, school personnel, and peers (Oberoi, 2016). These programs provide youth with a safe space and social supports to enhance feelings of belonging and wellbeing, which in turn facilitate social integration and may improve academic performance.

Both formal and informal mentoring relationships are beneficial for facilitating social integration and school engagement (Oberoi, 2016). Mentoring relationships

are helpful for newcomer youth as they adapt to a new culture, language, and school system (YouthREX, 2018). Mentoring programs also play a role in developing positive social relations with teachers and peers at school, which can facilitate school engagement and a sense of belonging amongst newcomer youth (Oberoi, 2016). School-based mentoring programs facilitate positive outcomes for newcomer youth by fostering a welcoming space that allows them to grow.

Group mentoring has also been identified as a successful approach to working with newcomer youth. One of the advantages of group mentoring is that it can allow for more culturally competent work, as some youth prefer working with peers and adults with similar experiences rather than a one-one-one mentor (Pryce et al., 2019). Hence, youth, peers and adults work collaboratively in a supportive environment, allowing youth to make more friends and build greater connections. Moreover, group mentoring programs have been shown to enhance one’s sense of hope and belonging, as well as improve their communication and connection with others.



## 2. THE CONNEX YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The literature reviewed makes evident that newcomer youth encounter multiple barriers to happy and healthy integration. The Connex program was initiated to overcome these barriers and facilitate the ease of entry and overall wellbeing of young newcomers to Canada. The following provides an overview of the Connex program, including its objectives, desired outcomes, the structure and components of the project, and the adaptations made throughout the course of the three-year project.

### Connex Objectives and Outcomes

The purpose and primary goal of Connex was to work with youth to design a program that was expandable across other settlement service areas that better meets their needs than does existing programming. Intermediate goals included an overall better service delivery model for youth who have unique and urgent settlement issues that, if left unmet, often result in negative long-term outcomes and stress on the entire family. An improved and more tailored intervention for this specific client group was a goal for this project. The longer, strategic goal would be to see a marked increase in the quick and effective integration of youth in secondary schools, reduced mental health issues, and improved wellbeing.

With these objectives in mind, Connex expected that youth participants would experience an increased confidence in themselves and a greater sense of belonging, particularly

within their school environment. As youth continued their participation in the program, participants were also expected to see improvements in their social skills, as well as an improvement in their English skills. A greater understanding of Canadian culture, post-secondary opportunities, volunteering opportunities, and employment options were additional outcomes expected as a result of participating in the Connex program. Ideally, these outcomes experienced as participants are actively involved in the program would lead to further benefits in the areas of greater feelings of inclusion (both within the school and in Canadian society), improved public speaking skills, a better understanding of Canadian society, increased job readiness, greater access to employment opportunities, and to improved mental health and wellbeing. These objectives and outcomes of the Connex program are outlined in **Table 1**.



**Table 1. Connex Program Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

Program Objective	
To deliver a mentorship program for newcomer youth in York region to better meet their needs and facilitate integration into the schools and larger community for improved mental health and overall wellbeing	
Short-Term Outcomes (during the program)	Longer-Term Outcomes (after the program ends)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased sense of belonging</li> <li>• Increased confidence</li> <li>• Improved social skills</li> <li>• Improved English and literacy skills</li> <li>• Increased understanding of cultural differences in Canada</li> <li>• Improved understanding of post-secondary, volunteering, and employment opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased social inclusion</li> <li>• Increased public speaking skills</li> <li>• Increased understanding of the broader Canadian society</li> <li>• Increased job readiness</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing and mental health</li> <li>• Accessible employment opportunities</li> </ul>

### Connex Structure, Components, and Adaptations

Connex provided a weekly forum for newcomer youth to connect with and learn from one another, while engaging in activities to support their holistic development, and expedite their familiarity with Canadian places and institutions. Connex focused on establishing itself in schools with the highest need. Over the course of three years, the program was meant to operate in person within seven schools across four areas in York region, these four areas representing different cohorts of the program. However, the fourth cohort became an online program and was

made available to all participants who had engaged with the program prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, Connex reached over 200 students through the weekly program meetings. Details of the four cohorts are outlined in **Table 2**. Additionally, professional learning opportunities were also offered to both the Connex youth and volunteers. Over 300 participants (some of which may have been involved in the weekly program) participated in various workshops, such as First Aid, CPR training, Working with Vulnerable Youth/Trauma Informed Care, Leadership Skills, and Programming and Activities for Young Children.

**Table 2. Cohort Locations**

Cohort	York Region	Schools
Cohort 1	<b>West</b> Vaughan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thornhill Secondary School (30 youth participants)</li> <li>• Maple High School (35 youth participants)</li> </ul>
Cohort 2	<b>South</b> Aurora – Richmond Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richmond Hill High School (70 youth participants)</li> <li>• Alexander Mackenzie High School (15 youth participants)</li> </ul>
Cohort 3	<b>East</b> Markham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milliken Mills High School (40 youth participants)</li> <li>• Middlefield Collegiate Institute (15 youth participants)</li> </ul>
Cohort 4	<b>North</b> Newmarket - Georgina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. J. M. Denison Secondary School (online; 10 youth participants)</li> </ul>

Connex was distinguished from other newcomer youth programs by its customized and participant-led approach to content design and execution in recognition that every school and every student is unique. Connex opened each cohort with a needs assessment, which integrated the perspectives of both staff and students, and then used the findings to develop a calendar of weekly sessions. Participants were involved throughout, in giving feedback and shaping the direction of the programming.

The program was also premised upon the value of mentorship, that being relationships of support between those with overlapping as well as divergent life experience, who can provide social, emotional, educational, professional and other guidance to one another. While Connex originally envisioned a ‘one-to-one mentorship’ scheme, with mentors and mentees, this was ultimately reworked into a less formal multi-directional group arrangement in which all participants simultaneously occupied both sides of the mentor-mentee relationship. This allowed each youth participant to reap the rewards of providing, as well as receiving, mentorship support.

While each cohort unfolded uniquely, all Connex programs prioritized emotional and social wellbeing alongside academic and professional development for the participating newcomer students. Offering refreshments, as well as leaning towards group activities, were considered important components of the program as both contributed to group cohesion and relationship-building, which were key outcomes of the initiative. Most sessions began with an emotional check-in and ended with a similar check-out. Sessions were either facilitated by Connex staff, an external facilitator or sometimes even the students themselves, which added to the benefits reaped from the program in terms of building confidence and expertise among the participants.

Depending on the cohort and the day, sessions were variously dedicated to topics and activities such as:

- **mental and physical wellness skills-building** (e.g., yoga, mindfulness, healthy eating, stress management);
- **professional/academic skills-building** (e.g., resume workshop, First Aid training, leadership training);
- **language skills-building** (e.g., conversation circles);

- **cultural familiarity** (e.g., gingerbread house and Christmas card making);
- **social justice learning** (e.g., group projects on a topical issue);
- **arts and recreation** (e.g., hip hop, games, sketching, spoken word);
- **personalized support** (e.g., help with homework); and
- **school/community familiarity** (e.g., school-based scavenger hunt, so they could get a sense of the school geography and school activities; introduction to different community organizations and available programming).

Across cohorts, a ‘fan favourite’ were the field trips, fully funded outings to museums, sporting events, libraries, skating rinks, and more. These field trips introduced these newcomer youth to the geographic and cultural landscape of their new home.

Unfolding as it did over the three years, in various locations, Connex realized the importance of adaptivity. Given their recent immigration status, students had varying levels of comfortability in English. In addition to securing translation services when needed, Connex learned to creatively overcome these communication challenges. For example, Connex conducted some of its needs assessments by using pictures, instead of words, to describe a possible activity, and asking students if it was of interest. Transportation was also provided to and from activities and bus passes provided to students who required them. Connex also learned early on that having sessions during school hours was preferred given that many students had other obligations or restrictions after-hours. Thus, when possible, sessions were held during lunch time or, in some instances, during an ESL class.

Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic represented a serious disruption to the program, forcing an initial hiatus followed by a difficult transition online. Yet, Connex proved itself responsive to the circumstances and, particularly, to the needs of the students. Connex was also able to expand its offerings as needed, in order to facilitate the overarching

and ultimate goal of enhancing newcomer student wellbeing. For example, Connex realized that ESL and other teachers had a gap in relating to their newcomer students and so provided several teacher trainings. These were highly successful, both in preparing the teachers to engage more relevantly with their students and in creating a pipeline between the classroom and the Connex program.

**“So in my own words, I would say that it was an innovative attempt to create more supportive pathways and wrap-around supports, and just link newcomer youth with other newcomer youth, with peers within their own school setting, and also in the community...because what we were really trying to do was make it easier for youth to connect, to feel part of their school environment, and to, you know, break out some of the barriers that would normally exist for anyone who’s coming in... so I think it really did a good job of that.”**

**- Advisory Committee Member**

Further, Connex was able to provide service and resource referrals to participants for needs beyond the scope of the program. In fact, Connex staff even helped to organize participants in coordinating their own ‘drop-in’ centre to accommodate parents and siblings of newcomer youth who were taking a multi-hour educational transition test.

Ultimately, Connex staff communicated their satisfaction in the program's achievement of the desired outcomes, which were to facilitate the development of newcomer youth in the following areas:

- comfort and fluency in English;
- social belonging;
- confidence and self-esteem;

- mental, emotional, academic, and professional skills development; and
- a smooth transition and integration into many aspects of Canadian life.





# 3. THE CONNEX PROGRAM EVALUATION

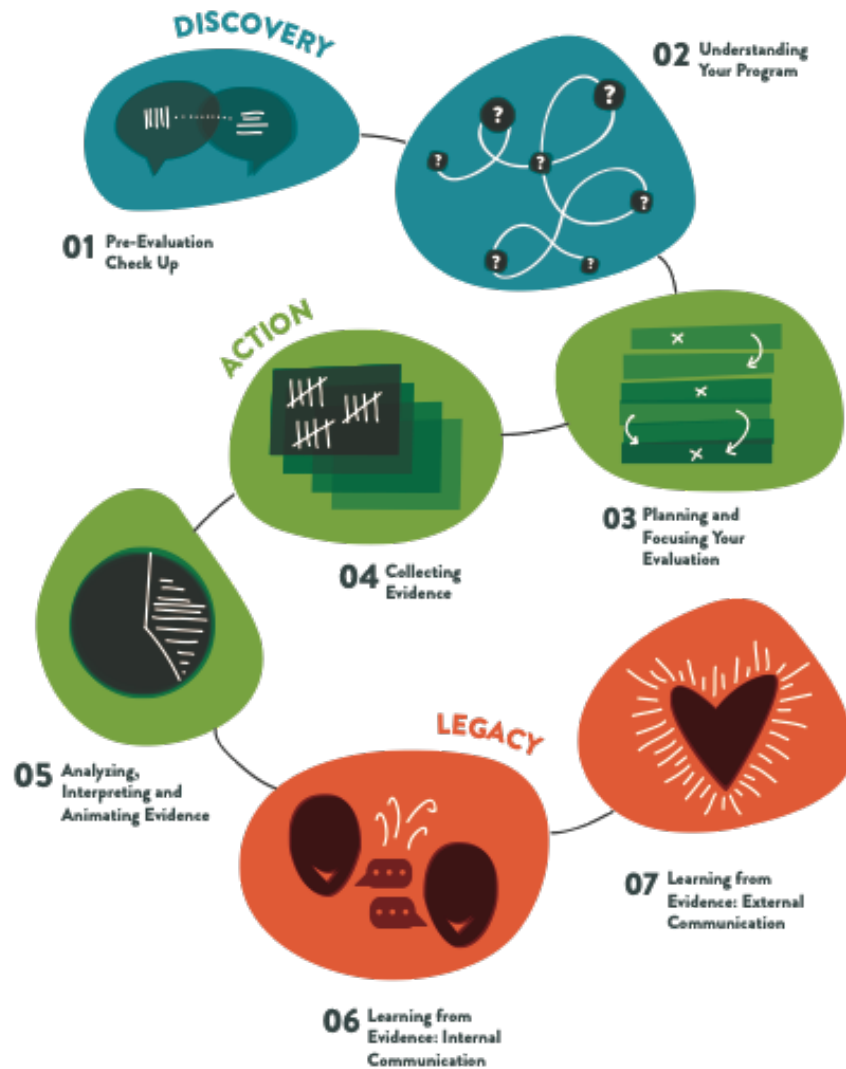
The Connex evaluation was guided by the YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing (see **Figure 1**). This framework was specifically developed for youth programs in Ontario and is a three-phase seven-step process for conducting evaluations. The first phase is the discovery phase in which a better understanding of the program is achieved through discussions with stakeholders, reviewing the evidence, and the development of a program logic model. The second phase is the action phase, which includes the development of an evaluation plan, data collection, and data analysis. The Connex evaluation included a process and outcome evaluation. The third phase is the legacy phase in which the findings and lessons learned are shared, both internally for program improvement and externally so others may benefit from these lessons.

## Evidence Brief & Logic Model

The design and development of the evaluation of Connex began with consultations with Connex staff to understand the program. As part of the discovery phase, an **Evidence Brief** was created through a comprehensive review of literature on best practices for mentorship programs serving newcomer youth. This review supported Connex in deepening the evidence base and ensured the program was built on the best available evidence.

A program logic model was also developed to describe the program's inputs, activities and outcomes. This model was revised at the end of the program to capture the changes to the model over the course of the program (see **Appendix A**).

Figure 1. YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing



## YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing

The YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing offers a youth program a simple three-phase seven-step process for developing an evaluation plan, implementing the plan and using the findings to improve the program and promote the wellbeing of youth participants.

### PHASE 1: DISCOVERY

#### STEP 01: PRE-EVALUATION CHECK UP

Where is your organization on your evaluation journey and what is your capacity to undertake this journey? What are your evaluation assets? What resources do you need to successfully complete this journey?

#### STEP 02: UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROGRAM USING LOGIC MODELING

What is your program theory? What are your program components and your intended outcomes? A logic model is a visual representation of your program and how it is intended to work.

### PHASE 2: ACTION

#### STEP 03: FOCUSING AND PLANNING YOUR EVALUATION

Before you set off on your evaluation journey, gather your stakeholders and develop a roadmap (evaluation plan) for your evaluation journey.

#### STEP 04: COLLECTING EVIDENCE FOR A PROCESS & OUTCOME EVALUATION

Collect data + stories to answer your process and outcome evaluation questions.

#### STEP 05: ANALYZING, INTERPRETING AND ANIMATING EVIDENCE

Identify themes in your qualitative data, patterns or trends in your quantitative data and make sense of your findings.

### PHASE 3: LEGACY

#### STEP 06: LEARNING FROM EVIDENCE: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Turn the sense making into learning that strengthens your program and improves the well-being of your youth participants. Use your evaluation insights and findings to inform decisions that improve your program.

#### STEP 07: LEARNING FROM EVIDENCE: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Share your evaluation findings in a variety of oral and written formats tailored to different audiences to help stakeholders understand the REAL story about your program.

### Our Guiding Lenses

#### A Learning Focused Lens

Will the evaluation produce insights and findings that can be used by the youth program to improve and promote youth wellbeing?

#### A Youth-Engaged Lens:

Does the evaluation meaningfully engage youth participants?

#### A Contextualized Methods Lens

Does the evaluation design/methods allow a youth program to tell rich stories of their processes and outcomes that acknowledge the complexity and dynamism of youth work?



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## Process Evaluation

A Process Evaluation allows for a careful description of a program’s actual implementation and whether services are delivered in accordance with program design. Process evaluation makes it possible to study the critical ingredients of a model.

The evaluation of Connex included a process evaluation that documented, identified and analyzed key factors that influenced the implementation and operation of Connex. A process evaluation examines the culture, implementation, reach and resource use of a particular program. In identifying and understanding the key factors that influence the operation of a program, a process evaluation explores how a project carries out its operations and how its community works together toward its objectives. In

this type of evaluation, the emphasis is on describing key activities and characteristics of the program.

The process evaluation of Connex reviewed documentation from the project and data from the various sources of the evaluation. The process evaluation of Connex further allowed for an opportunity to reflect on program practices by exploring how well the project was able to reach the target population and explored how satisfied participants, and other stakeholders where possible, were with the program. These components supported Connex in identifying, documenting and analyzing the key factors that influenced the implementation and operation of the program.

**Table 3. Process Evaluation Questions and Data Sources**

Process Evaluation Questions	Data Sources
<p><b>Did Connex reach its target population?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic sections of participant surveys</li> </ul>
<p><b>Were the project components of Connex implemented as intended?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with staff and community partners</li> <li>• Informal communications with staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>How satisfied with the Connex program were the key stakeholder groups?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student participants?</li> <li>• Staff?</li> <li>• Advisory Committee?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant surveys and focus groups</li> <li>• Follow-up informal interviews</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Advisory Committee survey</li> </ul>
<p><b>What were the challenges and suggestions for program improvement?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Advisory Committee Survey</li> </ul>

## Outcome Evaluation

An Outcome Evaluation measures the extent to which a program does what it is intended to do i.e. whether a program is meeting its objectives.

Outcomes are benefits or changes for youth during or after participating in program activities. Outcomes may relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, conditions, or other attributes. The outcome evaluation of Connex helped to understand and demonstrate the nature of changes that took place for newcomer youth and other benefits as a result of participating in Connex’s activities.

Table 4. Outcome Evaluation Questions and Data Sources

Outcome Evaluation Question	Data Sources
Did youth experience an increased sense of belonging?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Did youth experience improved confidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Were the English and literacy skills of youth participants improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Was there an improvement in social skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Did youth gain a greater understanding of Canadian culture and society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Did youth gain a greater understanding of post-secondary, volunteering, and employment opportunities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Was there an impact upon the mental health and wellbeing of participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant surveys, focus groups, and informal follow-up interviews</li> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>
Were there any benefits to the larger community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Advisory Committee Survey</li> </ul>

## Evaluation Activities and Data Sources

The following evaluation activities were undertaken during the course of the Connex program evaluation.

**Table 5. Evaluation Activities Throughout the Project**

Evaluation Milestones	Timing
1. Development of program logic model	✔ Completed Year 1, Revised Year 3
2. Development of Evaluation Plan	✔ Completed Year 1
3. Development of participant surveys	✔ Completed Year 1, Revised Year 2
4. Development of participant focus group and teacher interview guides	✔ Completed Year 1
5. Administration and analysis of participant surveys for Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3 participants	✔ Completed Years 1 and 2
6. Focus groups conducted with two groups of participants	✔ Completed Year 1
7. Interviews with teachers	✔ Completed Year 1
8. Year One Interim Report	✔ Completed Year 1
9. Development, administration, and analysis of Advisory Committee survey	✔ Completed Year 2
10. Year Two Interim Report	✔ Completed Year 3
11. Development of follow-up call questions and template	✔ Completed Year 3
12. Development of electronic follow-up survey to be distributed to all past Connex program participants	✔ Completed Year 3 (implementation was not possible)
13. Development of end of program interview guides (for staff and community partners)	✔ Completed Year 3
14. Analysis of follow-up call data	✔ Completed Year 3

Evaluation Milestones	Timing
15. Analysis of end of program interview data	✔ Completed Year 3
16. Synthesis of all data	✔ Completed Year 3
17. Final Report	✔ Completed Year 3

The evaluation of Connex utilized multiple data sources, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, which collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Each of these sources are outlined below.

### Connex Participant Surveys

Four surveys were administered to participants throughout the course of the evaluation project. During Year 1, participants in the first and second cohorts completed surveys at the end of the program; the one exception to this was a school in Cohort 1 in which, due to language challenges, focus groups were conducted instead. These post-surveys assessed both the participants' satisfaction with the program (e.g., goals being met, program enjoyment, clear structure, appropriate activities, whether they would recommend the program, etc.) and the expected participant outcomes (e.g., feeling of belonging, improvement in English skills, understanding of volunteering opportunities, understanding of Canadian society, etc.). Open-ended questions also asked participants to comment on their favourite parts of the program, how they would improve the program, to describe their relationships with the staff and other participants, and to expand on what the program helped them learn. At the end of the post-survey, participants were also asked some demographic questions (e.g., gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, country of birth, arrival in Canada, etc.) in order to describe who was involved in the evaluation. Overall, 21 participants from Cohort 1 and 65 participants from Cohort 2 completed the survey. As participants were informed that completing the survey was voluntary and that they

could skip any question they did not want to answer, not all questions were responded to by every participant.

A pre-survey was developed and added to the second year of the program and was administered to participants in the third cohort. This pre-survey captured the feelings and interests of participants before they began the Connex program (e.g., degree to which they wanted to improve English skills, whether they wanted to make new friends, confidence levels of when speaking English, feeling as though they belong at school, etc.). Open-ended questions also asked participants what they were most excited about learning and what they hoped to see in the program. Overall, 26 youth participants from two secondary schools involved in the third cohort completed the pre-survey.

To capture additional benefits of the program, changes were made to the post-survey for Cohort 3 (i.e., addition of improved confidence taking transit, improved understanding of post-secondary and employment opportunities, and the opportunity to speak with experts about career decisions). The overall format of the survey also changed to a retrospective-pre-post-survey, in which participants were asked to reflect back and provide ratings for their knowledge, understanding, and capabilities before they began the program and then asked to rate the same areas now that they had completed the program. Using this format allowed for a comparison of the perceived changes the participants experienced as a result of their involvement in the program. Overall, 18 participants from Cohort 3 completed the post-survey.

## Focus Groups

Rather than completing the participant post-survey, two focus groups were conducted with participants from one school who were part of the first cohort. The questions asked of participants in the focus group interviews were similar to the open-ended questions included on the post-surveys and included questions about their experiences in the program (e.g., their favourite part of the program, their relationships with Connex staff and other program participants, what the program helped them learn, and the challenges associated with their involvement in the program). These focus groups were conducted in Arabic and Kurmanji, the languages most familiar to the participants, recorded and then translated back to English for review. The transcripts were brief and lacked in-depth responses; as such, these data will be used to supplement the other findings of the evaluation.

## Interviews

During Year 1, interviews were conducted with teachers from three schools in Cohorts 1 and 2. Teachers were asked about their involvement with the program, their relationship with the Connex staff, their perceptions of what the Connex participants learned and gained as a result of the program, and how the program could be changed and improved upon. The interviews were each recorded, transcribed, and, guided by the evaluation questions, the content was reviewed. Five teachers participated in the interviews during Year 1.

In Year 3, end-of-program semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Connex staff and advisory committee members. Interview participants were asked to describe the program, what worked well in the program, the challenges encountered, the changes that were made throughout the project, and the changes that they would make for further program improvement. The questions also explored the perceived outcomes that resulted from the program and the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the

youth participants. Although the hope was to interview principals and other school staff that had been involved in the Connex program, the Covid-19 pandemic and return to school in the Fall of 2020 was taxing on school staff and administration and interviews were not possible. Three Connex staff members and two members from the advisory committee participated in these end-of-program interviews.

## Informal Participant Follow-up Interviews

During the summer of 2020, a Connex staff member made telephone calls to Connex participants across all cohorts. After a general check-in, where the staff member asked how participants were doing and whether she could provide any supports, participants were asked about the impact that Connex had for them. For example, participants were asked how the Connex program helped them better adjust to Canadian society, what could have been done differently to help with this, and how they have applied what they learned in the Connex program since participating in the program. The staff member was not comfortable having these conversations recorded; as such, she wrote notes on the responses made by the participants. These notes were then reviewed by YouthREX and used to supplement the other data gathered throughout the evaluation. Overall, 35 participants contributed to this data, with 11 participants from Cohort 1, 10 participants from Cohort 2, and 14 participants from Cohort 3.

## Connex Advisory Committee Survey

During the second year of the Connex program an electronic survey containing both close-ended and open-ended questions was created and administered to capture the opinions of members who were involved in the Connex Program Advisory Committee. The survey asked advisory committee members about the goals of the committee, its role, and the impacts that resulted from their participation in the Connex advisory committee. Overall, 10 members of the Connex advisory committee responded to this survey.

## Ethical Considerations

YouthREX's evaluation protocol for youth programs has been reviewed and cleared by the York University's Human Research Participants Review Committee. The evaluation of the Connex program adhered to all the standards and regulations in this protocol including informed consent, no implied coercion for participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Any identifying information was removed from transcripts to protect anonymity of the participants throughout the evaluation process, and raw data was only available to members of the YouthREX team. All processes also demonstrated cultural awareness, sensitivity, and inclusive practices that are reflective of YouthREX's values.





## 4. FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION: PARTICIPANTS AND SATISFACTION

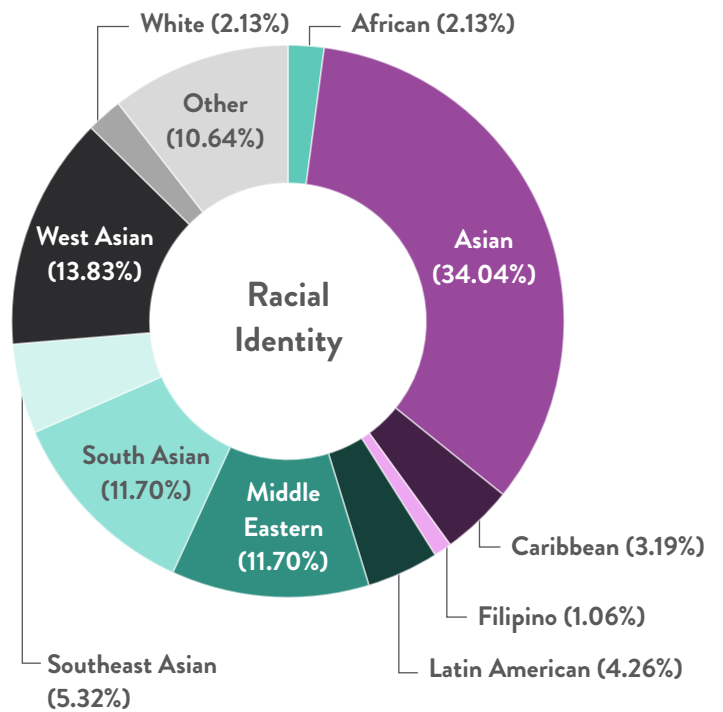
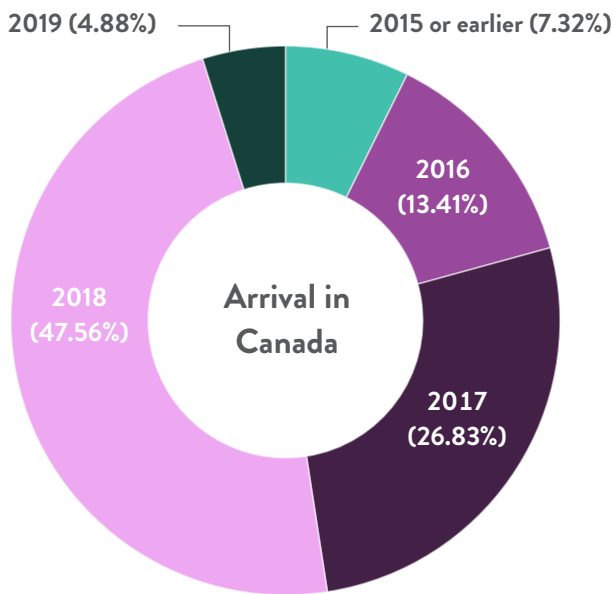
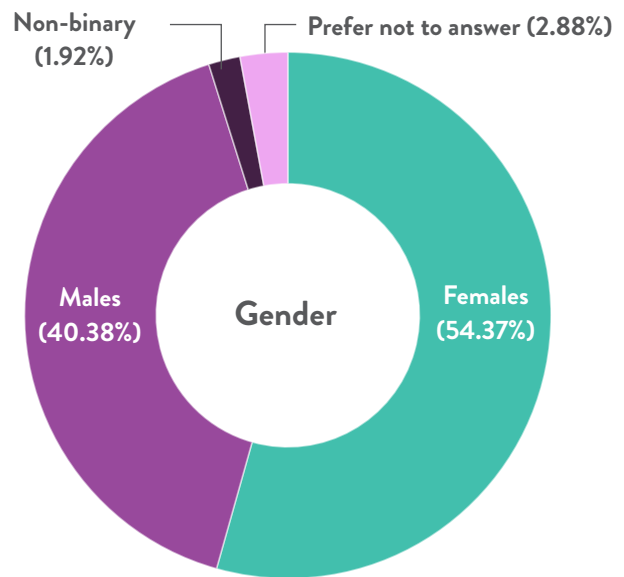
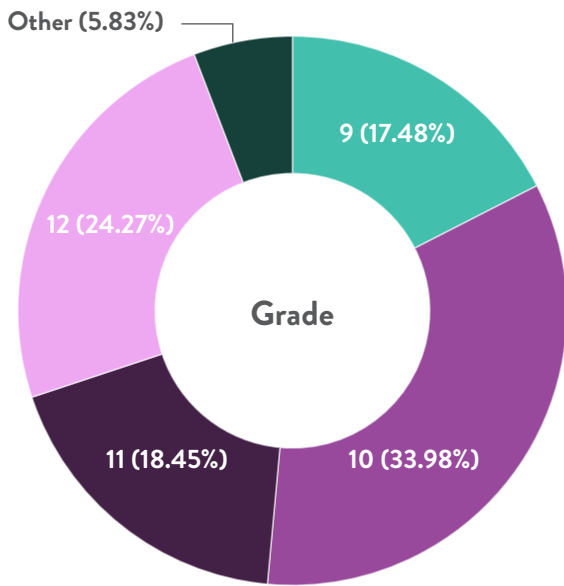
The following presents the highlights from the Connex process evaluation across the three years of the project. The process evaluation findings have been divided into sections that address the participants of the program and the level of program satisfaction. There is no evaluation data for the fourth cohort given the initial pause and then move to online programming. Therefore, all evaluation findings presented are for the first three cohorts.

### Participants: Reaching its Target and the Need for the Program

The demographics section on the post-surveys demonstrated that the Connex program reached a variety of youth in terms of grades, gender, racial identity, country of birth, and the length of time living in Canada (see **Figure 2**; full results of the evaluation participant demographics are found in **Appendix B**).



Figure 2. Survey Participant Characteristics

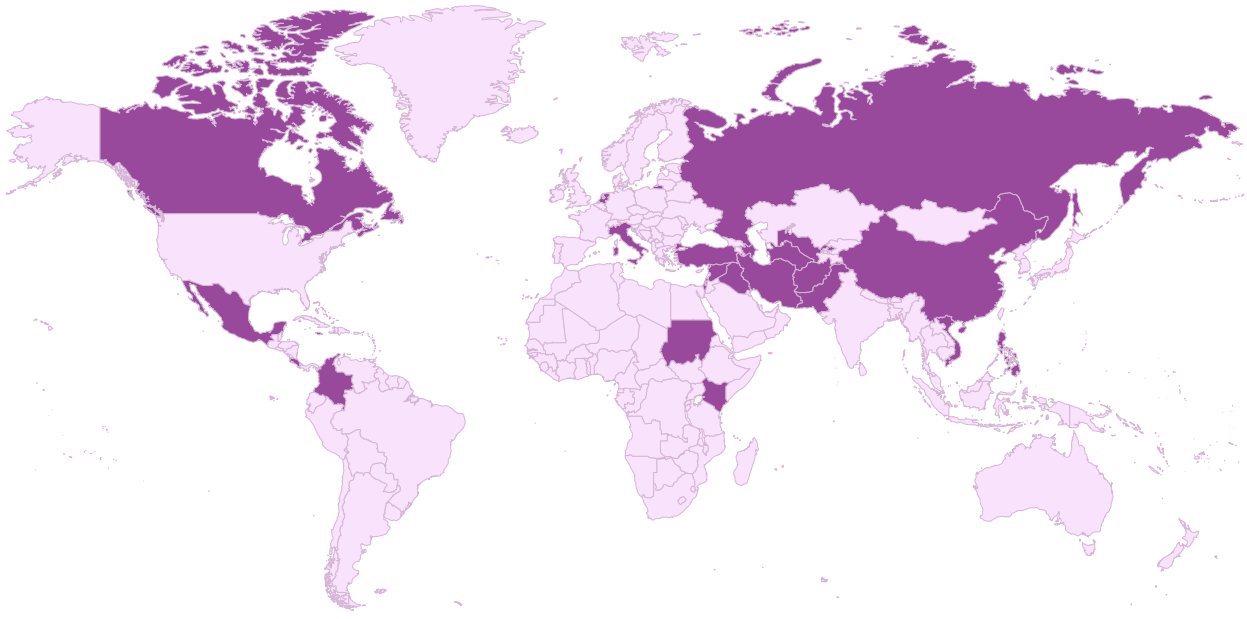


The survey data demonstrated that participants across all grades were involved in the Connex program and there was representation from those who identified as male and female, although those who identified as female (80%) represented the majority of participants in the third cohort; two participants did report their gender identity as non-binary. There was also a wide range of racial groups that participants chose as ones in which they identified. Across the program as a whole, the vast majority of Connex participants (nearly 80%) had moved to Canada within the previous three years and were, therefore, considered newcomers.

Furthermore, participants who completed the surveys moved to Canada from a wide variety of countries, as shown in **Table 6**. Overall, participants who responded to this question on the survey were born in 23 countries from many different parts of the world. It should be noted that, given the mentorship model of the program, some participants who were born in Canada did participate in the program in Cohort 2 and Cohort 3.

**Table 6. Survey Participants’ Countries of Birth**

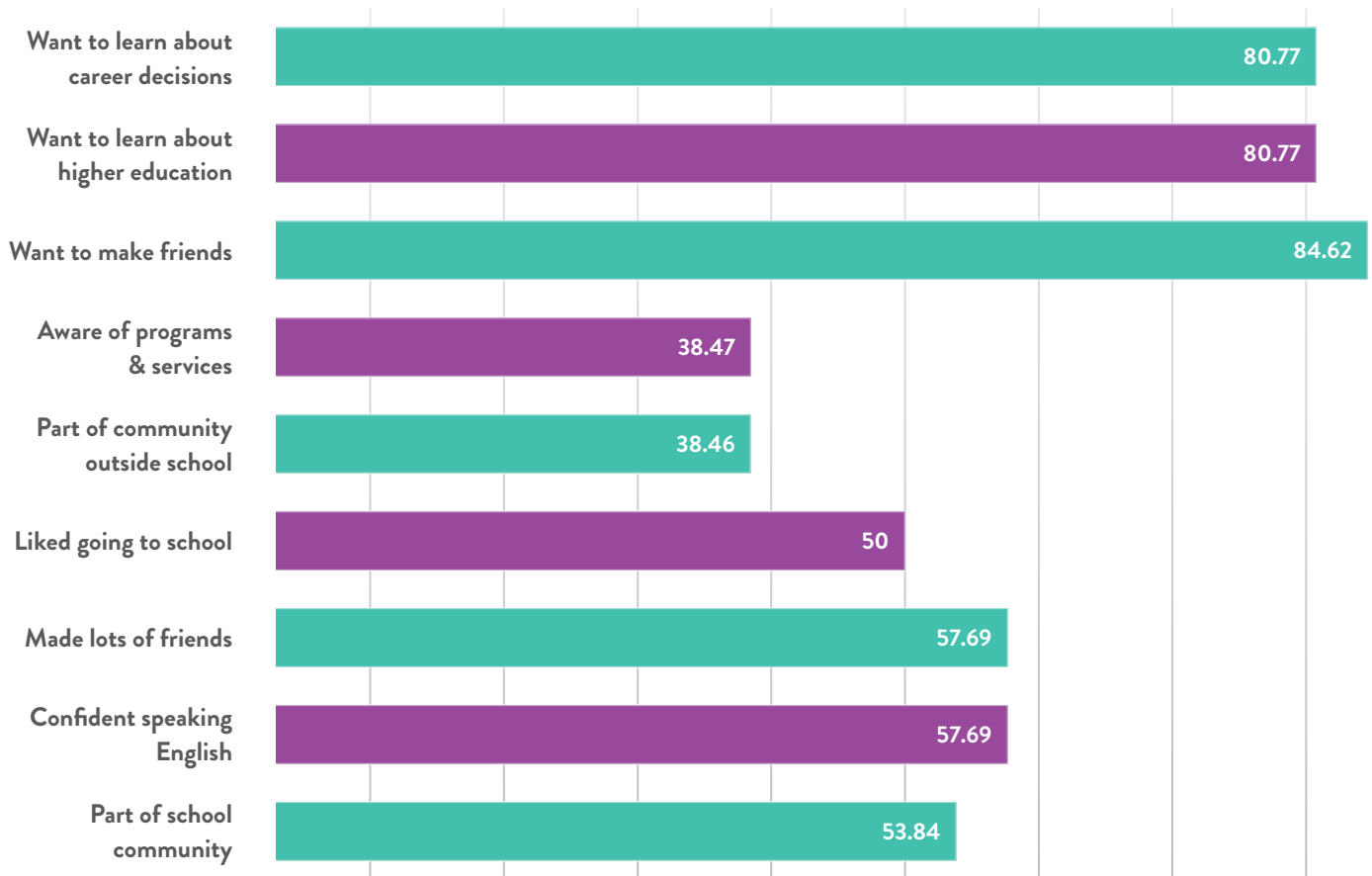
Afghanistan	Israel	Philippines
Azerbaijan	Italy	Russia
Canada	Jamaica	Sudan
China	Kenya	Syria
Columbia	Mexico	Turkey
Costa Rica	Netherlands	Turkmenistan
Iran	Pakistan	Uzbekistan
Iraq	Palestine	Vietnam



The pre-survey completed by Cohort 3 participants provides some insights into what Connex youth were experiencing when they became involved in the program (see **Figure 3**). At the time of the pre-survey, less than 60% of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that they felt **confident when speaking English** with their friends, felt like they were **part of a community at school**, had reported they had **made a lot of friends at school**, and **looked forward to going to school**.

Less than 40% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were **aware of various community programs and services** and felt like they **belonged to a community outside of their school**. Moreover, approximately 80% of the survey respondents reported being interested in making **new friends**, learning about **higher educational opportunities**, and learning about **career decisions**. (For complete findings from the pre-survey, see **Appendix C**.)

**Figure 3. Percentage of Participants Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with Statements on the Pre-Survey (Cohort 3 only)**



The responses to the open-ended questions on the pre-survey are consistent with these quantitative findings. Participants reported that they were most excited about learning **communication** skills (e.g., more and improved English, gaining comfort and confidence communicating with others), learning about **academic and career opportunities** (e.g., volunteering, furthering studies, career options, and generally things to help them in their future), and the **social opportunities** (e.g., meeting new people and making new friends, field trips, having fun). Similarly, when participants were asked what they hoped to see in the program, the largest theme was **social opportunities** (e.g., field trips). Participants also reported wanting to see **communication** activities, **food**, and other **learning opportunities** (e.g., volunteering, post-secondary, and future career opportunities) in the program.

These findings from the pre-survey suggest that there may have been unmet needs in what participants were experiencing at the beginning of the Connex program in

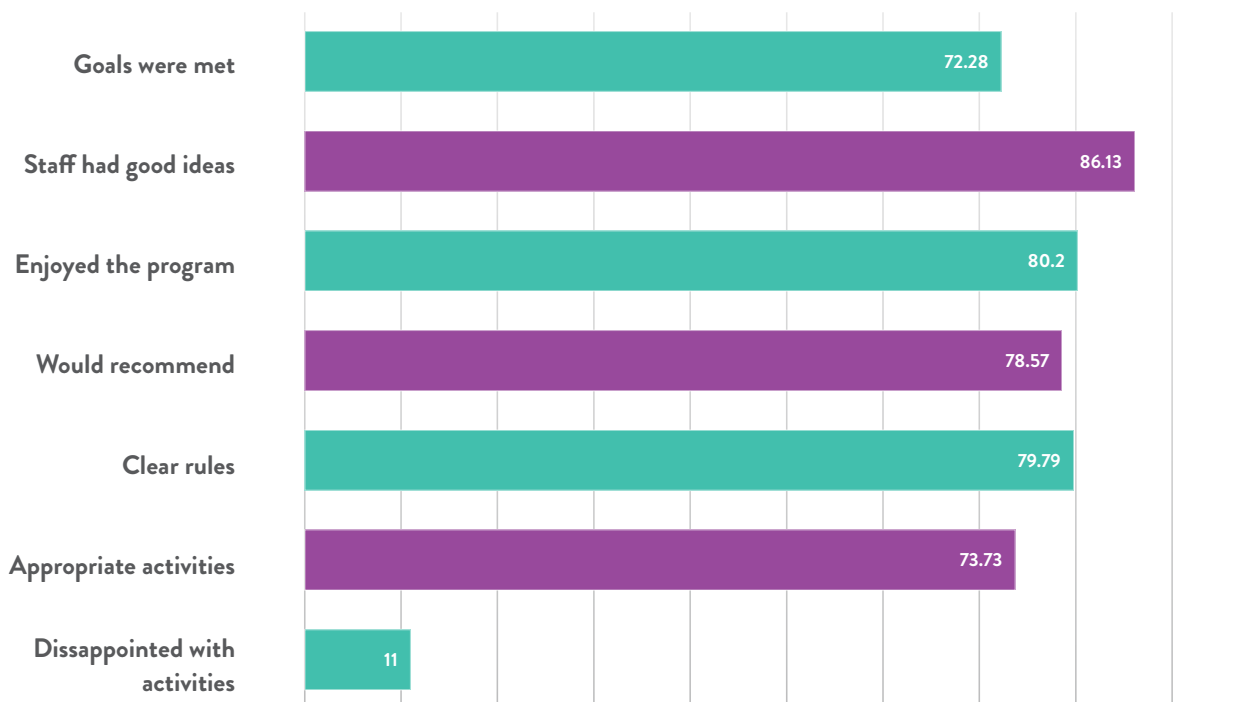
terms of making new friends, their feelings of belonging at school and in their communities, their levels of confidence in speaking the language of their new country, and their awareness of programs and services available in their new communities. Addressing these unmet needs is consistent with the goals of the Connex program.

## Program Satisfaction

### Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings related to satisfaction with the Connex program come from the surveys conducted at the end of participants' involvement with the program and suggest a high degree of satisfaction with various components and aspects of the program. The data, combined across all cohorts, is displayed in **Figure 4** (see **Appendix D** for the full results from the surveys related to program satisfaction).

**Figure 4. Percentage of Participants Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with Program Evaluation Questions on the Post-Surveys (Across All Cohorts)**



It should be noted that, for many of the questions, participants from Cohort 2 provided ratings slightly lower than those provided by Cohort 1 or Cohort 3 participants. For example, all participants (100%) who completed the post-survey for Cohort 1 and nearly 95% of participants who completed the post-survey for Cohort 3 agreed or strongly agreed that they **enjoyed the Connex program**, compared to 70% of participants from Cohort 2 who agreed or strongly agreed to this statement on the post-survey. Despite these lower ratings from Cohort 2, which will be discussed later, the findings from the post-surveys do support a general sense of overall satisfaction across all participants in the Connex program.

**“The fun, confidence that we had and the things we learned in connex mentorship classes. I actually loved it so much and I hope I see you guys next year.”**

- Cohort 2 participant

## Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data also support the assertion that there was a great deal of satisfaction with the Connex program, not just generally but also in relation to the structure and components of the program as well as the atmosphere of the program.

**“I don’t think I realized how rewarding it would be to me and to see that improvement and to see their faces light up when you walk into a room or them tell you ‘Look at how I did on my test’ or those sorts of things.”**

- Connex staff

## General Satisfaction

The qualitative data from the post-surveys support the quantitative data and further show a high degree of general satisfaction with the Connex program. For example, when participants were given the opportunity to provide additional comments on the post-survey, the responses were very positive and praised the program. Participants wrote about how much they **enjoyed the program** and would **recommend it** to others, as well as how they **learned many new things** and were exposed to great opportunities. Furthermore, a question on the post-survey asked participants how the Connex program could be made better and a number of participants responded that the Connex program did not need to change anything as it was already a good program.

## Program Structure and Components

More specifically, the evaluation data provide support for satisfaction related to the program structure and components of the program. For example, on the participant post-survey, a number of participants noted that the best part of the Connex program were the activities that were provided and the **exposure to new opportunities**. Some participants responded to this question noting the activities in general, while others were more specific in their responses. For example, some participants noted the best part of the program was the hip hop activity while others mentioned how the field trips were great and **made them happy**. Some participants noted the best parts were the guest speakers, workshops, the creation of the book, and the poetry. One participant noted that the best part was, “going on a trip to places that I thought I would never go to” (Cohort 3 participant). Participants in the focus groups also spoke positively about the activities and the field trips experienced as part of the program.

The interviews conducted with teachers during the first year of the program also revealed their satisfaction with the program structure and components of the Connex program. For example, a couple noted that they felt there was **good planning and organization** from the program. One interviewee noted that teachers could learn from the structure of the Connex program, stating that teachers might see better results from their students if they took time for a 5- or 10-minute game at the start of each class. The teachers also mentioned that they appreciated that the guest speakers came from varied backgrounds, who then acted as **role models** for the participants. The **fieldtrips** were also noted by teachers as great experiences for the participants, ones which aren't always available in the schools due to budget constraints, and that they felt the students were very grateful for the opportunities and had a great deal of fun on them. One teacher did feel that more learning could have been incorporated into the fieldtrips and suggested providing maps to the students in order to situate where they were going on the outing as well as introducing vocabulary specific to the context of the field trip.

**“Everything was wonderful. I felt very enjoyable during activities, field trips and conversations with others. One of the best part of the Connex program is the field trip to R.O.M. This provides us with experiences and knowledge about arts, cultures, and learning about Canada as well as other countries.”**

- Cohort 3 participant

### Program Atmosphere

The atmosphere within the Connex program was another area in which participants and other stakeholders expressed their satisfaction. The interviews with the teachers revealed their appreciation of the informal nature of the

Connex program and felt teachers taking a behind the scenes role allowed the Connex staff to build different and **deeper relationships** with the youth participants. Teachers mentioned that they noticed their students had really **bonded** with the Connex program leader, who was welcoming and respected and listened to the needs of the participants. One teacher mentioned how the Connex program leader went **above and beyond** when she identified areas of concern with a number of students and got the students supports and help they needed. One teacher stated that participants felt **very safe** in the Connex environment while another teacher noted that the students benefited from the environment that was created within the Connex program.

**“...I think for the most part we really appreciate the program. We felt that the students benefited from the excursions, and benefited from the interactions with the Connex team and benefited from the environment that was created.”**

- Teacher

Similarly, participants themselves, both in the focus groups and on the post-survey, commented that there were positive relationships with both the Connex staff and the other Connex participants. Echoing the comments made by teachers, the Cohort 1 focus groups described a comfortable environment in which participants felt **safe, respected, and cared for**. On the participant post-survey, staff were described as friends, respectful, supportive, caring, encouraging, amazing, helpful, trusting, and accepting.

**“I was so comfortable speaking with the staff and program mentors and they were so much supportive making our tired or sad days into a happy day.”**

- Cohort 3 participant

Moreover, responses on the participant post-survey indicated that what was most liked about the program were the social connections, referring to the people that they had met and the friendships formed from being a part of the Connex program.

**“I met many people and became friends with them.”**

**- Cohort 1 participant**

Participants wrote that meeting new people, interacting with more people, having conversation with others, and learning about the experiences of others were the best parts of the Connex program. Participants described a fun atmosphere in which they felt comfortable.

**“They were very caring, they listened and they were good friends once I got to know them.”**

**- Cohort 2 participant**

The atmosphere of the Connex program was also described as open, found among the evaluation data from the teacher interviews and the participant post-surveys. Participants wrote how they learned about different cultures and to be more open and empathetic to other people.

**“Not to judge a book by it’s cover. I always thought I should avoid different races but I learned their experiences and it tell me that they are the same as other and me...”**

**- Cohort 3 participant**

It should be noted that racial tensions were discussed in the focus groups conducted during the first year as a challenge experienced in the program. Participants cited either racist comments directed towards a particular ethnic group or experiences of racism from a different racial or ethnic group. One participant who expressed experiencing discrimination and conflict, however, explained that the Connex program leader helped them to process that conflict constructively. This did not appear to be a common challenge across the program as a whole and was addressed by program staff.





## 5. FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION: PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The evaluation findings provide strong evidence of the positive impact that involvement in the Connex program had on its participants. Given the large amount of data that resulted, the following highlights the outcomes that surfaced during the evaluation of the Connex program that correspond with some of the outcomes identified in the Connex program logic model. Specifically, the evaluation findings are presented for the following outcomes: Sense of Belonging; Confidence; English and Literacy Skills; Social Skills; and Understanding of Canadian Culture and Society. Other outcomes for participants and the perceived community benefits of the program will also be highlighted. (See [Appendix D](#) for the full results from the participant post-surveys related to program outcomes across cohorts.)

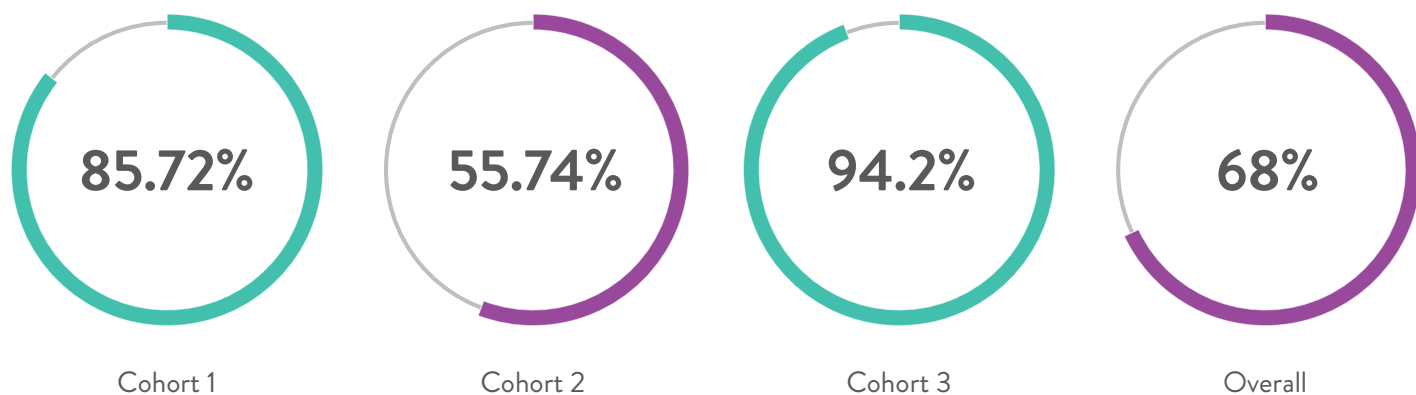
“So, I think, overall, from what I’ve seen, I think that the feedback from the youth has been outstanding. So, seeing students at the beginning of when we’re starting to the end, their English proficiency **skyrocketing, confidence**. Seeing them really come out of their shell and be able to take **initiative** to go meet new people. And their social skills really **flourishing, leadership**, taking initiative, the overall, I would say, wellbeing.”

- Connex staff

### Sense of Belonging

An expected outcome of the Connex program was to contribute to a greater sense of belonging, particularly within the school environment. [Figure 5](#) displays the findings from the post-survey for sense of belonging at school across cohorts. As can be seen, the vast majority of participants from Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 felt a **greater sense of belonging in their school communities** after participating in the Connex program. The same degree was not evident for Cohort 2, in which just over 50% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they were a part of their school community. This finding of lower ratings among participants in the second cohort was also true for some of the satisfaction findings and will be discussed later.

Figure 5. Percentage of Participants Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Had Greater Feelings of Belonging at School at Program End



**“We are all like a family that support each other, we can open to each other and we care for each other.”**

- Cohort 1 participant

Because the Cohort 3 post-survey used a retrospective pre-post survey design (i.e., asking participants to respond to questions referencing the different time periods of before participating in the Connex program and because of participating in the Connex program) it is possible to compare the impact of the program based on participant perceptions. Statistical analyses revealed some areas in which participants reported a statistically significant increase because of their involvement in the Connex program when compared to before they were involved in the program. Specifically, the post-survey ratings were higher than the pre-survey ratings in the area of feeling like a part of a community at school. In other words, according to the perceptions of participants, **feeling like a part of the school community** was significantly higher after participating in the Connex program than it was before participating in the program.

The data from interviews with teachers during the first year of the Connex program also provide evidence for participants gaining a greater sense of belonging because of the Connex program. **Building a community** was used by one of the teachers, citing the connections and relationships that were built within the program. A number of teachers mentioned noticing **greater peer-to-peer interactions** and the formation of **new relationships and bonds** as the program progressed. Furthermore, during the informal follow-up calls to past participants at the end of the program revealed that participants appreciated the connections that had been made during their time in the Connex program and that the friends they made through the Connex program really **helped with their adjustment** to Canadian society.

**“...I felt more welcomed.”**

- Cohort 2 participant

The interviews with Connex staff and members of the advisory committee also pointed to a perceived increased sense of belonging among participants of the program. The interviewees mentioned that the program helped to **connect newcomer youth to one another and the school**, and it helped them to **build relationships**, relationships

that continued beyond their involvement with the Connex program. A number of the staff and advisory committee members reported that this relationship building increased the participants' sense of belonging and made them feel more comfortable at the new school.

**“...as somebody who is new to the school, sometimes, it was really stressful for them to even to make new friends, just to even have the confidence to speak to somebody. And then the program really helped with just connecting with other people, feeling more at ease in their schools. And in general sense of, you know, welcome in their schools.”**

- Connex staff

## Confidence

Increased confidence was another area in which the Connex program hoped to make an impact for participants. Improved confidence, both in general and within specific areas, was noted throughout the various data sources. For example, a number of participants on the post-survey wrote that the best part of the program was the **confidence they gained** as a result of their participation in the program. This was again echoed during the informal telephone calls at the end of the Connex project, in which former participants noted they had **learned confidence and leadership skills** through their participation in the program, and they **continue to use these skills** well after their participation in the program had ended.

*What did the program help you learn?*

**“To always have self-confidence and to never fear of trying anything new.”**

- Cohort 2 participant

Teachers also noted seeing evidence that their students who participated in the Connex program were gaining **increased confidence**. Comments within the interviews were in regard to noticing students becoming **less shy** and **coming out of their shells**. Connex participants were observed to be **speaking up** in class more and **asking more questions** during class than they had before they started participating in Connex. They saw Connex participants **taking initiative** and developing into **leaders**. One teacher commented that the participants wanted to share what they had learned in the Connex program and share it with the rest of the school.

**“And I think it improved students' confidence because they were able to make new friends or see their old friends that were in different levels...which brought I think some level of comfort and risk taking.”**

- Teacher

## English and Literacy Skills

Improving participants' English and literacy skills was a primary goal of the Connex program and the activities of the program provided many opportunities for this. The evaluation of the Connex program provides strong evidence that participants did experience this outcome. As shown in **Figure 6**, more than 80% of participants from Cohorts 1 and 3 agreed or strongly agreed that their **English language skills had become stronger** and they had become **more confident speaking English** with their friends. Although the percentage of participants in Cohort 2 who reported stronger English skills as a result of their participation in Connex was lower than the other two cohorts, thus bringing down the overall percentage of participants who reported this, there is still strong evidence of this outcome being attained by participants. Furthermore, there were some differences in the structure of the second cohort that may have contributed to these lower ratings, which will be discussed later.

Again, for Cohort 3, the statistical analyses that examined the differences between scores for before the program with after the program revealed that there was a statistically significant difference for confidence in speaking English with friends, in that participants were **more confident speaking English with their friends** after participating in the Connex program than they were before participating in the program.

“I think it did help improve their English. When the group would get together we can see students communicating with groups of other kids who weren’t part of their first language. I think some of them created pretty good relationships with our Connex group.”

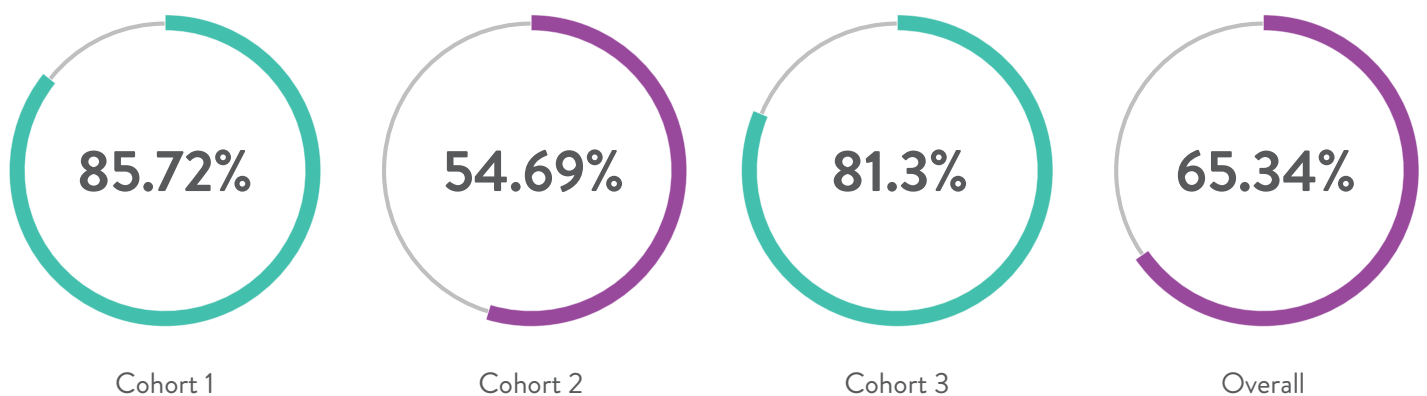
- Teacher

Learning English language skills and having the opportunities to practice their English skills were also prominent comments in response to the open-ended questions on the post-survey that asked participants what they liked best about the program as well as what they learned in the program. These sentiments were also expressed by Cohort 1 participants in the two focus groups, as well as by teachers who reported the program providing a greater number of **opportunities for participants to communicate in English** and noticed their students **becoming more confident when speaking English**. Furthermore, English skills were mentioned by many participants when asked during the follow-up calls about how they have applied and used what they learned in Connex.

“At first I was shy and afraid to speak English. But now, during this time. I can speak English with more confidence and know many information that I don’t know before. ”

- Cohort 2 participant

Figure 6. Percentage of Participants Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That Their English Became Stronger and Were More Confident Speaking English



## Social Skills

Social skills were another outcome experienced by participants in the Connex program, as evidenced by the participant post-surveys, teacher interviews, and informal follow-up interviews with past participants at the end of the program. In response to what participants felt was the best part of the program, **social connections and social skills** were common answers. Participants wrote that meeting new people, interacting with more people, and having conversations with others were the best parts of the program.

“...it gives them the opportunity to communicate more so a lot of them came out of their shell, their shyness to communicate...”

- Teacher

Additionally, many participants who were reached during the follow-up telephone calls at the end of the program reported that the social skills they learned in Connex had been **applied and used** after the Connex program had ended. Furthermore, the teachers who participated in the interviews during the first year of the program commented how they noticed youth **coming out of their shells**, making new friends, and learning to express themselves.

## Understanding Canadian Culture

In order to assist in the overall adjustment of newcomer youth, one of the goals of the Connex program was to expose their youth participants to and increase their understanding of Canadian culture. As shown in **Figure 7**, the majority of participants did report a **better understanding of Canadian culture and society** after participating in the program, although the extent to which participants reported this varied by cohort, ranging from 63% in Cohort 3 to 86% in Cohort 1.

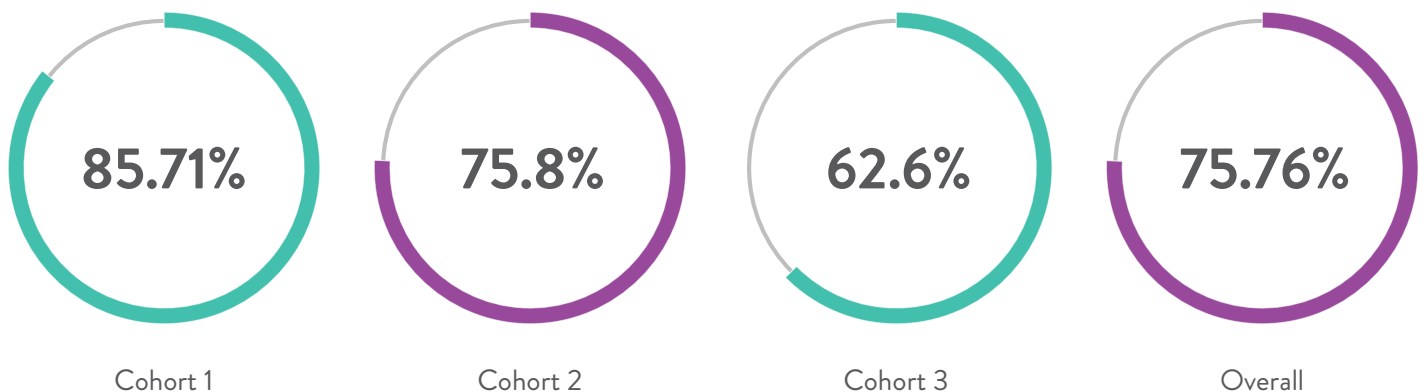
*What did the program help you learn?*

“How to adopt to new things ... and it helped me to adapt to Canada.”

- Cohort 2 participant

One possibility for the lower ratings by Cohort 3 could be due to the number of Canadian-born youth who were involved in the program. One would expect these Canadian-born participants to already be familiar with Canadian culture and society and would, therefore, not experience or report a great deal of change in this area.

**Figure 7. Percentage of Participants Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They had a Better Understanding of Canadian Society After Participating in Connex**



In addition to the survey findings, participants from Cohort 1 who were involved in the focus groups frequently cited learning about Canadian laws, customs and culture, noting these learnings as entertaining but also **very valuable** to their ability to communicate with people in Canada. During the follow-up telephone calls made at the end of the program, a number of participants mentioned that the opportunity Connex provided to explore Toronto **helped them adjust to Canadian society**. Interview participants, including the teachers, staff, and advisory committee members, echoed these findings.

### Other Benefits to Connex Participants

Other benefits were reported across the different sources throughout the evaluation. For example, the majority of participants reported on the post-survey that they were more confident that they could do well in school and reported a greater understanding of volunteering opportunities after participating in the Connex program (see **Appendix D** for the complete data). Furthermore, Cohort 3 participants were asked about their confidence in taking local transit, their understanding of post-secondary opportunities, their knowledge of different employment opportunities, and whether they were provided with opportunities to speak with experts about career decisions. In each of these areas, a majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that these experiences had improved because of their involvement in the program and specifically mentioned learning about post-secondary opportunities and employment readiness (i.e., resume and cover letter writing) in response to open-ended questions.

*What did the program help you learn?*

**“Opportunities for post-secondary school – Socializing – Dance – To feel confident and accept who I am etc and a lot of experience.”**

- Cohort 3 participant

Mental health and overall wellbeing were also mentioned by the participants and other stakeholders who were part of the evaluation of the Connex program. Participants reported learning about their mental health and self-care and staff commented that the change in mood for participants from the beginning of meetings to the end of meetings had visibly improved. Moreover, the teachers who were interviewed in the first year of the program noted this was an important learning that Connex participants received through the program, with one teacher stating noticing that some students were asking about mental health supports.

*What did the program help you learn?*

**“I learned I should care about myself and my mental health is really important. I also should love myself.”**

- Cohort 2 participant

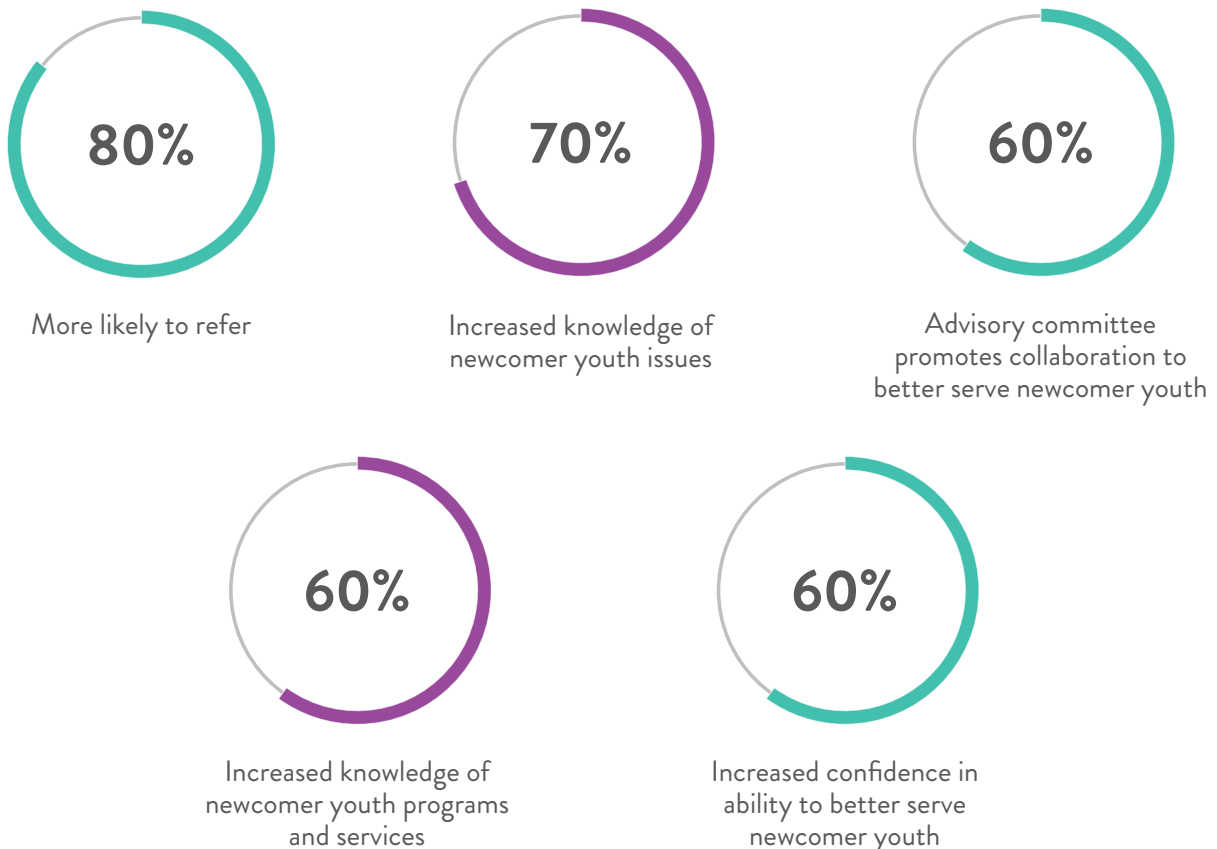
## Community Benefits

While it is very difficult to measure the community benefits of programs, and is often outside the scope of evaluations, the evaluation data from the Connex evaluation do provide some evidence that the Connex program was contributing to benefits in the larger newcomer community.

One source of evidence that the Connex program had been contributing to benefits for the larger community of newcomer youth comes from the Advisory Committee survey (see **Appendix E** for the full results of the survey). The Advisory Committee brought together a wide variety of organizations and agencies, including representation from regional public libraries, school boards, mental health organizations, and other organizations and agencies that

work to support newcomers. As displayed in **Figure 8**, the results of the Advisory Committee survey indicated that advisory committee members were **more likely to refer** newcomer youth to the available supports and services (80%) and that their **knowledge of newcomer youth issues had increased** as a result of their involvement in the committee (70%). Furthermore, more than half of the advisory committee members who responded to the survey (60%), agreed or strongly agreed that the committee **promoted interagency collaboration** to better serve newcomer youth, that their own **knowledge of newcomer youth programs and services had increased** because of their involvement in the committee, and they were **more confident in their own ability** to better serve newcomer youth.

**Figure 8. Percentage of Respondents from the Advisory Committee Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with Statements on the Survey**



The open-ended questions on the advisory committee survey asked committee members to comment about the gaps to newcomer youth programs and services filled by Connex, changes they have implemented in their own agencies as a result of their involvement in the committee, and the greatest accomplishment of the advisory committee. With respect to the gaps in newcomer youth programming and services filled by the Connex program, advisory committee members wrote that **Connex extended the supports offered to newcomer youth** from the community into the school environment.

In terms of changes that had been made within the committee member's organization as a result of being involved in the advisory committee, of those who reported making changes, responses were related to **outreach** and **networking**. Respondents mentioned having **greater knowledge of the needs** of newcomer youth, as well as greater knowledge of the **supports and services** available. This increased knowledge improved their ability to reach out to those supports and services, which, in turn, allowed them to better support newcomer youth.

Lastly, with respect to accomplishments of the Connex advisory committee, members reported that the advisory committee **helped to build a community, lend a voice to newcomer youth, and helped connect other agencies working to support newcomer youth**. Other comments referred to accomplishments more specific to the Connex program in general. For example, some members reported the accomplishments of helping youth gain a sense of belonging, build connections, and develop positive relationships. Other accomplishments mentioned were providing supports and programming tailored to the expressed needs of newcomer youth, as well as providing the knowledge about other programs and supports that are available to newcomer youth within their communities.

Another source of evidence suggestive on the positive community impact of the Connex program comes from program interview data. Connex staff and advisory committee members were asked about the benefits of the program to the larger community. One staff shared that the Connex program **filled a need for newcomer resources** in certain areas of York region given that many schools did not have settlement workers. Another staff expressed that while the program did make an impact in the community it may not change the reality for everyone since there are still many barriers for newcomer youth living in the region, including insufficient programming.

One advisory committee member shared that the program has drawn attention to what newcomer youth want and need and what they benefit from. Connex developed many partnerships within York region; this enabled Connex participants to become **more engaged in different resources in the community**, with some interview participants mentioning Connex participants visiting their community agency.

**“I see that a lot of the youth that actually, that joined the program...they actually ended up coming to join our youth centre...”**

**- Advisory committee member**



The teacher interviews also pointed to some benefits that went beyond the Connex program and extended into the school community. One participant noted that there were not many opportunities for newcomer youth within the schools and Connex was able to provide that opportunity. It was also expressed that the Connex program was **a support to schools and teachers** at a time when schools were experiencing an influx of newcomer students.

A couple of teachers mentioned that the Connex program was a further support to teachers, with the **wealth of information** Connex staff were extremely happy to share with them, and that teachers could then build off the Connex programming within their own classrooms. One teacher also noted feeling that the Connex program would benefit all high school students, not just newcomer youth.



## 6. PROGRAM LEGACY: LESSONS LEARNED

The Connex Youth Mentorship Program addressed a gap in the supports and services for newcomer youth by extending supports and offering a program to newcomer youth within the school community. The evaluation findings revealed that the program reached youth from 23 different countries, with the majority of participants arriving in Canada within three years of participating in the program. Overall, participants and other stakeholders reported a great deal of satisfaction with the program and noted a variety of benefits, both to the participants who were involved in the program but also within the broader community as well.

This section offers lessons learned for future such endeavours; it is informed by the challenges encountered during the program, as well as other considerations and insights from various stakeholders. Unsurprisingly, Connex encountered challenges over its duration. These do not reflect missteps in the conceptualization or execution, but rather attest to the uncertainties and evolutions that characterize any program, particularly one that unfolded over diverse contexts with diverse participants, took place across several years, involved numerous stakeholders, and transpired both before and during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Since Connex was a pilot project (i.e., intended to identify best practices for supporting newcomer students, and hence, inform program models for similar initiatives), these challenges offer valuable intel in that they provide fodder for refining a program blueprint that can be expanded across the settlement sector.

### Importance of Adaptability

Arguably, Connex's most valuable asset was its resilience to change and disruption, which allowed the program to continue fulfilling its mandate over the course of its three years even as issues arose.

Undoubtedly, the most significant and enduring disturbance to Connex was from the Covid-19 pandemic. At the outset, when school boards were operating under the assumption that physical gathering restrictions would be resolved within a matter of weeks, Connex temporarily suspended the program, while compensating for its loss by sharing online support resources with participants.

Once it was determined that pandemic measures would be in effect indefinitely, Connex had to reimagine itself to ensure that it could still make its forums and resources available to the newcomer youth who depended upon it. Thus, Connex re-established itself virtually and modified the program for execution online. Fortunately, apart from an end-of-year celebration, most other program elements could be delivered in online format.

As with many other programs being offered virtually at the time, youth were not as interested in the virtual forum as they were the in-person one for various reasons, and attendance was thus compromised. This was particularly true for the fourth cohort, which was to be implemented at the exact time a province-wide lockdown was announced. Connex staff recognized that this was not attributable to a fundamental disinterest but, rather, a combination of virtual burnout, non-conducive home situations (e.g., small quarters, shared space with multiple siblings etc.), and pandemic-related mental health struggles. One way that Connex responded to this was by doing home deliveries of gifts, a gesture that was very positively received and one that helped to maintain connection, provided students access to material goods, and made explicit the care and concern that Connex staff had for their participants.

Connex staff capitalized off of the flexibility of online programming, by expanding operational boundaries and offering it to all past and present Connex participants. It also maintained its commitment towards customized and participant-led programming, by beginning online delivery with a needs assessment (i.e., a survey and group call with present and former participants) to determine what supports were needed. The resulting initiative was ‘Wellness Wednesdays’ in which participants joined together online to connect with one another and to participate in activities and sessions in support of their mental health (e.g., yoga class, time management, goal setting, and stress management workshops). When ‘Wellness Wednesdays’ did not generate as much interest as expected, Connex distributed a survey to troubleshoot. Based on the survey findings, Connex

offered two additional days of weekly online programming: one devoted to exchanging recipes and discussing cooking and one for unstructured conversations. At the end of the school year, and thus at the end of the Connex initiative, the Connex program leader reached out via telephone to past participants to check in and offer any further supports and resources as needed.

While the circumstances of Covid-19 will, hopefully, resolve permanently, adaptability and responsiveness are ongoing necessities for the program, particularly given its situatedness within a school context. Indeed, aside from the pandemic, teacher action during the second year of the program also affected the functioning of the program. While disruptions are never welcome, they are an inevitability and thus, flexibility, persistence, and creativity in response to them is of utmost importance. Fortunately, Connex proved itself capable of this, reflecting its commitment to the wellbeing of newcomer students and willingness to confront challenging conditions.

## Planning for Diversity

While Connex participants were united by their common status as ‘newcomer’, no other similarities could be taken for granted. Indeed, participants were varied in terms of their country of origin, ethnicity, religion, and first language, as well as the infinite other ways that individuals differ but that are not captured in demographic data.

Given this context, designing and delivering a program that is both suitable and relevant for all participants is a challenge and, unsurprisingly, several issues arose. These are explicated below, identified in the heading according to the area of participant difference.

### Language

An understandable complication within a newcomer group is a diversity of mother tongues and varying levels of English linguistic comfort. Connex creatively problem-solved for some of the issues arising from this. During

the needs assessments, the results of which would inform the program activity schedule, Connex staff would use pictures instead of words to describe to students a possible activity. This ensured that all participating students, not just those with full ease in English, could inform the content of the Connex programming. Of course, not every communication obstacle could be overcome in this way and, sometimes, conversing with students in their first language was a necessity. The Connex staff was not always able to provide for this in-house, given the variety of languages represented among the students. Indeed, while maximizing the ethnic and racial diversity of the group was desirable, as it reflected the program's inclusiveness and generated greater value for all involved, it also precluded the feasibility of a staff team who could collectively converse in every student-spoken language. When a staff member wasn't able to communicate with the students in another language as necessary, an external interpreter was present. This was helpful but still less than ideal, because these language-specific recruits didn't have the benefit of a pre-existing relationship with the students and thus changed the group dynamics.

### Providing Food Options

Although the provision of lunch was mentioned as a positive thing included in the program, there were a couple of comments made over concern that the food provided didn't

take into account participant food restrictions. Sharing food is fruitful towards fostering community and nurturing relationships. As such, the unintentional exclusion of some from the collective consumption experience could undermine these social benefits. Ensuring a variety of options that are in accordance with both religious and personal dietary restrictions and preferences would alleviate this concern.

### Programming Need

The importance of making programming customized to the audience, and responsive to their needs, was reflected in the varying uptakes to different offerings. For example, hip hop sessions were popular by many. However, they did not jive for other students, for whom the activity may not have been a good fit culturally or religiously. For the latter, Connex held a 'life skills' session instead of bringing the instructor back.

### Relationships

Any program that brings people together for the express purpose of forging connection can anticipate a certain amount of conflict. Within the context of a racialized society, it is unsurprising that such conflict would organize along racial lines. However, this is further complicated by the recent immigration of participants. Specifically, racial dynamics are unique to place and, inevitably, participants



carry over those from their previous context, potentially increasing the opportunities for race-based tension. Several participants disclosed experiences of discrimination, interpreted as racist in nature; others confessed to subscribing to or perpetrating racial stereotyping themselves. Participant testimony suggests that Connex staff was able to successfully mediate such incidents as they arose.

The diversity among participants generated supplemental value in Connex, as it enhanced the learning and exchange for all parties involved. Maximizing the benefits from this diversity, however, requires intentionality and additional consideration. As described in the above sections, Connex was mostly able to resolve any issues that emerged from divergent participant need and experience. However, it was suggested that Connex would additionally benefit from expanding its team in terms of numbers but also in terms of abilities. Staff with the ability to speak multiple languages could minimize instances of having to recruit external translators; and more generally, a staff team that is, collectively, more connected to the various diasporas represented among the newcomer students could better anticipate needs (such as those related to diet, or appropriate activities).

Ultimately, it is impossible to anticipate every concern, but the Connex approach of regularly soliciting feedback, and being open to responding to such feedback, served it well in making the program a valuable space for all who accessed it.

## Accounting for School-Based Variables

Connex operated within schools, which came with many advantages. These included proximity to newcomer students, as well as access to the administrative infrastructure and physical facilities of the school system. Furthermore, school is where youth spend a great deal of time and, as such, the happy and healthy integration of newcomer students depended upon their comfort and belonging within that environment. Making the school

context more welcoming and hospitable, by situating Connex within it, was therefore fruitful towards the program's ultimate outcome. However, the school-based aspect meant navigating multiple bureaucracies, relying on non-Connex personnel. This, naturally, introduced new variables, and required unique approaches and considerations.

### Importance of Buy-In

Connex acknowledged the importance of good relationships with the school administration and staff. When there was a greater level of program buy-in from teachers and other staff, this resulted in a smoother process and generated greater student engagement. Indeed, Connex did not have direct access to, or pre-existing relationships with, students and thus, it was crucial towards participation that teachers and administrators were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the program.

### Session Timing

Finding the right time to administer the program proved challenging. Although lunch was the preferred timing, and was overall the easiest to accommodate, in some schools there was not a shared lunch period. Offering the program after school was also a challenge given that many students had conflicting obligations (e.g., caring for younger siblings) or relied on transportation home using the school bus. Arranging rides for the time when the program ended proved challenging.

### Teacher Readiness

Connex realized that many ESL and other teachers had a gap in relating to their newcomer students. This was deemed important to address. Indeed, enhancing newcomer student wellbeing was the ultimate program outcome. Therefore, preparing teachers to more effectively and appropriately engage with newcomer students was considered highly relevant towards this aim, with the benefits extending well past the duration of the program. Thus, Connex provided several teacher trainings.

These were highly successful, both in preparing the teachers to better relate and respond to their students, and in creating a pipeline between the classroom and the Connex program.

## Nature of School Involvement

Being intimately connected with the schools was an asset for Connex. However, there were some comments raised concerning exactly how and to what extent this school involvement should ideally manifest.

Specifically, interviews with Connex staff and the teachers from the first and second cohorts expressed a desire for greater information sharing from the other. Teachers wished to know more about what was going on in the program and Connex staff wished for greater knowledge about what was going on in the schools.

However, other evaluation data suggests that it was preferable for Connex to maintain its independence from other aspects of school life. As described earlier, some teachers felt that relationships were stronger and more developed among the Connex staff and the participants because it was not a part of the school curriculum. Moreover, a few students mentioned that Connex could be improved by not connecting it to grades and not having homework. Indeed, lower scores were observed for a number of process and outcome variables among Cohort 2 participants for whom Connex activities contributed to a small portion of their grade in their course.

Additionally, observing a separation from official school activity was deemed beneficial towards participant engagement. For Cohort 2, which, as mentioned above, reported lower satisfaction and outcome ratings, the program was offered during the existing ESL classes and brought together multiple classes at one time. This resulted in a large number of participants when compared to the other two cohorts. Indeed, the large number of participants was reported as challenging by the teachers

who were interviewed, as well as by some participants in their open-ended responses. The size of this group may have compromised the meaningful engagement of all participants. In addition to the number of youth involved, given that this was a part of an existing class, participants were not making the choice to voluntarily attend the Connex program. These factors may have contributed to the lower ratings observed from this cohort.

It is, of course, necessary to establish a relationship with the schools to facilitate the administrative aspects of the program. However, the results of the evaluation, particularly those which show discrepancies in the experiences of Cohort 2 participants compared to the other cohorts, suggest that teachers and other staff should limit their involvement to encouraging participation, rather than attempting to integrate this program within their curriculum and class time.

## Extending the Program, Expanding the Benefits

Perhaps the biggest testament to the success of a program was the desire for its extension. Across all data sources, a common suggestion was to extend the program by increasing the frequency of meetings and the overall program duration. Some anticipated that spanning the program across the entire school year could greatly enhance the benefits that youth would experience as a result of their involvement in the program.

Extending the program duration could allow for multiple benefits. Firstly, it could enhance the leadership and development opportunities of the program, as well as contribute to its long-term durability. For example, the first semester could be structured as the program exists now, but the second semester could see the youth becoming the leaders. Youth leaders would then have the capacity to continue the program in the following year, bringing on new youth to develop into leaders, thereby improving the sustainability of the program within the schools.



Secondly, the relational benefits of the program would be multiplied through longer program duration. Indeed, Connex is premised upon the value of relationship-building towards holistic benefits for newcomer youth. The development of fruitful, mutually beneficial, and sustainable relationships is a long-term pursuit, nurtured over time alongside the establishment of trust. Extending the program would, therefore, maximize its benefits.

### Facilitating Connex Staff Success

Every Connex staff member was motivated by the desire to serve the program's newcomer youth to the best of their individual and collective ability. This was reflected in the team's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and other program hiccups. Driven by the imperative to continue fulfilling their mandate, the staff team was creative, responsive and resilient in ensuring its continued presence for those who depended upon it.

However, there were suggestions made about how the staff could even better support newcomer youth. These included expanding the team in terms of numbers but also in terms of abilities. It was mentioned that staff with the ability to speak multiple languages would prove to be very beneficial for such a newcomer youth program. Additionally, it was mentioned that it was essential for staff to be familiar with local resources, supports, and programs, and if they weren't, then it was essential to provide this training. Familiarity

with supporting early English language learners was also mentioned as something needed for staff in delivering a newcomer youth program.

The proven willingness among staff members to serve their participants is the most important quality of a staff member, and one that cannot be trained or manufactured. Those supporting newcomer youth can be even better situated for success in their work if they are in sufficient numbers, when 'spoken languages' is prioritized in hiring decisions, and when they receive adequate training.

### Fostering Equitable Relationships

Connex realized in its early days the importance of fostering relationships based upon equity. Connex originally envisioned itself as a one-to-one mentorship program, in which more recent newcomer 'mentees' would be paired with a more established newcomer 'mentor'. These labels were quickly removed after it became clear that their use, at least in this situation, implied a power hierarchy, one that unintentionally positioned some students as 'in need' of support versus others considered capable of providing it. Removing the implied hierarchy was particularly needed for such a program like Connex, where integration and building a sense of belonging and community are key goals. Creating labels like mentor and mentee help to create a distinction and an "otherness" that the Connex program was aiming to reduce. Indeed, Connex learned that the

youth participants did not appreciate the distinction and noted that the majority of participants wanted to be thought of as mentors. As such, Connex reworked this program aspect into a less formal group arrangement, one in which all participants simultaneously occupied both sides of the mentor-mentee relationship. This allowed each student to reap the rewards of providing, as well as receiving, mentorship support. It further distanced the students from the (perceived) power-laden labels that may have acted as obstacles to relationship-building. As the findings from the evaluation suggest, the quick shift within the Connex program to remove these labels did not hinder the benefits participants gained through their involvement in the program.

This lesson points to the need to consider carefully terminology and power dynamics in every element of a program, particularly one in which relationships are considered a primary outcome.

There were other, less significant, barriers to the development of equitable and mutually beneficial relationships. As mentioned in previous sections, several participants disclosed experiences of discrimination, interpreted as racist in nature, and others confessed to subscribing to or perpetrating racial stereotyping themselves. In the context of a racialized society, such issues can be anticipated. Importantly, participant testimony suggests that Connex staff was able to successfully mediate such incidents as they arose.

## Resolving Funding Limitations

In any funded program, there are limitations on how and when money can be spent. Unfortunately, in the case of Connex, these restrictions hindered its ability to provide top-quality programming that was responsive to student demand. Across cohorts, a 'fan favourite' of Connex were the field trips, fully funded outings to arts museums, sporting events, libraries, skating rinks, and more. These field trips helped to expose the participants

to other opportunities and show them what was possible. They provided exciting intermissions from the everyday, that also introduced these incoming Canadians to the geographic and cultural landscape of their new home. Unsurprisingly, then, participants expressed a desire for more field trips. However, Connex was not always able to accommodate these requests because of the terms of its funding arrangement. Thankfully, Connex was able to rely on its partnership with York University to overcome this hurdle and offered a campus trip, which was very positively received by the students who accessed a taste of post-secondary education and hence their futures. This was, however, a limited and stop-gap solution, which didn't address the broader concern about grants which do not afford the level of spending flexibility required to maximize participant experience. Hopefully, future iterations of Connex can address this.

Furthermore, many Connex participants expressed their satisfaction with the program and noted their desire for the continuation of the program. Unfortunately, the Connex funding was time-limited and programming has since come to an end. Such is the norm for grant-funded projects. Continued funding, or longer-term funding, would allow programs to reach a greater number of their target population and could extend the benefits that those participants received.

## Evaluation Lessons

Program evaluation activities are extremely valuable, not only in terms of showing whether a program is successful, but also in pointing out the areas and issues to address in order to make the program even more successful. While the Connex program was continually modifying its delivery to better address the needs and wants of its participants, the evaluation itself also underwent modifications to better capture the process and outcomes variables important to the program.



During the first year of the evaluation, participants were asked to complete post-surveys. However, in one school in Cohort 1, it was decided that focus groups, conducted in the participants' first languages of Arabic and Kurmanji, were a more appropriate option given the language barriers. Although focus groups were an excellent way to explore youth experiences, attitudes and feedback regarding Connex's activities, there were a number of factors that may have hindered the extent to which these contributions were fully utilized within the evaluation. For example, it was mentioned that the focus group data were brief and lacked detail. This cannot be attributed to any language barrier because the focus groups were conducted in the native languages of the participants. Rather, it is possible that the facilitators were not trained adequately on how to encourage conversation through open ended, but directed, questions, follow-up questions and prompts for more information. It is also important that facilitators are knowledgeable of the evaluation questions so that the discussion can be informed and guided by the priority objectives of the evaluation.

The language-based characteristics of the focus groups may also have served as barriers for young people currently learning English. In the context of participants who speak Kurmanji as their native first language, it may be a difficult process to translate their contributions from this language because it does not have a written form. There may be, inevitably, some experiences or details that become

muddled or lost in translation. Perhaps consideration into more arts-based qualitative methods to supplement or compliment existing evaluation methods is needed as another option to capture youth experiences in the program when communication in the same language proves challenging.

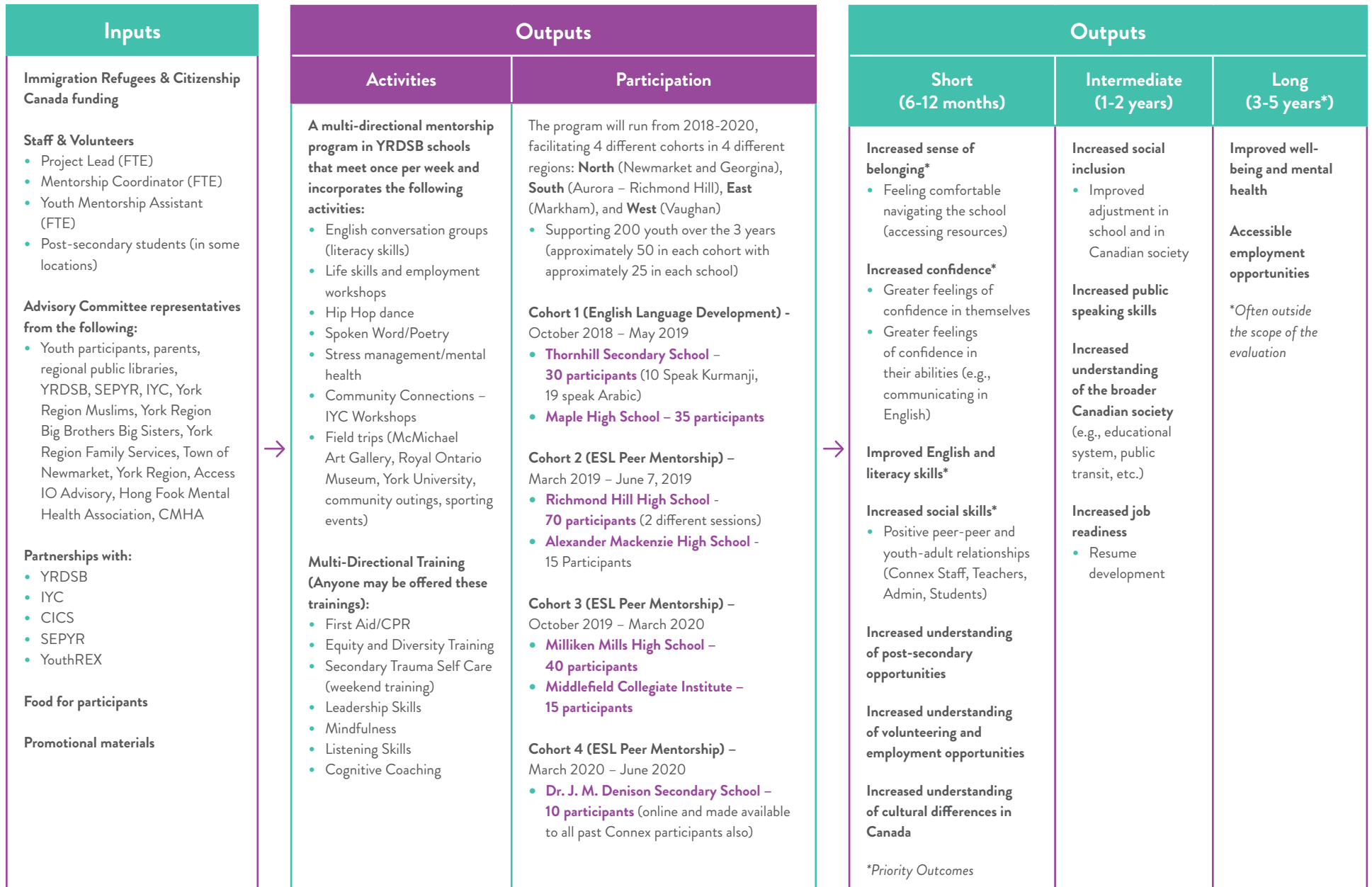
Changes were also made to the participant post-surveys between the first and second year of the program, and a pre-survey was introduced during the second year as well. Although it may make it difficult to compare participant experiences across the duration of a program, it is always more desirable to make changes in order to better capture what is happening in and resulting from a program rather than to stick with the way it began. The final participant post-survey was revised to include retrospective pre- and post-questions. This was important as it allowed the participants to reflect on where they were at the beginning of the program compared to where they were at the end of the program. Furthermore, this allows evaluators and program personnel to directly compare the changes that occurred within participants, based on their perception, over the course of their involvement with the program. Retrospective pre-post-surveys are also a less complicated method for assessing perceived change over time. After all, the overall goal of such programs are to provide experiences that result in change for the betterment of those involved.



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# APPENDIX A: CONNEX PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL



# APPENDIX B: SURVEY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Cohort 1 (%)	Cohort 2 (%)	Cohort 3 (%)	Total (%)
<b>Grade*</b>				
9	4 (19.05)	11 (16.42)	3 (20.0)	18 (17.48)
10	1 (4.76)	28 (41.79)	6 (40.0)	35 (33.98)
11	3 (14.29)	13 (19.4)	3 (20.0)	19 (18.45)
12	9 (42.86)	13 (19.4)	3 (20.0)	25 (24.27)
Other	4 (19.05)	2 (2.99)	-	6 (5.83)
<b>Gender</b>				
Females	13 (16.9)	31 (46.27)	12 (80.0)	56 (54.37)
Males	8 (38.10)	31 (46.27)	3 (20.0)	42 (40.38)
Non-binary	-	2 (2.99)	-	2 (1.92)
Prefer not to answer	-	3 (4.48)	-	3 (2.88)
<b>Racial Identity</b>				
African	-	1 (1.69)	1 (6.7)	2 (2.13)
Asian	1 (5.0)	27 (45.76)	4 (26.7)	32 (34.04)
Caribbean	-	2 (3.39)	1 (6.7)	3 (3.19)
Filipino	-	1 (1.69)	-	1 (1.06)
Latin American	2 (10.0)	1 (1.69)	1 (6.7)	4 (4.26)
Middle Eastern	3 (15.0)	8 (13.56)	-	11 (11.70)
South Asian	5 (25.0)	-	6 (40.0)	11 (11.70)
Southeast Asian	3 (15.0)	1 (1.69)	1 (6.7)	5 (5.32)
West Asian	3 (15.0)	9 (15.25)	1 (6.7)	13 (13.83)
White	-	2 (3.39)	-	2 (2.13)
Other	3 (15.0)	7 (11.86)	-	10 (10.64)
<b>Arrival in Canada</b>				
2015 or earlier	-	5 (9.09)	1 (12.5)	6 (7.32)
2016	6 (31.58)	4 (7.27)	1 (12.5)	11 (13.41)
2017	5 (26.32)	15 (27.27)	2 (25.0)	22 (26.83)
2018	8 (42.11)	28 (50.91)	3 (37.3)	39 (47.56)
2019	-	3 (5.45)	1 (12.5)	4 (4.88)

\*In Cohorts 1 and 2, the question about grade was phrased in a way that asked participants what grade they will be entering in the upcoming school year.

As such, some participants indicated they would not be entering a grade in secondary school. It should also be noted that based on the responses for these two cohorts, it does appear that some respondents answered the question based on the grade they were currently enrolled. As such, caution is warranted for this question as it may not be a true reflection of the grade composition of those who completed the surveys.

# APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT PRE-SURVEY FINDINGS

The pre-survey captured feelings and interests of the Connex participants at the beginning of the program. Twenty-six participants completed the pre-survey.

	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean (SD)	Mode	Median
Confident speaking English with friends	3 (11.54)	3 (11.54)	5 (19.23)	8 (30.77)	7 (26.92)	3.5 (1.33)	4	4
Feel like a part of the school community	-	4 (15.38)	8 (30.77)	12 (46.15)	2 (7.69)	3.46 (.86)	4	4
Made a lot of friends at school	-	4 (15.38)	7 (26.92)	12 (46.15)	3 (11.54)	3.54 (.91)	4	4
Interested in learning about volunteer opportunities	-	2 (7.69)	9 (34.62)	8 (30.77)	7 (26.92)	3.77 (.95)	4	3
Interested in learning about career decisions	1 (3.85)	2 (7.69)	2 (7.69)	9 (34.62)	12 (46.15)	4.12 (1.11)	4	5
Someone to talk to about 4career decisions	1 (3.85)	3 (11.54)	9 (34.62)	8 (30.77)	5 (19.23)	3.5 (1.07)	3.5	3
Good relationship with role model	2 (7.69)	3 (11.54)	6 (23.08)	9 (34.62)	6 (23.08)	3.54 (1.21)	4	4
Look forward to coming to school	1 (3.85)	3 (11.54)	9 (34.62)	11 (42.31)	2 (7.69)	3.38 (.94)	3.5	4
Aware of various community programs and services	2 (7.69)	4 (15.38)	10 (38.46)	9 (34.62)	1 (3.85)	3.12 (.99)	3	3
Feel like I belong to community outside school	2 (7.69)	4 (15.38)	10 (38.46)	6 (23.08)	4 (15.38)	3.23 (1.14)	3	3
Would like to make new friends	2 (7.69)	-	2 (7.69)	14 (53.85)	8 (30.77)	4.00 (1.06)	4	4
Would like to learn about opportunities Canada has	1 (3.85)	1 (3.85)	8 (30.77)	7 (26.92)	9 (34.62)	3.85 (1.08)	4	5
Would like to learn about higher education	2 (7.69)	-	3 (11.54)	10 (38.46)	11 (42.31)	4.08 (1.13)	4	5
Would like to feel more confident speaking and reading English in class	2 (7.69)	2 (7.69)	5 (19.23)	5 (19.23)	12 (46.15)	3.88 (1.31)	4	5

## What you are most excited about learning in the program?

Four themes emerged when analyzing responses to the question asking Connex participants what they are most excited about learning in the program: communication, expanded academic and career opportunities, expanded social opportunities, and general comments.

### Communication

A number of Connex participants reported being excited about learning better communication skills. In addition to learning more and better English, participants also reported they were excited to become more comfortable and confident in communicating with others.

### Expanded Academic and Career Opportunities

In general, this was a large theme referring to participant responses that are related to being most excited about learning things that will help participants in their futures. In fact, a number of participants explicitly mentioned they were most excited to learn things in the Connex program that would help them with their future. Participants commented that they were excited to learn about help to further their studies and about post-secondary opportunities, including college and university. Participants also reported that they were excited to learn about volunteering opportunities as well as career options and opportunities. One participant was very specific and mentioned being excited to learn about business and working with technology.

### Expanded Social Opportunities

The theme of expanded social opportunities was another large theme. Many of the participant responses categorized into this theme referred to friends. Participants commented that they were excited to meet and connect with people and make new friends. A couple of comments also referred to wanting to learn about other cultures and connect with people from other countries. One participant even mentioned being excited to meet someone from their own country. Other comments classified into this theme were related to being excited about field trips and having fun.

### General Comments

A few participants made comments about being excited to learn new things and new skills in general, without making specific mention to the areas in which they were referring to.

## One thing you hope to see in the program

Four themes emerged from the data when examining responses to the question about one thing participants hope to see in the program: social opportunities, communication, food, and learning opportunities.

### Social Opportunities

Social opportunities was the largest theme that emerged from responses regarding what participants would like to see in the program. The most frequent comments categorized into this theme were related to field trips. Some comments were general and just mentioned field trips. However, other comments were specific and including participants noting they would like to go to Niagara Falls, a skating rink, the zoo, and the Royal Ontario Museum. One participant noted they would like to have field trips in order to gain more knowledge about Canada. Sports, such as rugby and swimming, were also mentioned by participants. Lastly, participants noted they would like to see fun game and activities in the Connex program.

### Communication

A couple of participants noted they would like to see more communication activities and increased conversations.

### Food

Food was another theme that was found in the responses to this question. Participants wrote that they would like to have food in the program and one participant noted they would like to see a variety of food.

### Learning Opportunities

The theme of learning opportunities represents comments related to learning about volunteering, college and university, and future careers. While some comments were general in nature, such as wanting to see employment-related activities or learning opportunities to increase knowledge of options for the future, other comments were more specific about wanting field trips to various universities in order to explore options for career programs.

# APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT POST-SURVEY FINDINGS

## Participant Evaluation of Program

	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean (SD)
Goals for participating were met (n = 101)	-	4 (3.96)	24 (23.76)	51 (50.50)	22 (21.78)	3.97
Cohort 1	-	1 (4.76)	5 (23.81)	10 (47.62)	5 (23.81)	3.90 (.81)
Cohort 2	-	3 (4.76)	16 (25.4)	33 (52.38)	11 (17.46)	3.83 (.77)
Cohort 3	-	-	3 (17.6)	8 (47.1)	6 (35.3)	4.18 (.73)
Staff and mentors have good ideas related to problem solving (n = 101)	-	2 (1.98)	12 (11.88)	40 (39.60)	47 (46.53)	4.4
Cohort 1	-	-	1 (4.76)	12 (57.14)	8 (38.10)	4.33 (.56)
Cohort 2	-	1 (1.59)	10 (15.87)	27 (42.86)	25 (39.68)	4.21 (.76)
Cohort 3	-	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	14 (82.4)	4.65 (.86)
Enjoyed the program (n = 101)	1 (.99)	1 (.99)	18 (17.82)	30 (29.70)	51 (50.50)	4.52
Cohort 1	-	-	-	5 (23.81)	16 (76.19)	4.76 (.43)
Cohort 2	1 (1.59)	1 (1.59)	17 (26.98)	24 (38.10)	20 (31.75)	3.97 (.89)
Cohort 3	-	-	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	15 (88.2)	4.82 (.53)
Would recommend the program (n = 98)	1 (1.02)	1 (1.02)	19 (19.39)	32 (32.65)	45 (45.92)	4.4
Cohort 1	-	-	3 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	16 (76.19)	4.62 (.72)
Cohort 2	1 (1.61)	3 (4.84)	15 (24.19)	27 (43.55)	16 (25.81)	3.87 (.91)
Cohort 3	-	-	1 (5.9)	3 (17.6)	13 (76.5)	4.71 (.59)
Disappointed in the activities (n = 100)	41 (41)	34 (34)	14 (14)	8 (8)	3 (3)	1.92
Cohort 1	12 (57.14)	8 (38.10)	-	-	1 (4.76)	1.57 (.90)
Cohort 2	22 (36.07)	21 (34.43)	12 (19.67)	6 (9.84)	1 (1.64)	2.08 (1.04)
Cohort 3	7 (41.2)	5 (29.4)	2 (11.8)	2 (11.8)	1 (5.9)	2.12 (1.27)
Clear rules and Expectations (n = 99)	-	1 (1.01)	19 (19.19)	53 (53.53)	26 (26.26)	4.11
Cohort 1	-	-	4 (19.05)	12 (57.14)	5 (23.81)	4.05 (.65)
Cohort 2	-	1 (1.64)	13 (21.31)	33 (54.10)	14 (22.95)	3.98 (.71)
Cohort 3	-	-	2 (11.8)	8 (47.1)	7 (41.2)	4.29 (.69)
Activities just right for age and level (n = 99)	1 (1.01)	3 (3.03)	22 (22.22)	47 (47.47)	26 (26.26)	4.08
Cohort 1	-	-	1 (5.00)	12 (60.00)	7 (35.00)	4.3 (.56)
Cohort 2	1 (1.61)	2 (3.23)	18 (29.03)	30 (48.39)	11 (17.74)	3.77 (.83)
Cohort 3	-	1 (5.9)	3 (17.6)	5 (29.4)	8 (47.1)	4.18 (.95)



## Program Participant Outcomes

	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean (SD)
Feelings of belonging or being part of a community at school						
Cohort 1	1 (4.76)	-	2 (9.52)	10 (47.62)	8 (38.10)	4.14 (.94)
Cohort 2	2 (3.28)	4 (6.56)	21 (34.43)	16 (26.23)	18 (29.51)	3.72 (1.06)
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	-	1 (5.6)	6 (33.3)	7 (38.9)	4 (22.2)	3.76 (.90)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	-	1 (5.9)	8 (47.1)	8 (47.1)	4.41 (.62)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3 (3.00)</b>	<b>4 (4.00)</b>	<b>25 (25.00)</b>	<b>34 (34.00)</b>	<b>34 (34.00)</b>	<b>4.09</b>
Stronger and better English, confident speaking English with friends						
Cohort 1	-	-	3 (14.29)	10 (47.62)	8 (38.10)	4.24 (.68)
Cohort 2	2 (3.13)	4 (6.25)	23 (35.94)	23 (35.94)	12 (18.75)	3.61 (.96)
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	-	2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)	7 (38.9)	7 (38.9)	4.00 (1.03)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	-	3 (18.8)	3 (18.8)	10 (62.5)	4.44 (.81)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>2 (1.98)</b>	<b>4 (3.96)</b>	<b>29 (28.71)</b>	<b>36 (35.64)</b>	<b>30 (29.70)</b>	<b>4.10</b>
Confident to do well in school and classes						
Cohort 1	-	-	3 (14.29)	7 (33.33)	11 (52.38)	4.38 (.72)
Cohort 2	1 (1.59)	2 (3.17)	22 (34.92)	24 (38.10)	14 (22.22)	3.76 (.89)
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	1 (5.6)	-	5 (27.8)	9 (50.0)	3 (16.7)	3.71 (.99)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	1 (5.9)	4 (23.5)	9 (52.9)	3 (17.6)	3.82 (.81)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>1 (.99)</b>	<b>3 (2.97)</b>	<b>29 (28.7)</b>	<b>40 (39.60)</b>	<b>28 (27.72)</b>	<b>3.99</b>
Confident taking local transit						
Cohort 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	5 (27.8)	8 (44.4)	2 (11.1)	3.47 (1.07)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	1 (5.9)	2 (11.8)	10 (58.8)	4 (23.5)	4.00 (.79)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>		<b>1 (5.9)</b>	<b>2 (11.8)</b>	<b>10 (58.8)</b>	<b>4 (23.5)</b>	<b>4.00 (.79)</b>
Understanding of post-secondary opportunities						
Cohort 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	6 (33.3)	5 (27.8)	4 (22.2)	3.53 (1.18)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	-	3 (17.6)	7 (41.2)	7 (41.2)	4.24 (.75)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3 (17.6)</b>	<b>7 (41.2)</b>	<b>7 (41.2)</b>	<b>4.24 (.75)</b>

<sup>1</sup>Does not include Cohort 3 “before participating” responses

	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean (SD)
Understanding of volunteering opportunities						
Cohort 1 (n = 21)	-	-	1 (4.76)	11 (52.38)	9 (42.86)	4.38 (.58)
Cohort 2 (n = 64)	-	2 (3.13)	16 (25.00)	34 (53.13)	13 (20.31)	3.89 (.75)
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	5 (27.8)	7 (38.9)	3 (16.7)	3.53 (1.13)
<i>Because of participating</i>	1 (5.9)	-	3 (17.6)	8 (47.1)	5 (29.4)	3.94 (1.03)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1 (0.97)</b>	<b>2 (1.94)</b>	<b>20 (19.42)</b>	<b>53 (51.46)</b>	<b>27 (26.21)</b>	<b>4.07</b>
Knowledge of different employment opportunities						
Cohort 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	-	3 (17.6)	5 (29.4)	6 (35.3)	3 (17.6)	3.47 (1.06)
<i>Because of participating</i>	-	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	8 (50.0)	3 (18.8)	3.73 (.80)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1 (6.3)</b>	<b>4 (25.0)</b>	<b>8 (50.0)</b>	<b>3 (18.8)</b>	<b>3.73 (.80)</b>
Talked with experts about career decisions						
Cohort 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	4 (22.2)	2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)	5 (27.8)	5 (27.8)	3.24 (1.60)
<i>Because of participating</i>	1 (5.9)	1 (5.9)	3 (17.6)	7 (41.2)	5 (29.4)	3.82 (1.13)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>1 (5.9)</b>	<b>1 (5.9)</b>	<b>3 (17.6)</b>	<b>7 (41.2)</b>	<b>5 (29.4)</b>	<b>3.82 (1.13)</b>
Understanding of Canadian society						
Cohort 1 (n = 21)	-	2 (9.52)	1 (4.76)	12 (57.14)	6 (28.57)	4.05 (.84)
Cohort 2 (n = 62)	-	2 (3.23)	13 (20.97)	36 (58.06)	11 (17.74)	3.90 (.71)
Cohort 3						
<i>Before participating</i>	1 (5.6)	1 (5.6)	5 (27.8)	8 (44.4)	3 (16.7)	3.50 (1.03)
<i>Because of participating</i>	1 (6.3)	-	5 (31.3)	5 (31.3)	5 (31.3)	3.81 (1.11)
<b>END OF PROGRAM OVERALL</b>	<b>1 (1.01)</b>	<b>4 (4.04)</b>	<b>19 (19.19)</b>	<b>53 (53.54)</b>	<b>22 (22.22)</b>	<b>3.92</b>

# APPENDIX E: ADVISORY COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SURVEY FINDINGS

## Survey Distribution

- An electronic survey was emailed to all Connex Youth Mentorship advisory committee members (n = 34) on February, 6, 2020. One email was undeliverable and a new email was not provided (n = 33).
- A follow-up email reminder was sent again on February 11, 2020.
- Data analysis was conducted on completed surveys (n = 10, 30.3% response rate).

## Characteristics of Members who Responded to the Survey

### Length of Involvement with Advisory Committee

- One person who responded (10%) was quite new to the advisory committee and reported being involved for a period of 0-3 months
- Four respondents (40%) reported being involved in the advisory committee for four to nine months
- Another respondent (10%) reported being involved in the advisory committee for 10 to 12 months
- Four respondents (40%) reported having been involved in the Connex advisory committee for over one year

### Number of Meetings Attended

- Most of those who responded to the survey had only attended one or two advisory committee meetings (n = 8, 80%)
- One respondent (10%) reported that this was the first meeting in which he or she would attend
- One respondent (10%) reported having attended three or more meetings

### Agency Affiliation

The respondents represented a variety of agency types:

- schools (n = 2, 20%)
- newcomer agencies (n = 1, 10%)
- municipal agencies (n = 3, 30%)
- youth agencies (n = 2, 20%)
- community agencies (n = 1, 10%)
- other (n = 1, 10%)

## Perceptions of the Connex Program and Advisory Committee

- Almost all of the respondents (n = 9, 90%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the Connex advisory committee has a clear purpose;
  - one respondent (10%) did strongly disagree with this statement
- Almost all of the respondents (n = 9, 90%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the Connex advisory committee has an integral role to the success of the Connex program;
  - again, one respondent (10%) strongly disagreed with this statement
- More than half of the respondents (n = 6, 60%) agreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the Connex advisory committee has promoted interagency collaboration in order to better serve newcomer youth;
  - one respondent (10%) chose the neutral response option and one (10%) respondent chose the don't know response option for this statement;
  - two respondents (20%) strongly disagreed with this statement that Connex was promoting interagency collaboration
- Most respondents (n = 7, 70%) agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge of newcomer youth issues has increased as a result of their involvement in the Connex advisory committee;
  - one respondent (10%) chose the neutral response option and one (10%) respondent chose the don't know response option for this statement;
  - one respondent (10%) strongly disagreed with this statement that their knowledge of newcomer youth issues has increased
- More than half of the respondents (n = 6, 60%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their knowledge of newcomer youth programs and services has increased as a result of their involvement in the Connex advisory committee;
  - two respondents (20%) chose the neutral response option and one (10%) respondent chose the don't know response option for this statement;
  - one respondent (10%) strongly disagreed with this statement that their knowledge of newcomer youth programs and services has increased
- Most respondents (n = 8, 80%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were more likely to refer newcomer youth to available supports and services;
  - one respondent (10%) chose the neutral response option;
  - one respondent (10%) strongly disagreed with the statement
- More than half of the respondents (n = 6, 60%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were more confident in their abilities to better serve newcomer youth;
  - two respondents (20%) chose the neutral response option and one (10%) respondent chose the don't know response option for this statement;
  - one respondent (10%) strongly disagreed with the statement

### **What gaps, if any, in newcomer youth programming and services are filled by the Connex Youth Mentorship program?**

Many of the respondents who answered this question mentioned the Connex Youth Mentorship program filling a gap for newcomer youth related to the school environment. While some respondents were general in their comments (e.g., “secondary school mentoring programs” and “having that support in the school environment”), others reported that having the Connex program extended the supports available to newcomer youth from their communities into the school setting. Another respondent felt the Connex program increased the knowledge and awareness for staff in the schools related to the issues that newcomer youth face. Other respondents further reported that the Connex program, as it supports newcomer youth, is part of the larger need to successfully help newcomer youth integrate into their new societies.

### **Describe what changes, if any, you have implemented in your own organization or programming as a result of your involvement with the Connex Youth Mentorship Advisory Committee.**

Three of the eight respondents (37.5%) who answered this question reported that this question was not applicable to them, with one respondent explicitly stating that he or she was new to the advisory committee and had not yet attended a meeting. One respondent did report that no changes had been implemented at the time of responding. The remaining respondents (n = 4, 50%) reported that the changes they had made were in relation to outreach and networking. Respondents mentioned having greater knowledge of the needs of newcomer youth, as well as greater knowledge of the supports and services available. This increased knowledge improved their ability to reach out to those supports and services, which, in turn, allows them to better support newcomer youth.

### **What do you feel has been the greatest accomplishment of the Connex Youth Mentorship Advisory Committee?**

Two of the eight advisory committee members (25%) who responded to this question reported they were unable to respond to this question. With respect to accomplishments of the Connex advisory committee, members reported that the advisory committee helps to build a community, lend a voice to newcomer youth, and helps connect other agencies working to support newcomer youth. Other respondents mentioned accomplishments more specific to the Connex program in general. For example, some members reported the accomplishments of helping youth gain a sense of belonging, build connections, and develop positive relationships. Other accomplishments mentioned were providing supports and programming tailored to the expressed needs of newcomer youth, as well as providing the knowledge about other programs and supports that are available to newcomer youth within their communities.

### **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the Connex Youth Mentorship Advisory Committee?**

While three of the six respondents wrote that they did not have more to share, two respondents wrote about the positive experiences of being involved with the advisory committee (e.g., “I have had an amazing experience” and “We have enjoyed being part of this Advisory Committee”). Another member wrote that the advisory committee was an “excellent resource network.”