

Acknowledgements

Catalyst Research and Communications would like to acknowledge all of the people who worked on this project. Special thanks to Alia Hogben at the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and Hamdi Mohamed at the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization.

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Section A
Introduction

A. Introduction

The Canadian Council for Muslim Women (CCMW) partnered with the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) to undertake a Project on Muslim Youth.

The project was initiated by CCMW based on feedback from women at their focus groups and conferences who identified concerns that some of their children were having difficulties adapting and integrating as well as maintaining their Muslim and ethnic identities. The concern was that the loss of identity could lead to difficulties, alienation or disengagement and would have a long-term effect on their education, health and other aspects of their lives.

Initial research supported their observations. Muslim children are not doing as well as their parents in terms of integrating into mainstream society. This phenomenon has been identified as the responsibility of both the host country as well as the adaptation patterns of the immigrant family. The findings show that a strong sense of belonging must be fostered to achieve integration. Collaboration is required by a whole community to eradicate racism and discriminatory practices that can undermine the development of a strong identity. Given the research, CCMW concluded that there is a need to develop resources and build partnerships between educators, parents and social services to ensure that an effective integration process for youth can occur.

This project was designed as a pilot project and has sought to identify some of the issues facing young Muslims such as discrimination and racism and navigating multiple identities. It also sought to develop strategies that would involve the whole community including families, youth, schools and social services, to assist young people to develop a strong sense of their multiple identities as Canadian Muslims.

The project had a number of objectives:

- To develop a pilot project that would involve a community organization, schools (one French and one English) parents and Muslim youth.
- To develop a model and strategies and techniques to:
 - Address discrimination/tensions between parents, Muslim youth and the schools by developing positive relationships
 - Ensure that Muslim youth and the school system understand the issues of identity.
- To demonstrate that if all members of a community are involved than youth will benefit.
- To develop a model that is transferable to other communities.

Catalyst Research and Communications was hired to support the project after the initial hiring of a coordinator was not successful. This report reflects the work done by Catalyst to support the project and does not provide information on the first five months of the funding period.

The deliverable for the project was the development of a kit that included:

- Issues that Muslim youth are facing,
- Strategies for how youth can be supported to address them,
- Strategies for how schools can address some of the issues,
- Strategies for how parents can be supported to address them.

Section B

Methodology

B. Methodology

The original methodology had four components:

- a) **Multi-stakeholder steering committee** that would guide the project and be made up of students, parents, teachers and members of both OCISO and CCMW.
- b) **Focus groups** in the schools for students, teachers and parents.
- c) **A literature review.**
- d) **A kit** on community strategies to support Muslim youth.

This was a participatory research methodology and given that there was latitude to adjust the methodology as needed. The methodology was changed as a result of the methodological challenges faced in organizing the focus groups. (see below). A Muslim Youth conference was organized to supplement the information that was learned in the focus groups.

The original methodology for the project had a number of underlying conditions:

1. The work would be done in partnership with a national organization, CCMW and a local settlement organization, OCISO.
OCISO was chosen, in part, because of its unique program that had settlement workers in specific schools in Ottawa, working with youth, parents and school resource people.
2. A youth would be hired to coordinate the work.
3. The definition of youth is quite broad and can range from 16-25. However, the focus would be on the 16-18 high school range because of the access that OCISO had to high school students through their Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) Program.
4. The work would be focused on five central themes identified by CCMW:
 - a. Identity
 - b. Relationships and Family Dynamics
 - c. Racism and Discrimination
 - d. Gender Issues
 - e. Violence

Throughout this report, the methodology is described and organized under the Phases or the deliverables.

1. Phase 1: Focus groups with youth, parents and school resource people.
2. Phase 2: Muslim Youth Conference
3. Literature Review
4. The Kit

1. The Original Workplan

Original Workplan	Final Workplan	Comments
1. Hire the youth coordinator to do key parts of the work.	Catalyst hired a university student to work on the project.	The University student was interviewed and recommended by OCISO as a good person to work on the project, but would need support.
2. Form the Steering Committee – To include representation from CCMW, OCISO, youth, schools and parents.	A steering committee was established. Five meetings were held between November 2007 and April 2008.	The committee never achieved full representation of the intended stakeholders. In April, 2008 the committee became the Conference Organizing Committee with different members.
3. Hire Muslim facilitators for the focus groups. (preferably youth)	In total, three facilitators were hired for the French workshops and three facilitators for the English.	In addition to the hired facilitators Catalyst staff attended all of the workshops to ensure consistency and to provide support.
4. Identify the schools to work with.	The steering committee, mostly guided by OCISO and their expertise in the school chose: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ridgemont High School (English) 2. Deslauriers High Schools (French) 	Criteria used for selection were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English and French school • Diverse Muslim population in the school. • Would have easy access to the school because the OCISO already had a program there.
5. Prepare materials for focus groups.	Material prepared for the focus groups included: letters to parents, youth and schools, agendas, facilitators' guides and handouts. All were translated and distributed through different means.	Samples are available in Appendices B and C, and on the CD.
6. Interviews with school resource people.	The two Principals were interviewed, the MLO Managers in OCISO and a teacher in an Ottawa school that is a member of CCMW.	
7. Delivery of the Focus Groups. In each school:	Focus groups were done between November and	This was the area where there was the most number

a) boys b) girls c) mixed youth d) teachers e) parents	March. The original number of focus groups that were planned was 10 (5 in each school). In the end, nine were completed.	of methodological challenges. (see below)
8. Writing of the results of the focus groups	Reports were prepared from each focus group.	
9. Presentation to the CCMW conference.	In November of 2007, a presentation was done that provided an initial overview of the project.	The presentation was supplemented with the work being done by the Ottawa Social Planning Council around the Somali Community.
10. Literature Review	A literature review was done for the project.	
11. Kit with strategies	Separate kit has been completed that includes issues, strategies and ways to engage youth. Can be printed in hard copy or be put on the web.	The kit integrates the material from both Phase 1 and 2 and the Literature review.

2. Supplementary Workplan – The Muslim Youth Conference

Upon completion of the focus groups, it was clear that there would be insufficient data to be able to put together the kit, including strategies. It was decided that one way to gather further data would be to host a Muslim Youth conference where youth, parents and school resource people could be invited to dialogue.

Original Workplan	Final Workplan	Comments
Not applicable	1. Get approval for the conference from the Steering Committee.	A Concept paper was created to explain the rationale. (see Appendix D – Handout 1)
Not applicable	2. Form an organizing committee.	Building from the first Phase, all the facilitators became part of the conference organizing as well as previous steering committee members. In total the committee had 11 members of which eight were very active.
Not applicable	3. Develop the list of tasks and distribute.	The list was based on the Catalyst Conference list and tasks were distributed. (see Appendix D – Handouts 2 and 3)
Not applicable	4. Prepare material to inform the conference about Phase 1.	A power point presentation was developed. (see Appendix E) A video was prepared to highlight some of the issues through interviews with Muslim youth.

Not applicable	5. Preparation for the conference	There was a very highly functional group of youth that organized the conference with Catalyst.
Not applicable	6. Conference Day	The conference was held May 26, 2008. 100 people attended the conference including 60 youth and 40 parents and school resource people. Over 18 youth were actively involved in organizing the conference.
Not applicable	7. Conference Report	Section E of this report is the Conference Report

3. Overall Methodological Challenges

Establishing a Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was originally conceived as being composed of representatives from the two sponsoring agencies and youth, parents and school representatives from the two schools involved.

Both OCISO and CCMW consistently had members at the steering committee. The school representatives were able to attend only intermittently, although they expressed support for the project and offered good input when they attended. One of the school staff left her position partway through the project and consequently left the Steering Committee.

One youth was named to the committee from the French school but only partway through the project, and she was unable to attend any of the sessions. Evening meetings were difficult for her, especially as they were held far from her home. Efforts were made to provide a ride or taxi fare for her, but this was difficult to arrange, as communication was only through the school staff person. Messages to this staff person sometimes were delayed in the response, perhaps because she was part-time and had many other duties. The project was unsuccessful in recruiting a committee member from among the youth focus group participants in the English school. Again, the only contact was through a staff person who had many other duties and responsibilities.

In light of this, it was thought important to have a number of youth on the planning committee for the conference. This was much more successful; those on the committee were recruited through the facilitators and community contacts rather than through the schools and of the 11 members of the conference committee, 8 were between 18-25.

Lesson Learned: A formula for participation in the steering committee was not as effective as getting members for the organizing committee for the conference.

Working with Youth as contract staff

The original methodology identified a secondary goal that was to hire a Muslim youth to do the project. The settlement organization went through a hiring process and did not find a suitable contract. While there were a number of youth with good skills, they did

not possess the range of abilities required for the project. The decision was to hire a consulting firm as they often have a range of people to rely upon. The consulting firm, Catalyst Research and Communications, agreed to hire, on contract the youth recommended by OCISO.

As she was still doing a full-time student program, there was some challenges in her being able to work and complete tasks for the project.

Lesson Learned: Students have many demands on them and are not the best candidate for this type of work as it requires a great deal of flexibility to accommodate youth, parents and school resource people's schedules and a range of skills from coordinating events, and dealing with logistics, to writing material for different audiences.

Working with both a national organization and settlement organization.

There was a great deal of support offered by both OCISO and CCMW when issues did arise. In some cases, the two organizations, while committed to similar social change goals, have very different organizational cultures and philosophical and political differences. On practical terms, when the English School parents' group refused to meet with us after initially agreeing to meet, the two organizations offered two different approaches. It was clear that they had different communities that they represented and there had not been sufficient time to determine how issues of this type could be resolved. OCISO's response was from a settlement perspective and to meet the immediate needs of the community. If the parents did not want to participate, then that needed to be respected. For CCMW, who are used to presenting new concepts and respectfully dialoging around difficult issues, they were more prepared to go to the parents' group to discuss their concerns.

In the end, a parents' group was organized by CCMW ' outside of the school system; however the parents in the school were not involved again until the Muslim Youth Conference.

Lesson Learned: A more formal protocol be developed between the partner organizations to describe how issues will be addressed.

Working with the schools

The decision to work through the schools instead of organizing focus groups within the community was seen as an advantage because there were already connections within the school through the OCISO program.

However there were some significant challenges that arose with this methodology:

- The focus groups with the students were held at lunchtime for maximum participation but this does not ensure maximum discussion. Generally there was 40 minutes of actual discussion time. Interesting issues were raised but there was insufficient time to discuss them.
- It was difficult to recruit the parents through the school. The project had to rely on the MLOs to introduce the project to individual parents and the parent groups. The MLO job is already so demanding and at times it really seemed that the project was putting an unfair burden on them. In the end, it was

necessary to recruit the parents through another venue outside of the school system.

- The logistics took an enormous amount of time. The MLOs, the French School Resource person and English principal were the key people to support the project and each invested considerable time. There was considerable difficulty in getting a Muslim youth to commit to doing the logistics which means that, in the end, it was done through the office of the consulting firm, which is not the most cost-effective way to get this work done.
- There was also enormous difficulty finding francophone facilitators in the Muslim community. It was more straightforward to find appropriate English-speaking facilitators in the Muslim community.
- There are always unintended consequences with any project. With the schools these were numerous including: teachers who requested formal approval from the School Board before attending a focus group (which delayed the focus group by several months); the reaction of staff at the French school when the youth proposed a prayer room in their school; the reaction by some parents in the English school to the participation of CCMW in the project as they did not have an accurate understanding of the work of CCMW. At times it did not seem that there was sufficient capacity or venues to address these issues as they arose.
- The English school chosen had a large Somali population and so some of the results were not seen as necessarily transferable to other Muslim communities in Ottawa.

Lessons Learned: An observation would be that the Principals and some of the teachers were very positive about this initiative, however it takes very little reaction from the teachers to significantly impact a project such as this. It is clear that the schools play a very critical role in what gets discussed and act as a “gatekeeper” to the youth. Depending on the interest and comfort level of the staff, this type of project may or may not move forward. There needs to be a much more explicit discussion about the kind of ongoing “negotiations” that have to be undertaken throughout the project in order to keep the schools engaged and a clarity as to who has that role.

Difficulties in recruiting facilitators

It was considered desirable to have Muslim co-facilitators for all the youth focus groups, and to have a male co-facilitator for the boys and a female co-facilitator for the girls. In addition, focus groups were run in both languages, so this meant finding at least four different and experienced facilitators. Ideally, these would be facilitators who were somewhat close in age to the youth themselves, in order to be better able to establish a rapport in a short timeframe. For the most part, the project was successful in finding facilitators who met these rather exacting criteria, and we were very fortunate in the skill of the individuals involved. However, the project team was unable to find a male francophone Muslim facilitator. The French male facilitator ultimately engaged had lived and worked extensively in Muslim countries, and so was considered an acceptable choice.

Lessons Learned: Both organizations have a deep pool of people that they can draw upon in the Muslim community. However, at time, it seemed that they were unable to provide key resource people for this project. This was problematic as

Catalyst did not have established working relationships in the Muslim community. In the end, it was often the informal contacts that Catalyst had that worked out the best.

The context at the time of the focus groups

After Ridgmont was chosen as the English High School and throughout early Fall, the high school was subject to a number of security problems and had a number of lock-downs. This disrupted the school days and created a great deal of stress for the Principal and all the players involved.

A number of Muslim youth were identified as instigating the threatening calls. In some ways the school was poised to have this project support addressing some of the issues that were emerging in the school. The MLO Manager identified this as a possible use of the project but there was insufficient time to negotiate the needed changes to this project to also make it meaningful in an immediate sense to an emerging critical issue.

The breadth and depth of the Muslim community and internal dynamics

The difficulty in getting a parent focus group organized highlighted some of the challenges associated with the diversity of the Muslim community. The parents at Ridgmont High School and the parents recruited through CCMW's networks came from different parts of the Muslim community in Ottawa, and held different views. It would have been ideal if the project had been able to involve the range, but this was not possible under the circumstances.

These differences are partly related to a diversity of views on Islam. However, there also appear to be distinctions and sometimes divisions related to race and culture, and the different perspectives of recent immigrants compared to those Muslims who were born in Canada or have been here a long time. These distinctions appear to be more pronounced among parents than among youth.

When working with the parents and based on the descriptions of the youth, there appeared to be three distinct audiences of parents in the Muslim community:

- a) Conservative: Q'uran informs what the youth can do and there is a very strict interpretation of the Q'uran. The parenting style is to provide clear direction without debate and discussion.
- b) Encourage a strong Muslim/Islam identity within a diverse society: In this parenting style it is important to pass onto their children the cultural and religious beliefs that the parents hold while recognizing that the youth have to navigate within a diverse society and a different cultural base than they did.
- c) Muslim identity is not central to their parenting: They do not consider it an advantage or essential to maintain their Muslim identity or do not want to impose their values on their children.

One of the suggestions arising in the parent focus group itself was for greater dialogue among the diverse parts of the Muslim community, to seek to understand each other's views and bridge some of the differences among them.

Section C

Framework for the Project

C. Framework for the Project

1. Understanding Identity

The initial discussions around this project looked practically at what were the influences on Muslim Youth as they were formulating how they saw themselves. Identity formation and the questions of “Who am I?” or “Who do I say I am?” is complex and is influenced by a multitude of factors. In our initial thinking, we sought to identify the different people and institutions that would be informing Muslim youth’s understanding of their identity.

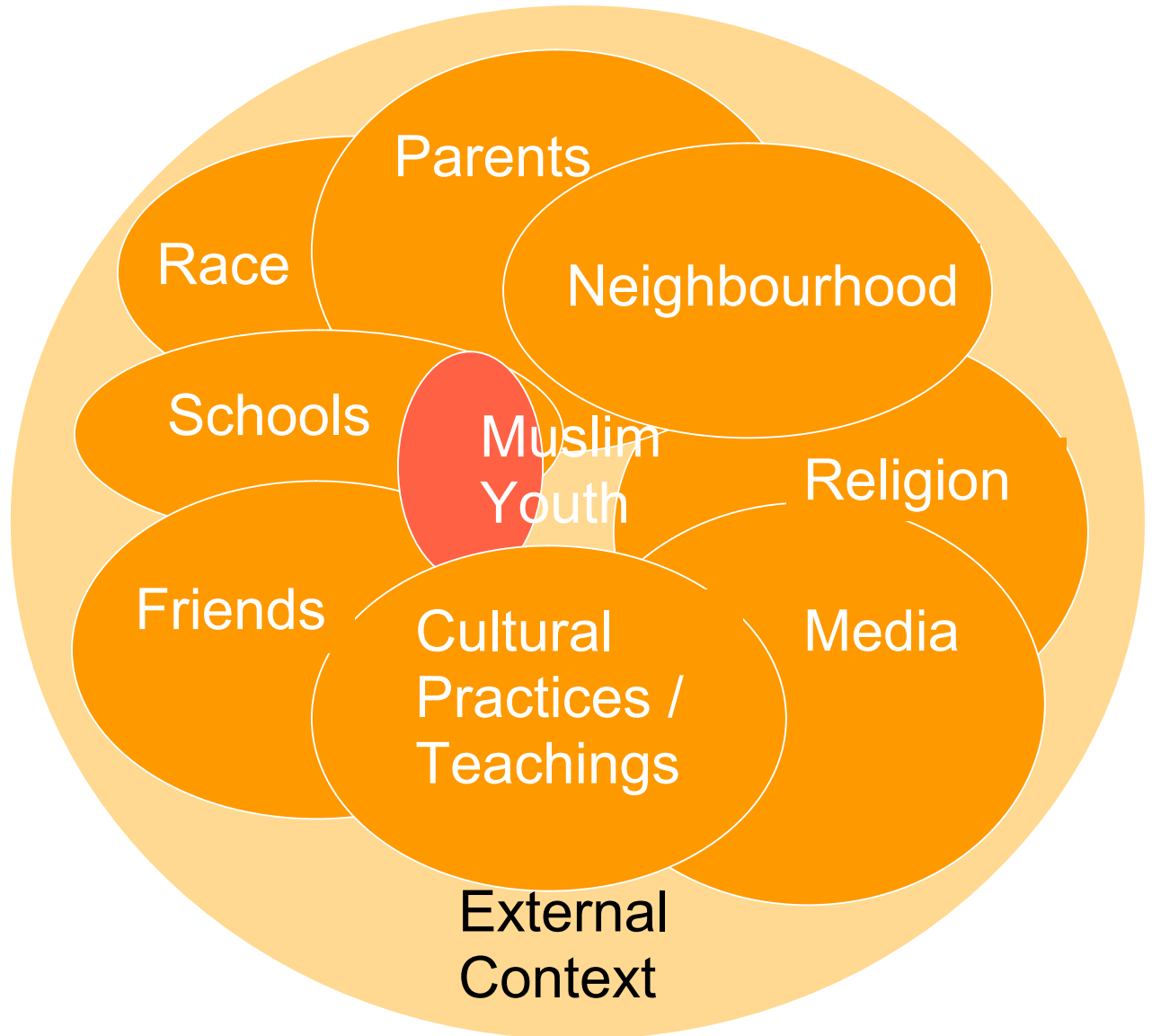
At the same time, we wanted to acknowledge and respect the individual agency of each young person to determine what messages they were accepting and rejecting. Diagram 1 (below) attempts to reflect the dialectic relationship that was used as the framework for the project.

Erik Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist introduced the notion that the social, cultural, and historical context is the ground in which individual identity is embedded. What has been my social context becomes a critical question. “Was I surrounded by people like myself, or was I part of a minority in my community? Did I grow up speaking English at home or another language? Did I live in a generic part of the city or a ghettoized part? (Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* p.19)

Acknowledging the complexity of identity, Erikson noted,

“ We deal with a process “*located*” in the core of the individual *and yet also in the core of his communal culture...* In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge in comparison to themselves...” (Erikson, Eric. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 1968)

Diagram 1: Factors that impact on Muslim Youth Identity



Muslim Youth are navigating many influences as they seek to define who they are and what their place is in society. Some of these influences are shown on the diagram and help inform how Muslim youth will see themselves and the world around them.

2. What does integration mean?

Integration of Muslim youth into Canadian society means that there are specific avenues and adjustments made in institutions to ensure that Muslim youth are able to acknowledge their cultural and religious identity in their lives, work and play and have specific opportunities to develop that identity. It also means that they can positively

influence Canadian social norms and institutions so that it continues to evolve to reflect a multicultural identity. Integration does not mean that Muslim youth are isolated into cultural and traditional norms that were historically or geographically relevant in another country.

Section D

Phase 1: Focus Groups

D. Phase 1: The Focus Groups

Two schools were identified as appropriate for holding focus groups:

- Deslauriers High School was the French school (All material used in the French school is in Appendix C)
- Ridgemont High School was the English school. (All material used in the English school is in Appendix B)

Both schools have a significant proportion of Muslim students, with estimates between one-third to one half of the students.

The initial step was to talk with the principals and get their support and engagement. Their first responses were enthusiastic. In the English school, the Principal invited us to a meeting of the parent group and the MLO, and joined the Steering Committee. In the French school, the principal introduced us to a school resource person who was to be a support to the project and appointed her to the Steering Committee.

A flyer explaining the project was prepared, along with a formal invitation letter to the principals of the schools, a letter to parents, and a consent form for parents and students. The material was translated. (See Appendices B and C)

There was a great deal of logistical work done by the MLO and school resource person in distributing materials, collecting consent forms and getting youth involved.

1. Methodology of the Focus Groups with the Youth

The focus groups with youth were held as planned in each of the two high schools. The format for the focus groups were:

- One with girls only
- One with boys only
- One mixed composed of the two groups together.

The gender specific focus groups used a combination of confidential questionnaires, discussion questions, and an open exercise in which students circulated around the room to write their comments on flipcharts under various headings (see Appendices B and C for facilitator guides, agendas, and handouts for youth). Youth in the mixed group were given a brief synopsis of the results from the two preceding gender-specific focus groups, as a starting point for an open discussion.

The sessions were co-facilitated by two to three facilitators. Every effort was made to provide Muslim facilitators of the same gender as the participants, and this was possible in all but one of the sessions, as the consultants were unable to identify a Muslim francophone male. The lead facilitator for that session has lived and worked extensively in Muslim countries. In each case, one of the co-facilitators acted as note-taker at the session.

Focus groups were held at lunch-time to enable participation, and food was provided. Despite the usual difficulties in collecting consent forms, there was a good level of attendance in all the sessions.

A total of 44 youth participated in the focus groups:

- 16 young women (French school)
- 8 young men (French school)
- 12 young women (English school)
- 8 young men (English school)

2. Methodology of the Focus Groups with Teachers

The original focus group for Ridgemont High School was planned for a date in December 2007. Shortly before the focus group, the Principal called telling us that a teacher had raised concerns that the process had not gone through formal approval by the School Board. Access to parents and school resource people came to an end as we submitted an application for doing the focus groups. The process for approval took three months and we did not meet with the teachers until May of 2008. At that meeting a small group of 6 staff attended, including the principal and vice-principal, and a detailed discussion was held during the lunch period.

At Deslauriers High School, a similar experience occurred. There was a great deal of openness on the part of the principal for us to participate. We were initially offered a workshop in the full staff meeting. The meeting was postponed three times. In the end we were given approximately 15 minutes of a regular full staff meeting, which did not permit extensive discussion. To supplement this, a brief questionnaire was distributed to teachers, however the staff person designated to collect the completed questionnaires left the school soon after, and as no one else was designated to gather the questionnaires, it was not possible to collect them before the end of the project.

(See Appendices B and C for the discussion questions and questionnaire distributed to teachers.)

3. Methodology of the Focus Group with Parents

In both schools, there was a considerable challenge in recruiting parents to attend focus groups. The vast majority of parents were immigrants and would be most comfortable attending a meeting if someone they knew in the community invited them. It was extremely helpful to be able to work with the MLOs in that they worked with the parents.

In Ridgemont, there was an active group of Somali parents who met regularly to discuss school affairs with the principal, and this group agreed to set aside one of their meetings for a focus group as part of the Muslim Youth Project.

Unfortunately, when the evening for the focus group arrived, parents explained that they preferred not to hold the discussion as their views on Islam differed from those of CCMW. CCMW offered to meet with the group to explain and discuss the concerns of the parents. The parents did not agree to meet as a group with CCMW and alternative methods were proposed to meet with parents. It was unfortunate that the parents did not

take the opportunity to dialogue with CCMW representatives as there were common goals and the misunderstandings could have been clarified.

In Deslauriers High School, the school contact was not a person who had extensive dealings with parents, and so was unable to recruit parents to a session.

The parent focus group that was eventually organized was based on CCMW's network of contacts in the community.

In the face of several challenges related to recruiting parents to a focus group through the schools involved in the project, it was decided to convene a focus group of parents outside the school system. CCMW sent invitations to a network of contacts in the Muslim community, and 13 parents attended a focus group held at City Hall.

4. Results from the Youth Focus Groups

Identity

The students were given a self-assessment in which the selected different ways that they self-identified. (See Appendix B, Handout 10 and Appendix C, Handout 8).

Participants from Ridgmont, both boys and girls, tended strongly to give equal weight to their multiple identities: Canadian, Muslim, country of origin. This was somewhat less true of the students at Deslauriers. They boys in particular most strongly identified as Muslim, then as being of their country of origin, and were much less likely to select multiple identities. The girls were slightly more likely than the boys to give equal weight to their various identities, however there was also strong identification with their country of origin as their primary identity, or with Muslim as their primary identity.

In discussion, the youth (especially those who give equal weight to their different identities) say they manage these multiple identities with comfort and ease, and see no conflict between these various aspects of themselves. However, the same is not true in the way others perceive them. Several youth indicated that, although they were born in Canada, they are often seen as coming from somewhere else. "I just say I'm from Somalia, because it's easier." If they travel outside Canada, for example in Europe or to their family's country of origin, they say they are Canadian.

In word association exercises, the students in both schools have strongly positive images of being Muslim, and of being Canadian. However, there are signs of concern. One word association response under Muslim was "police investigation" (which may relate to the disproportionate number of Somali youth in jail in Ottawa), and two under Canadian included the term "racist".

Comfort in Different Settings

As part of the self-assessment questionnaire referred to above, focus group participants were given a list of various settings and asked to rate their level of comfort in each of these situations. The chart below lists areas where each group of respondents were more comfortable or least comfortable. There were other situations, not listed in the

table, where the responses were more neutral. These rankings are discussed in more detail in the paragraphs below.

	Most comfortable	Least comfortable
Boys (Ridgemont)	Going to the mosque Going to school Going to the mall with friends Going on a date	Going to the mall without friends Riding on the bus Watching the news
Boys (Deslauriers)	Going to the mosque When Islam is raised in the classroom Going to a party Going to the mall with friends Going on a date Going to school	Going to the mall without friends Watching the news
Girls (Ridgemont)	Going to the mosque Going to the mall with friends Going to school When Islam is raised in the classroom Going to a party Riding on the bus	Going to the mall without friends Going on a date
Girls (Deslauriers)	Going to the mosque Going to school When Islam is raised in class Going to the mall with friends Going to a party	Going on a date Going to the mall without friends

Faith and Culture

One of the places where all of the participating youth feel at ease is at the mosque. This question received among the most positive reactions from all four groups of youth: boys and girls in both the English and French school. Youth also tended to link faith and culture, for example, referring to prayer under the discussion of cultural practices.

In the discussions, youth tended to identify many positive aspects of their faith and culture, e.g. “be the best you can be”, “respect others”, “gives me inner strength”.

School

Youth input suggests that they feel mostly positive about their school. The main reasons mentioned were the large number of Muslim students (“I attended another school before, and there was nobody to chill with”), and a general sense of being accepted. At Ridgemont, the prayer room and Friday prayers also created a sense of being accepted. This is not to say there were no concerns, and students did indicate the situation could

always be improved. A few indicated being questioned about their faith or their clothing (this is not always in a negative way), and a few indicated racist comments.

In addition to a general question about the level of comfort in being at school, there was a specific question about when Islam is raised in the classroom. Reactions to this question were a little more mixed, and, as one student commented, “it depends”. Overall, Islam is treated positively in the classroom, but there were some negative experiences where teachers were not respectful or were ignorant of Islam. What was clear from the students is that they are able to analyze and discern which teachers are respectful of their being Muslim and which are not.

Finding a Job

This was an area of mixed experiences, some positive and some negative. There were specific examples of discrimination on the basis of race and religion. The youth talked about how the jobs evaporated when they showed up to drop off their resume, or how the employer’s tone changed when they gave their name. Some girls prefer telemarketing jobs because the customer cannot see their hijab or skin colour. They joked about how they used false names sometimes, like Cynthia or Heather, because of the adverse reactions from customers when they gave their real names.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are not just an issue in employment. Negative attitudes confront them in many settings. A young woman born in Canada is asked, in exaggeratedly slow tones, about whether she likes this country. Some people discriminate, and others try so hard not to discriminate that it’s almost painful. In the view of the youth, these distortions are fuelled largely by the news media.

Media

Watching the news was one of the negative experiences identified by many youth, especially the young men. In their view, the media is one of the main contributors to stereotypes about Muslims. The coverage of terrorism emphasizes Islam as something to fear, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan highlight Muslims as the enemy. One young woman noted that when a soldier dies in Afghanistan “the world stops”, but when civilians die in that country from the war, there is not even a mention of it. Many of the youth said they do not believe what they see on Canadian media, and seek out other sources of information, including BBC and domestic news networks in their country of origin.

Challenges of second generation

Many of the youth were born or raised in Canada, but even those who have arrived recently are caught between two cultures: that of their parents and that of the dominant majority. They are very conscious of their parents’ sacrifice and the obstacles that their parents face in Canada. As a result, the youth feel a strong responsibility to succeed, in order to make their family’s sacrifice worthwhile. This sometimes translates into pressure to do well at school. “If I don’t get into university, I’m screwed.” To some extent, they are expected to succeed financially in order to help out with their family, including extended family in their original country.

Community

Many of the comments about neighbourhood settings indicate strong communities, where friends and neighbours speak with each other and keep an eye on the youth growing up (sometimes more closely than they would like). Some youth indicated that they were being observed by many members of the community at times.

Dating

Socializing with other young people, particularly of the opposite sex, is a delicate issue because young Muslims, like other young people, sometimes have different views from their parents. This is particularly challenging for sons and daughters of immigrants, for whom the expectations of the traditional culture are very different from the expectations of the youth's peers at school.

Both genders described how they sometimes did not completely share information with their parents about where they were, with whom and what they were doing. There were also some students who were most comfortable following the guidance of Islam around dating and did not support what other students were doing.

Gender

The girls and boys had different responses for several of the questions. For example, the table above shows some similarities and differences in terms of settings where they feel comfortable. The girls also talked about cultural and religious practices from a different perspective than the boys. Although both frequently mention the Quran and prayer, and a number of positive guidelines they receive from their faith, the girls sometimes had a list of "no's" (e.g. no boys, no parties, no drinking, no tight clothes).

Girls face particular discrimination if they wear the hijab because it makes their faith more visible. Also some girls feel disproportionate pressure to succeed in school: "If a boy fails a class, it's not a big deal. If a girl does, wow!"

The girls were consistently described as leaders and responsible. The boys were often described as needing more support and help. Their behaviours were often described as being outside of the norms of Islam and there was concerns raised about the disproportionate number of Somali boys in the Ottawa Detention Centre.

5. Results from the Parents Focus Group

The 13 parents who met in the focus group started by speaking in general terms about the experience of their children in Ottawa. Many of the parents had children in their late teens or early twenties, and so could reflect on the experience of the full spectrum of the educational system, from pre-school through high school and university. All the parents had examples of both positive and negative experiences for their children. Many of the children had been singled out or picked on by other students and by teachers at various points.

Recognizing the diversity of the Muslim community

Any strategies developed need to account for the diversity of the Muslim community and the importance of multiple approaches and avenues of engagement. Significant strides have been made over the last 30 years in how Muslims are integrated into Canada. Several of those present were able to reflect on a time when they were the only Muslims in their school or their neighbourhood. At the same time, much more action is needed.

What does integration mean?

Achieving integration is the responsibility of both those in the minority community and those in the dominant society. Parents discussed the complexity of identity, and the interplay of religion, race and culture. Muslims experience racism in different ways. The complex interplay between racist discrimination, intolerance based on their faith and the negative response to having immigrants in the country can lead to an inaccurate analysis of the situation that their youth are facing. Parents can sometimes see a rejection of certain aspects of the culture (e.g. children who are ashamed to wear traditional clothing) as linked in some way to a rejection of the faith. In fact, it is simply a youth trying to negotiate the negative messages they are getting from outside.

Supports that Youth need

The peers and friends of youth make an enormous difference in their self-esteem. This is why it is so important for non-Muslim children to have a basic understanding of Islam. One father described how his son's best friend helped him feel comfortable because the friend is Christian Lebanese and thus, although he is Christian, comes from a country with many Muslims and so is knowledgeable about Islam. This made the friendship easier to develop as there was a mutual understanding of the importance of the different religions in their lives.

Prayer rooms or Friday prayers in the schools are also a way to help students feel included and welcome, and quite a number of area high schools have them. However, the person who leads the prayers should be carefully chosen, and in some schools, they are required to submit to the principal an outline of what they will say, which seems reasonable.

Areas for Action

The parents identified three main areas for action.

1. Increase support for parents to integrate. Some parents, particularly those who are new immigrants, face enormous economic pressures – the number of single mothers was commented on, partly related to fathers who must leave to find work elsewhere. New immigrants need specific supports including mastering the language, more ESL support and other settlement services.

Parents do not know how to get involved in their children's schools, and this could be made more accessible. For example, imams could be asked to encourage parents to go to parent-teacher interviews, join the school council, and participate in parent activities at the school.

Parents do not always know how to talk with their children in this new culture, where it is clear that their children are learning new habits and practices, some of which the parents may not approve of. It was suggested that OCISO might prepare a “suggestion sheet” or “tools for parents” to assist newcomer parents as part of the settlement process, and help them keep the communication channels open as their children find their way in a new environment.

2. Improve the education system. It was clear that each school is different, and that some are much more open and welcoming of Muslim students than others. Parents readily agreed with each other on the names of several “good” schools, as well as other schools where their children had encountered barriers. From this experience, it was clear to the parents that there must be identifiable practices that make a school more inclusive. These practices need to be identified and shared throughout the school system.

Three key supports that the parents listed from their own experience:

- a supportive principal,
- accurate information in the classroom about Islam, and
- openness to other cultures generally.

With regard to the second point, one parent referred to a review of textbooks which showed that Muslim children could not see themselves in the materials. Teachers need training, and materials to work with. Some work has already been done to prepare a 12-segment curriculum that introduces basic facts and ideas related to Islam.

The experience of those parents who participated in the focus group was that positive work has been done in the English school board, but that there are more challenges in the French system for Muslim students. This may possibly relate to the pressures that Canadian francophones feel in protecting their own cultural identity, making it more difficult to accommodate other religious or cultural backgrounds.

3. The need for dialogue within the Muslim community. There are many diverse views and approaches to Islam, and some elements of the community can be judgmental of those who hold other views. It is important for the community to take the initiative and provide more opportunities for dialogue and exchange, to create more openness about what constitutes being a “good Muslim”. This will help create an environment that strengthens children growing up here in Ottawa and enable them to appreciate the breadth of the Muslim community.

6. Results from the Focus Groups with School Staff

Two discussions were held with school staff, one in Ridgemont High School and one in Deslauriers. Both sessions started with a brief synopsis of the major points emerging from the youth focus groups in that high school. The Ridgemont session was held after the parents focus group, and so included a summary of that discussion as well.

Ridgemont High School

The session at Ridgemont acknowledged that they had experienced some difficulties in engaging parents in the school. The homework club had been a good inroad, and a

group of Somali parents meet regularly at the school with the principal, the MLO and sometimes other staff. However, the school has had less success with Muslim parents of other backgrounds (principally Arabic-speaking), because they do not all share the same cultural background, and this seems to be a helpful bond for the Somali parents.

Teachers observed that because students have the opportunity to meet with people of various faiths and cultures, they are often exposed to new ideas and perspectives. Students tend to bring a very open mind to this experience, for example, Muslim youth tend to be less caught up in divisions and disagreements among Muslims (e.g. Sunni/Shia) than their elders. Nor do they participate in the great divides between faiths, such as between Islam and Judaism. As one teacher put it, “They are baffled by the notion that religion is the basis for bigotry.”

Another result of the exposure to the experiences of others is that they sometimes discover that practices and beliefs they had attributed to Islam are actually culturally-based and not necessarily shared by Muslims from other countries who they meet at Ridgemont.

The staff at Ridgemont are very proud that they have been able to create an environment in which students of all backgrounds feel welcome, including Muslims. However, they are concerned that Ridgemont is becoming identified as “the Muslim school”, which may lead to students of other backgrounds to choose another school and Ridgemont would perhaps lose some of the diversity that enriches the school.

The focus group also invited comparisons between Ridgemont and other high schools on the basis of indicators such as level of violence, in which they feel Ridgemont would compare favourably, despite recent media reports.

Actions

Encourage the support the concept of community schools at the School Board, in which students attend the school in their neighbourhood community. If students (and more specifically, parents) are able to choose any school in the system, subtle prejudices may shape their decisions rather than pure considerations of quality of education.

Students have prepared a number of videos about Ridgemont and what makes it the kind of school it is, and why students from various backgrounds feel comfortable there. These videos may be useful to others who want to promote these kinds of practices at other high schools.

Deslauriers High School

The session in Deslauriers was more time limited, and comments focused primarily on the issue of a prayer room in the school. The issue of a prayer room was raised in the mixed focus group at Deslauriers as an example of different approaches that schools can take. In the English system, schools have been told that they may provide a prayer room at the request of Muslim students, on condition that they respond equitably to students of other faiths, should they come forward with their own requests. This has led to the situation where a number of high schools in the English system have prayer rooms. The French school board does not have that directive. In Deslauriers, after an extensive discussion, a decision was made that, because it is a secular school, there will

be no prayers or other religious practices by the school, whether Christian, Muslim or of other faiths.

Although this point was only raised towards the end of the mixed focus group, it was a point that caught the attention of the teachers, and there was significant concern raised at the teachers discussion group. It seems likely that this debate will continue, as the students are not clear about the reasons for one approach in the English system and another in the French system. The historical context is quite different in English-speaking and French-speaking communities in Canada, which logically led to these two decisions, and students are not necessarily aware of this history.

While a questionnaire was handed out to teachers at Deslauriers (see Appendix C – Handout 9) Catalyst did not receive them back as the school resource person we had been working with left the school.

Section E

Muslim Youth Conference

Section E: Muslim Youth Conference

The Muslim Youth conference open to the public was held at the RA Centre in Ottawa on May 25, 2008. (See Appendix D, Handouts 4 and 5 for promotional flyer and press release.) The day-long conference was attended by 100 people, including 60 youth and 40 parents and community resource people. Over 18 youth were actively involved in organizing the conference.

The conference was organized to include a number of key elements:

- Keynote speaker on what is happening in Ontario around Muslim youth
- A presentation on Phase 1
- Morning workshops for youth where they can share their thoughts through different mediums (written, video and drama) about different issues affecting them as Muslim youth
- Lunch
- Parents and schools and community people are invited in the afternoon to see and hear the messages.
- Discussions amongst youth, parents and community people on how to move forward.
- Closing speakers that provide suggestions on how to move forward

The conference opened with a documentary prepared by the youth members of the committee. In it they interviewed five Muslim youth and asked a number of questions including:

- What are some challenges did you face growing up as a Muslim Youth in Canada?
- What can be done to overcome these challenges?
- If you could dispel one misconception that people have about your background as a Muslim Youth what would it be?
- What challenges do you face in trying to balance your hyphenated identities?
- Do you think you can identify closely with both your Canadian identity and your identity as a Muslim or is there a disconnect?
- What would you attribute to fostering a sense of belonging?
- What are some issues that you face as a young Muslim woman?
- Finish this sentence, "I feel proud to be a Canadian Muslim youth of tomorrow because..."
- What is one positive word you would use to describe your future as a Canadian Muslim youth?
- Are there any messages that you would like to send?

1. What's Going On with Muslim Youth in Ontario?

Keynote speaker: Saadiq Malik - President of Somali Student Association at Ryerson
(The entire speech can be found in Appendix G)

Many members of our community have come to this country, from all around the world in search of a better life- often escaping tyranny, war, persecution ...And like the thousands of immigrants before them, they have experienced the barriers that come with integrating into a new society, a new world- not understanding the language; unaware of the help and opportunities available to them; not fully conscious of their rights and responsibilities.

These barriers are somewhat natural and expected by new immigrants, especially when you consider the countries they migrated from. Nonetheless it is also expected that with time they should be able to overcome these obstacles. That after a reasonable amount of time not only should they be fully integrated and successful members of this nation...

Still, though this promise is realized by millions of Canadians, there are far too many of us to whom it remains nothing more than empty rhetoric- and not because of lack of effort. Too many Canadians face unjust and unlawful afflictions. In many cases the perpetrators are simply individuals, whether they be policemen, border officials, school counselors, or employers. In other cases it is major institutions like the RCMP, as was evident in its handling of the Maher Arar case. In any case it is indisputable that far too many Canadians are prevented from enjoying the rights and rewards that are promised to every citizen. Even one case is too many. Now through protests, court cases and petitioning we are perhaps able to confront this problem.

We must understand that the root of all discrimination, or at least in most cases, is ignorance. There are those who are just plain spiteful. But for the most part it is ignorance that leads to discrimination. The lack of understanding of different people's histories and backgrounds; cultures and traditions often makes people suspicious which then transforms to fear and ultimately discrimination. Thus although demonstrations and litigations are important tools in the fight for a just and free society ultimately the eradication of bigotry can only come through education.

And this is where we, the youth, become the most crucial component in this struggle for a better and more prosperous society. Yet our society is failing us miserably. It is failing to understand our struggles; failing in making us part of the solution and instead is often dismissive and overly patriarchal.

Time and again, we are negotiating and trying to reconcile issues that are often way beyond our years and with very little assistance. We have to reconcile ideals that are conveyed through our studies and by our leaders, with a reality that is often the exact opposite.

Islam is a religion of peace and our war is against Islamic terrorists.. What?... Come again?... Islam is a religion of peace but we apparently are fighting Islamic terrorists.

That is impossible. I mean the absurdity in that statement is so clear it would have been humorous if it weren't for its serious implications. Terrorists are by definition violent, non-peaceful- and so you can not have an individual that is both peaceful and violent. He can only be one so pick one. He is either a Muslim, which you confess is peaceful, or a terrorist, which by definition makes him violent. One. He can't be both. Oh he can because he is a terrorist who claims to represent Islam. Okay then why do we not refer to the IRA as the Irish terrorists?...or as the catholic terrorists?...The KKK as the American terrorists?...They were violent...They claimed to represent others who did not share their views. These are not just words. People may be quick to dismiss this...but it is not mere misfortune that sent Maher Arar to Syria to be tortured for over a year. It is not coincidence that religious profiling by our security officers against Muslims has dramatically increased in the last few years. It is not coincidence that many of my friends are afraid to admit to US border officials the fact that they are engineering students. We, those of us born and/or raised in this country and thus have the fortune of understanding the system are aware of the harmful implications of statements like "The War against Islamic terrorists."

Yet we are unable to point this out because we are continuously sidelined by our community. Left to watch helplessly as our nation is divided and turned against each other. False divisions created by individuals and groups whose goals are not ours; whose intentions are hidden and covered by false propaganda and baseless slander aimed to advance their own agendas. The ideals and values championed by this country are at their core similar to those expected from us by our faith. Tolerance; respect for human life; justice; equal treatment of one another- do upon others what you want done upon you. Yet in today's rhetoric and subsequent actions it is hard to recognize that. And as a result there is emerging an unnecessary rupture of our society. Causing us grief and misery. Confusion and frustration. Especially to those of us who have an understanding- a sense of belonging to both sides.

Like many others in our generation, Muslim youths have to struggle with the traditional distractions and temptations of drugs, alcohol, sex, gangs and the like. In addition, like most youth whose parents are recent immigrants, we also face the uphill climb of figuring the system out without the guidance of our parents and not because they don't love us or don't have the will, but because they haven't gone through it themselves and thus are unable to give us experience-based advice. Indeed that is why we tend to stumble more than our classmates.

So there you have it two layers of obstacles and stumbling blocks. Enough to make most youth fall to the wayside. However with Muslim youth there is the additional burden of having to defend and reconcile the two biggest elements of their identity- their faith and their nationality. Ironically for those of us who have been able to successfully reconcile the two- we find out that not only are they compatible but that they indeed can coexist just fine.

Nonetheless there are far too many youths who fail to realize that the ideals of this country and the values of our faith are harmonious. As such they either isolate themselves or rebel. Both of which can have detrimental affect to themselves; our community and our nation. Those who isolate themselves, often loose the opportunity to advance; contribute to our society; and emphasize the depiction of Muslims as

isolationist. Those who rebel can throw the baby with the water per say; and simply disown their faith or country; and/or in some extreme cases turn violent.

To prevent this we must confront those who divide us; whatever their background. We must strive to teach and learn from each others experiences. Our diversity is a blessing and must be used to further enrich our society rather than tearing us apart. We must remind ourselves and celebrate the ideals of this country and always defend them as one regardless of who is the victim and who is the victimizer. And finally we must work together to inspire and uplift our youth so that we can attain our potential. We must resist becoming a society with millions of reasons for why we can not live together and move to the promise of our ideals and instead become a society which remembers the difficulties and contributions made by both immigrants and those who welcomed them.

2. What's going on with Muslim Youth in Ottawa? – What we heard

Presenters: Muna Nur and Faiza Hassan

A powerpoint presentation that provided highlights of the results of Phase 1. (see Appendix E)

3. Workshops and Presentations by the Youth

In the morning youth went into four different workshops:

1. Girls drama
2. Boys drama
3. Written word
4. Video Workshop

The work they did in the morning was used to start off the afternoon.

The girls drama workshop produced a Tyra Banks style talk show where they showed skits and did interviews with girls on what it was like to be discriminated against at school and in social settings. The skits depicted a young Muslim girl being taken advantage of by having others do her homework, her being lied to about a party and the dynamic between her mother and herself. The underlying message of the skit was to be true to be yourself, to be strong and everything will work out.

The boys drama workshop produced a CNN interview with Muslim terrorists. The terrorists wished death on others and the boys really dramatized the stereotypes about Muslims as terrorists. The second half of the interview was an interview with a Muslim. The Muslim man talked about how Muslims strive for and believe in peace. They were clearly influenced by the key note speakers messages in the morning and did a good job of showing the distinction between a terrorist and a Muslim.

The written word workshop produced a number of poems and pictures and some of them are in the report.

Poem

We are strong intelligent Muslim girls
We do have a voice and it should be heard
Just because we are of a different race we
are not mean,
We can be funny, beautiful, intellectual if
U get to know us
We should not be lower class because of
our race
We believe a black president is possible
Like Barack Obama

The video workshop did a type of interviews from the street and asked the youth a number of key questions similar to the ones in the open documentary. Again, the responses were thoughtful but overall optimistic.

We then asked the audience to respond to the presentations. Youth stated that they learned that they are not alone, and that others are facing the same discrimination.

In discussing the pressures they face, it became clear to the youth and the parents and community members present that it is not easy to be Muslim when surrounded by non-Muslims, and particularly when facing discrimination and ignorance.

Participants also said they learned that the experience of girls can be different, and that they had not necessarily been aware of what girls are going through, and the discrimination they face based on religion and appearances.

Poem: “More To Me Than Meets The Eye”

A fading voice behind a crowd of ignorance
 I’m a youth and as a youth I want to be heard
 We need to educate, inform and facilitate
 A voice that makes change in our world
 I want to
 Strive for a difference
 Advocate for change
 And continue to learn
 Don’t be fooled by
 The clothes I wear
 The place I live
 And the colour of my skin
 There’s more to me than meets the eye
 A fading voice I will not remain
 My message will be heard
 And echoed throughout the WORLD

(This poem was produced in the Written Word workshop)

One of the key messages from the presentations were that Muslim youth need to respond to these difficult situations firstly, by being strong in their own identity and by being themselves. Both Muslims and non-Muslims need to deal with discrimination by ensuring equality prevails and by treating everyone fairly. It is important not just to equip youth to cope with difficulties, but to get to the root of the problem, and address the causes of discrimination. One of the ways to fight ignorance and discrimination is through education.

Another message was that youth see that their parents know youth are facing struggles and frustrations and try to help, but sometimes they “don’t get it”, or are confused and not always sure how to support youth. Youth also acknowledged that they do not always accept the help offered.

Finally, youth felt one of the key messages of the presentations was that youth can make a difference, and that they have a voice that needs to be heard. Youth also said

that, through the workshops, they learned that they can convey their message in many ways, through rap, poetry, video, etc.

“We shouldn’t care about the outside, it’s what’s inside that counts.”

4. What is Needed to Support Muslim Youth in Ottawa?

There were ten very animated small groups of youth, parents and community representatives that were asked to identify solutions and supports needed by youth, parents, the school system and the community. The issue identification is in this section and solutions are in Section G of this report.

Youth identified issues

Their self-image and identity can become confused as they struggle to be clear about who they are in the wider society. Some commented that growing up with non-Muslims, and the associated peer pressure and desire to be accepted, creates a struggle in maintaining their culture. Also, being religious is hard in Western society with the media and other pressures focused on material goods and external success.

Youth felt the presence of racism and discrimination, in part through exclusion in various ways, including name calling and being left out. Youth feel they need to fight for rights which have already been given to them, but which are not being respected. Flowing from this misunderstanding and discrimination, there is a lack of trust between youth and the mainstream society in some instances. As some youth said, “We need to close the gap.”

Youth commented on how challenging it is to get a job in Canada, how minorities get blamed for crime and other problems. When a Muslim commits a crime, their religion is emphasized, while that is not true for people of other faiths.

There were particular concerns raised about the school system, in which youth feel there is often a lack of sensitivity or understanding of Islam. It is frustrating to learn from teachers who are ignorant about Islam, and who are sometimes very judgmental. In some schools students are afraid to leave class in order to pray. Teachers sometimes have lower expectations of Muslim students and do not provide the kind of encouragement that youth need to succeed.

The media often portrays Islam in a very negative light and links all Muslims with terrorism, which distorts the truth and feeds the misunderstanding and prejudice which surrounds Muslim youth. People are presumed to be guilty because of their religion.

Youth also recognized the challenges of dealing with such a diversity of communities in Ottawa, including diversity within the Muslim community. There is a certain amount of culture shock experienced when youth are trying to reconcile their own culture with what is going on around them.

It was mentioned that there are double standards for young men and young women. There should be equal opportunities for both genders.

Another area of concern is that Muslim youth do not always get fully involved in the community, and play their full role as citizens of Canada. Sometimes this is inhibited and limited by the discrimination and assumptions they face. However, it is important for youth to take the initiative to be involved and speak out.

Challenges and conflicts within the family can also occur, and youth need guidance and assistance about how to cope with these and find a solution that respects all concerned.

Youth who are minorities in the Muslim community (e.g. francophone Muslims) also face additional barriers.

Parent identified issues

Parents identified concerns and issues they face. They want to be a positive role model for their children, and often find this hard in their circumstances. Parents are concerned about having enough time with their children and being there for them after school, while juggling work demands and financial pressures. This is exacerbated by the economic exclusion of new immigrants and their poor job prospects.

The lack of support systems in the community for parents in general and new immigrants in particular mean that parents often do not know what resources are out there or how to access them. Language barriers add to this difficulty.

The school system is very daunting for parents. There are high expectations of new immigrants: that they speak English or French, that they know the school's role vs. parents' role, that they know what to do and who to talk to about specific issue, and so on. There is a missing link between school and parents. In addition, sometimes schools are not honest with parents about how their child is doing. As a result of all these difficulties, parents sometimes have difficulty trusting the school system.

5. The Wall Chart “Muslim Youth Speak”

A long sheet of paper was posted on one wall of the plenary room as a “graffiti board”, and youth were invited to write any comments they wished on the sheet. Following are the comments that were written.

- Respect for all Muslims
- Don't believe that all Muslims are terrorists
- Peace to Everyone
- Islam is about negotiation
- Muslims are honest and peaceful
- Muslims are reasonable
- Pray Salat
- Believe in Allah or else
- If you know religion you know yourself and if you know yourself you know other people
- Only Allah can judge me
- For those who don't know...it's “Islam” not “eezlam”

- Learn about yourself through serving others
- Muslim girls have fun too
- Smile – it works
- Happiness is the cure to depression
- L.O.V.E – life, opportunity, equality
- Don't worry, be happy
- Allahu Akbar
- Patience in the face of calamity
- Peace is not a piece of cake. It takes work – Fazia
- The after life is the real life
- Think, Learn, Life – Islam
- When you remember Allah, Allah remembers you
- Muslim girls just wanna have fun!

6. Closing Speeches – Moving Forward to Support Muslim Youth

Different people were asked to speak to close the conference. All of them were asked to describe what their organizations are doing to support Muslim Youth and to offer some suggestions for the youth.

- **Ahmad Luqman** is currently leading the Muslim Youth of Ottawa, a local volunteer organization for the youth.
- **David Farthing** is the Executive Director of YOUCAN. YOUCAN is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to building a culture of peace among youth.
- **Sahra Said** is member of the Canadian-Somali Mothers Association.

All of their messages were consistent. They asked the youth to be strong in themselves and to use the programs that do exist for them already. They encouraged them to continue to follow their cultural and religious teachings in order to know themselves and to guide themselves when they made decisions. Dave Farthing, the Executive Director of YOUCAN invited the youth to join the organization as they have Muslim mentors who they could work with.

Section F

Literature Review

F. Literature Review

Note: Muna Nur prepared the Literature review. Muna chose to develop the literature review more as a paper and provided her viewpoints on a number of key issues affecting Muslim youth. The editing changes were done by Catalyst Research and Communications.

The number of Muslims living in Canada has doubled in recent years. In 1991 there were 253 000 Muslims living in Canada and the number has increased to nearly 580, 000 in 2001. Muslims now represent 2% of the total Canadian population¹ and comprise a variety of immigrants from countries around the world representing various linguistic, national and racial backgrounds.

The Muslim population is also significantly younger, with a median age of 28 years compared to the median age of the total Canadian population, which is 37 years of age.²

Ethnic communities in Canada are free to maintain their heritage and their religious identity. The Canadian constitution makes no distinction on the basis of race, ethnic origin, colour or creed. Religious and other fundamental rights are fully guaranteed.³

When it comes to religion 76% of Canadian Muslims ranked religion as being important to them.⁴ “The diversity of Islam is displayed by Canadian Muslims as they maintain different interpretations of Islam – some are very traditional in practice whereas others are creating their own distinctive sense of a Muslim identity.”⁵

Muslims who live as a minority in Canada have indicated that they face discrimination and racism. Lack of information and general misconceptions about Islam and its values are factors that lead to discrimination and racism.⁶

Muslim Youth

Young Muslims are not immune to this as they are often victims of discrimination and social exclusion on different levels in society. The younger generation of Muslim Canadians is coming of age in a predominantly western culture; about half are now born in the West as distinct from their parents, who migrated here in the 1950s and 1960s. As such, Canadian Muslim youth negotiate the continuity of their Islamic identity and practices while contending with the challenges of living in environments which often present conflicting cultural values and practices.

In exploring the challenges of youth identity formation among Punjabhi-Sikh Youth in Toronto, Jagjeet Kaur Gill helps us to understand identity as a “socially constructed, fluid concept that is an increasingly complex phenomenon for the children and youth of immigrants, especially when they are raised in a mainstream environment such as the Canadian milieu.”⁷

Muslim Youth struggle with the essential challenges of transitioning from childhood to adulthood while developing a personal, cultural and religious identity in the face of

shifting expectations from parents, school, peers and community. For some of these youth, especially those dealing with multiple oppressions, such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender, mediating the often conflicting demands from the mainstream culture, while navigating their own culture, ethnicity, religion, and community influences can be extremely difficult.

Identity

The concept of identity is a complex one and is shaped by multiple factors. “Who am I?” The answer to this question depends in large part on the “who” the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers and my neighbours? What do I learn from the media about myself?”⁸ The answers to all of these questions and many more will impact how Muslim youth see themselves. Social scientist Charles Cooley once reflected, “Other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.”⁹

This concept of a mirror is also linked to the idea that the parts of a person’s identity that capture the attention of others are more about others and what they notice and reflect back to them. Often, it is the parts of their identity that set people apart as exceptional or “other” that receive the most attention from other people.¹⁰

Research has shown that, “unlike their immigrant parents who have previous identities to draw on – their identities from their home countries – second generation youth who develop in contexts of outsidership have never been anything other than immigrants or visible minorities.”¹¹ These youth are neither part of their parent’s cultural landscapes nor are they completely part of the “Canadian” mainstream. They are at greater risk of developing a negative self-identity because they may come to believe that no matter how much they try to belong they will always be perceived as outsiders.¹²

Many of the concerns faced by Muslim youth relate to the maintenance of Islamic identity. Adolescent social pressures such as dating, premarital sex and drugs and alcohol use complicate the daily lives and schooling experiences of Muslim youth. These practices, which have become part of youth culture in North America, are strictly forbidden in Islam. Therefore the religious values and life styles of a Muslim can be difficult to maintain in a society based on often contradictory secular norms.¹³

Muslim youth must struggle to negotiate an identity within three often conflicting cultural frameworks, the dominant culture, their ethnic culture and Islam. These multiple identities also create distance from the dominant society by accentuating specific degrees of racial and religious difference.¹⁴

Studies suggest that the more comfortable that youth feel about their ethnic, religious identity, the more they are able to empathize with their peers, are more likely to initiate contact with peers who may be from a different ethnic background, and the greater their academic achievement.¹⁵

Peer Pressure

There are peer pressures that often influence Muslim youth to move away from religious boundaries. Negative peer pressure can come from Muslim students who follow cultural norms of the mainstream, Muslim students who are hard-line in their practices as well as

non-Muslims. According to the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, there is often a lack of acknowledgement on the part of older generations that Muslim girls are confronted with the same issues as male children and that this does include drugs, violence and sex as outlined above.¹⁶

This in many cases leads to the split-personality syndrome or “double-life syndrome”¹⁷ faced by Muslim youth who develop a double identity in order to contend with competing cultural demands of home and school. These youth are forced to develop an identity to deal with peer pressure at school and another to conform to conflicting cultural demands of the home and community; this situation ultimately leads to confusion and dissonance among these youths.

Peer pressure can also come from Muslim youth who are practicing their religious practices and are prepared to report to parents and religious leaders on the conduct of their fellow peers.

Peer pressure experienced by Muslim youth may also be positive. Positive peer pressure is derived from the social networks that youth are able to develop within the Muslim community. Muslim student associations in high schools constitute a form of positive peer pressure. They are organized to provide peer support and guidance to Muslim students in both social and religious matters. When youth are confronted with racism and peer pressure the ability to see themselves as part of a larger group from which they can draw support is an important coping strategy.¹⁸ Positive peer influence and support from fellow Muslims are a means of reinforcing Islamic values as well as developing friendship among other Muslims who are confronting similar challenges.¹⁹

Retention of Religion

The process of maintaining a distinctive religious identity relies upon the cohesion of group members. The level of freedom found in Canadian society may help to maintain Islamic identity for members of the Islamic community. The freedom makes it easy for Muslims to build religious institutions such as mosques, and full time schools where Islamic identity may be preserved in group contexts.²⁰

Commitment to religious beliefs is one of the strongest factors influencing the preservation of Islamic identity. Religious identification serves as an anchor amidst the contradictions faced by religiously marginalized” youth as they negotiate their identities within a multiethnic, multiracial society.²¹

Social networks that enable youth to resist peer pressures include Islamic halaqas or study circles at mosques. These provide youth with systems of effective support as well as being a traditional means for the study of Islamic knowledge.²²

Relationships and Family Dynamics

One of the greatest challenges facing Muslims in Canada is trying to raise their children according to their tradition, culture and religion. Some parents may be unwilling to adapt to their surroundings and this can lead to not only a generational gap, but also a cultural gap between parents and their children.²³ Parents are worried about the negative influences of contemporary culture on their children. Parents recognize their roles and influence as parents are changing as their children become part of the Canadian culture.

Although parental authority is strong within the Islamic tradition, parents living in Canada often experience challenges to this traditional authority over their children. It is not uncommon for conflict to arise between traditional values and the values of the host culture which appear not to include respect for this traditional form of authority.²⁴

Parents of adolescents sometimes believe that their children risk abandoning their traditional Islamic values in favour of acquiring new, less distinct ones and consequently losing their Islamic identity. What is haram (forbidden) in Islam according to the Shar'iah may not be illegal in Canadian law or custom. Conflicts between these two ways of thinking often confuse adolescents, influencing their communication with their parents and challenging their sense of identity. The freedom that is permitted by Canadian laws concerning these practices is often perceived by Muslim parents as contributing to an eventual loss of control over their children.²⁵

Parents are thus faced with the difficult problem of how to combat adolescent peer pressure and explain to their children that although practices such as alcohol use and premarital sex are legal in Canada, it is not legal according to the Shari'ah. These problems are even greater for second generation Muslims whose Canadian values are in direct conflict with the original values of their immigrant parents.²⁶ These types of conflicts may be especially difficult for young Muslim women because of their position in the family and the community.²⁷ They may be considered and expected to be the "bearers of culture", that is to maintain traditions, cultural symbols and norms of a particular group.²⁸ Girls in particular may be expected to maintain cultural practices that are not widely accepted in Canadian society.²⁹

Parenting in a New Culture

The most startling change and integration challenge to which parents have had to accommodate themselves is that their Muslim identities and those of their children can no longer be taken for granted. They now live in a world of competing religions, which translates into competing value systems. The value system by the secular west appears to be frighteningly at variance with their beliefs and traditions. The fear and concern of parents is whether it is possible to instill Muslim values and traditions in their children in multi-religious secular world.

As the children more readily learn and adapt to the values of the dominant Canadian culture, it may lead to increased conflict between them and their parents. These intergenerational conflicts and misunderstandings often center on practices not common in Islam. Minorities in Canada may find that their traditional cultural and religious practices are interpreted differently, most often negatively by the majority society. The power dynamics may shift towards the children as they often have better command of English, are more aware of the social services available to families and often act as interpreters for their parents. In response to the new culture and multiple challenges, parents try to hold on to their religion and values. Many parents assume that their teenage children are lost because they see them experiment with styles of socialization, clothing and bring home habits and vocabulary of their new environment.³⁰

These Muslim immigrants to Canada find themselves deprived of the social structures, which encourage the practice of Islam and help them maintain their Islamic identity. Instead they find a culture where religion constitutes only a fraction of people's lives.³¹

For some of these new immigrants the process of being a good Muslim in the West involves building walls around their community and finding relative isolation from the mainstream society. For others however, the process involves a gradual accommodation of traditional customs to those of the society without losing what they consider to be essential to themselves as Muslims.³²

Racism and Discrimination

Statistics show that in Canada, among Muslims who are fifteen year of age or older, six in ten (56%) have some level of post-secondary education. This number drops to 44% of the total Canadian population.³³ This difference is attributed to higher rates of post-secondary graduation rates of Muslims.³⁴

In addition, for Muslims aged fifteen or older, both the mean and median individual income is approximately \$8 000 less than the total population.³⁵ The unemployment rate in 2001 for those that identified themselves as Muslim was almost twice as high as the total population.³⁶ Numerous studies on wage-gap differentials between visible minorities and the total Canadian population have found that discrimination may be at the core of these disparities.³⁷

Institutionalized Racism and Education

Institutional racism consists of those established laws, customs and practices that systematically reflect and produce inequalities regardless of whether the individuals maintaining these practices have racist intentions. In society where there is institutionalized racism there is little prospect for social and economic advancement of minority groups.³⁸

Despite Canada's commitment to multiculturalism, institutionalized racism persists. Integrating into a society where people are identified by racial and religious categories is problematic especially when discrimination based on these categories permeates every aspect of their lives.³⁹ Of particular relevance to Muslim youth is the extent to which it is practiced and/or reinforced at various levels within the educational system.

Today's classrooms comprise students who increasingly reflect the diverse mix of social, ethnic, class, gender differences and interests in society.⁴⁰ Educators, teachers and parents are trying to come to terms with the diverse nature of our schools. There is increasing awareness that Canadian society is multicultural and that the education system should prepare citizens to cope with the national and global realities. The current educational system has had mixed responses to addressing the complex issues of identity for Muslim youth. A broader and more significant question continues to arise as to what is the role of the educational system in integration of students in a multicultural society?

Among the challenges faced by Muslim youth navigating the education system, issues related to inclusion and engagement are of particular concern. In order for schools to carry out any exemplary educational practice, and to establish a genuine inclusion of all students, it is crucial that there is a comprehensive understanding of the nature and context of specific problems and experiences that lead to student disengagement. There is need for a critical examination of the structures for delivering education in order to unravel how schools themselves contribute fundamentally to the problem of student

disengagement faced by minority Muslim youth.⁴¹ In order to address this disengagement schools must provide Muslim youth with identity-affirming experiences and information about their own culture as part of the curriculum.

Colour Coded Streaming

Research suggests that immigrant parents, regardless of ethnic background, have high aspirations for their children. However, a lack of familiarity with the school system, inability to understand information provided by the schools and a preoccupation with making a living can impede parents' ability to help children realize these ambitions.⁴²

One practice which parents may be unaware of is colour coded streaming. In schools the practice of colour coded streaming whereby a disproportionate number of racially and ethnically marginalized youth are channeled into lower, non academic streams is an example of institutionalized racism.⁴³ The channeling of students from specific racial and ethnic groups into lower non-collegiate streams reproduces social inequality by constructing a frame work that systematically differentiates, divides and distributes individuals into positions of advantage and disadvantage based on race and class divisions.⁴⁴

Streaming can be a process by which stereotyping becomes formalized by the educational system. Streaming students into different academic levels (general, advanced) has real implications for their educational chances.⁴⁵ Students who enter high school at the basic level find barriers and little encouragement to proceed to another stream. In most cases students are not fully aware of the consequences of streaming and the impact it would have on their future options.⁴⁶ The outcome of this process is low self-esteem, limited life chances, channeling into inappropriate careers or disengagement from school entirely.⁴⁷

Low Teacher Expectations

Lack of encouragement and low teacher expectations are seen not only as compounding the effects of streaming, but also adding to already negative stereotypes of racialized youth. Low teacher expectations of racial and ethnic minority youth can lead to negative evaluation and bias in assessment as well as underachievement. These low expectations are informed by negative racialized stereotypes and negative assumptions about Islam such as the notion that Islam doesn't value education for girls.⁴⁸ Low teacher expectations of Muslim youth can contribute to the perception of their inferiority and lead to feelings of alienation and marginalization. The identification of difference as foreignness is an attitude that often frames the relationships between Muslim students and teachers. Low teacher expectations are conveyed through a hidden curriculum within schools.⁴⁹

Hidden Curriculum

Hidden curriculum in schooling is a process through which attitudes and behaviors of teachers and other school agents convey specific messages to students. These messages are often conveyed through a climate of preconceptions, which are fuelled by racial stereotypes.⁵⁰

An example of this is cross-cultural differences in communication between teachers and students. This can lead to a negative evaluation of minority students who are not able to conform to the language styles. Miscommunication is often based on the disjuncture between the standardization of white middle class communication styles and of ethnic and class based minority groups. The consequence of the mismatch between dominant cultural communication styles and those of other groups can result in the negative evaluation of minority students in special language based remedial programs. Miscommunication and misunderstandings due to cultural variations of socio-linguistic style are often attributed to presumed language deficits.⁵¹ English as second language (ESL) or English skills development (ESD) classes are common sometimes just because of differences in accents that is not speaking English according to proper standards. A process, which results in, a loss of hope for those placed in the lower non-collegiate levels.

Conformity to the dominant cultural norms and standards of language has become one of the manifest purposes of schooling in Canada with lasting repercussions for those who do not conform. Labeling students according to characteristic other than ability negatively impacts student's school success.⁵²

Many immigrant parents place their hopes for the future in their children, therefore their children's welfare in Canada is a critical issue. Without school or work to keep them occupied many teenagers spend their time in local hangouts with little to do. This may reinforce feelings of powerlessness and victimization.

Combating Institutionalized Racism

The different bodies in Canadian schools confirm that we are dealing with heterogeneous communities. There is need to address the genuine problems faced by students in the Canadian education system. The challenge of family, community, teachers, administrators and other educational stakeholders is to address questions of equality and social difference and knowledge production in the school system and beyond.⁵³

Understanding and supporting the politics and dynamics of religious identities within secular public schools is an important yet often neglected aspect of equality in education. While public schools may be secular in orientation many students are not. Religion and spirituality are key components of the way many people see the world and their place within it. Understanding how religion shapes the identities and worldviews of people is an important aspect of human, social and cultural development. Canadian schools should reflect religious pluralism as a common ground for building a broad social and cultural literacy among students. There is lack of resources to help provide children and youth with more critical awareness of cultural beliefs, practices and traditions of Muslims.⁵⁴

Educators also need to examine the ways in which racist and discriminating ideas become entrenched in the institutional structures and practices of schooling. Anti-racist education is an effective way of addressing the disempowering aspects of public schooling particularly for minority youth. Anti-racist education provides a means to counter forms of racism manifested in the educational process. It seeks to identify and change institutional policies and procedures and individual behaviours and practices that may foster racism. It also provides the opportunity to question the power relations in

school and society. By developing programs and a curriculum that educate and combat racism the school and the community can enable both teachers and learners to deal with the disaffection and disengagement of Muslim youth from the mainstream school system.⁵⁵

The school system also needs to provide inclusive learning environments. Inclusive practices must take into account religious accommodation, for example, prayer rooms, observance of multiple religious holidays and practices and making allowance for different dress codes. Addressing these questions of equality is crucial for ensuring student engagement and retention in schools and for eventually achieving enhanced learning outcomes.⁵⁶

Gender Issues

Gender interaction can be an issue for Muslim youth in so far as mixing between members of the opposite sex is limited within Islamic tradition. Physical contact between males and females is allowed only among close family members or one's mahrem, the category of people who cannot marry.

Social distance within the Islamic tradition is therefore also gendered and situations of casual physical contact between males and females violate Islamic moral codes. Islamic rules governing social interaction among males and females are therefore particularly problematic to maintain because these rules conflict with the conventional norms of dominant culture.⁵⁷

Struggles with Hijab

Muslim girls who do wear their hijab must construct their identities in opposition to the stereotypes they encounter in the media and their public school experiences that portray them as oppressed or backward and uneducated.⁵⁸

For many Muslim girls, wearing the hijab is a choice they made as part of their expressions of Islamic identity and modesty and as an act of worship. Not having to conform to standards of dress that are dictated by popular styles of youth culture allowed these girls to feel freer to express their identity in a more modest fashion that was in accordance with their faith centered orientation.⁵⁹

By wearing the hijab and observing a more modest dress code, a Muslim girl is situating herself outside the socially accepted norms of behaviour and dress. For Muslim girls this act of resistance and non-conformity often results in exclusion and social isolation. Their "Canadianness" and sense of belonging is thus easily fractured by the lack of social acceptance they encounter from mainstream society.⁶⁰ Muslim girls who adopt the hijab as markers of Islamic identification can experience discrimination and racist violence.

Young Muslim women are attacked in different ways. Some of them experience insults and threats during their everyday lives, especially in public places and public transport. Other girls are victims of physical assault. These kinds of attacks not only harm the person attacked but all girls in the same situation, as they tend to feel insecure and unable to enjoy a normal life.⁶¹

Conclusion

One third of the total population of Muslims in the world today live as a minority in lands where people of other faiths, creeds and ideologies have administrative, political and legislative control. As a religious minority in Canada Muslims face certain difficulties and challenges in practicing their own distinct way of life. The concern faced by Muslim youth and parents is the maintenance of their Islamic identity. It might be difficult for Muslims who immigrate to Canada to maintain an ideal type of Islamic identity since this would require living within an Islamic state. Nevertheless a more relative type of Islamic identity can be achieved without the existence of Islamic state in its traditional form, if the political situation allows for it. This is the case in Canada where not only freedom of religion is a basic right but cultural differences are promoted by the official multicultural policy at the federal level.⁶²

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Section G

Strategies and Supports

Section G: Strategies and Supports

1. Youth asked for:

Youth identified four overriding supports.

1. **Positive guidance and influences:** advice for handling the pressures around them, knowledge and skills to make good decisions about their lives, and reminders about the importance of doing what is right.
2. **Acknowledgement and support:** to give them credit for things they have done well, to provide emotional support in difficult times, and to inspire them to be their best selves and to not give up. Sometimes, the form of support is more concrete, such as financial support to enable families to be able to meet their family needs.
3. **Opportunities to be involved** in constructive efforts in their own lives and in the community, and to be engaged in ways that are meaningful to them.
4. **A voice so that they can speak on their own behalf:** They want to be listened to and taken seriously.

Through all these things, they are looking to achieve equality for themselves as Muslim youth, and for everyone in society.

2. In the Family

Throughout this project, youth and parents identified the family as central to be able to develop a strong sense of identity. Key supports that are needed in the family were:

- Communication is fundamental, and parents need to do what they can to create an open dialogue with their children. This includes respecting the views of youth, and providing them with information and explaining things, but not pushing them to think a certain way. Trust is built through two-way conversations, and youth need to do their share in the communication by expressing their feelings and trying to understand their parents' point of view.
- Both youth and parents need to be patient with one another, and have reasonable expectations. Family meetings help strengthen the bonds, and doing various activities together also builds the relationship.
- Youth said it was important for them to help out at home and take their family responsibilities seriously.
- Parents need to lead by example, as youth are very conscious of any hypocrisy or double standards. Youth indicated that the parents help them by providing guidance about how to live their lives, and by exposing them to important teachings, such as bringing them to Islamic lectures.

- Parents could also use some supports, such as a hotline for parents, or a resource centre for parents to get help and learn more parenting skills.

3. In the Community

a) Youth Programs / Youth Centres: Muslim youth need more locations in the community where they can gather and participate in programs that are designed for them. It is important that these programs meet the needs of both boys and girls. Specific program suggestions are provided below. More advertisement is important as many youth are not aware of the programs that do exist.

b) Mentoring and Leadership Programs: Youth need strong role models to guide and assist them as they move into adulthood in the wider society. Mentors could be drawn from the faith community (e.g. Imams), from community programs such as Big Sister/Big Brother, and from among young adults in the Muslim community or in the mainstream community who support Muslim youth. Leadership programs can supplement the role of the mentors.

c) Sports and Recreation: More recreational opportunities are needed, including more sports clubs, events and leagues to provide ways for youth to enjoy themselves, learn important skills and stay out of trouble. Programs need to be affordable. Young Muslim women were particularly mentioned as requesting sports opportunities. The Boys and Girls Club is a good example to emulate.

d) Arts and culture: Programs to teach children and youth about their culture are important to maintaining a sense of identity. Art and culture are also ways for youth to express themselves, and art clubs or programs can be an important element of community programs.

e) Social services: More social resources are needed in a variety of areas, such as a hotline for Muslim youth, crisis support, counseling for Muslim youth and families. Whatever services are available need to be widely advertised. More funding is needed for Muslim organizations to provide needed supports, and also mainstream social services need to be sure they are meeting the needs of Muslim youth. Education and training about Islam and Muslims is needed for health care professionals, police officers, social workers, teachers and others in the community.

f) Employment: Youth face many barriers in finding employment and community programs which make this easier, such as youth job fairs, especially for new immigrants, would be helpful. Specific actions are also needed to reduce systemic barriers to access to jobs by Muslim youth.

g) Advocacy: Young people need a place where they can speak out and be listened to. More conferences and more activities organized by youth for youth can create spaces where youth advocate for their rights and develop actions they can take in the wider community.

h) Family activities: More community activities are needed for Muslim families, such as family picnics. These need to include Muslims from every ethnic group.

i) Within the Muslim community: There is a need for more unity in the Muslim community, to bridge the different ethnicities and reduce conflicts and misunderstandings amongst the diverse parts of the community. A wider representation from groups in the Muslim community is needed in order for a healthy dialogue to take place. It is important to ensure grass roots involvement in Muslim organizations and accountability from the leadership. In addition, Muslim communities are sometimes segregating themselves and steps are needed to encourage integration within the larger Canadian society.

j) Engagement in the wider community: Muslims need to play a greater role in our community, in schools, as social workers, police officers, etc. both to ensure these services are aware of the reality of Muslims and also to provide role models for Muslim youth growing up in Ottawa. Muslim leaders also need to take steps to be more visible in the general community and build bridges between Muslims and the rest of the community. Similarly, leaders in the broader Ottawa community need to be accountable for ensuring they take into account the needs of all members of the community, including Muslims.

To counteract the negative and distorted media coverage, Muslims need to educate non-Muslims in the community about Islam and about the Muslims living here. Activities for non-Muslims to observe our culture, or programs and clubs where Muslims and non-Muslims participate together may help build better understanding and break down prejudices. Muslim youth need to be an integral part of this, and need to get involved and become role models and positive examples for the general public.

4. In the School System

Note: Some of the suggestions noted above for the community could also be implemented in the school system, e.g. mentoring and leadership programs.

a) Curriculum and educational content

Curricula should include information about all major religions. As part of this, students would be educated about Islam (core beliefs and teachings, artifacts, mosques, arts, poetry, culture, etc.) and about its contributions over the centuries. School libraries could contain more enriched sections covering different aspects of Islamic beliefs and culture. Parents could be asked to suggest or contribute books, and embassies of Muslim countries may also have contributions. Classes should educate students about other cultures, and language studies courses should be available to learn more languages.

School assemblies can be used to build common ground between students, to include Muslim students, and to educate students about each other's backgrounds.

Muslim students in each school could be encouraged to raise awareness by making presentations to their classmates to explain the lifestyle of a Muslim, and dispel certain myths, e.g. Haram – that girls don't sleep with it and are not bald; that Islam does not endorse the oppression of women.

b) Clubs and programs for Muslim youth in schools

After-school activities (sports, arts, photography, etc.) can be an excellent way to strengthen the sense of inclusion and pride of Muslim students. Sports activities for girls was specifically mentioned. A Muslim club can provide support to Muslims, and also be a way to involve non-Muslim students in better understanding Islam and Islamic cultures.

Homework clubs are a good way to support Muslim students to do well. This is especially important in difficult neighbourhoods. Community home helpers need to be recruited to assist the youth with their school work in these clubs.

c) Teachers

Teachers must have more complete and accurate knowledge about the Islamic religion and culture, both in order to better understand their Muslim students and also to be able to teach other students about Islam and create an atmosphere free of prejudice in the classroom. This would include both religious understanding and cultural awareness.

Principals, teachers and all staff in schools need to speak on behalf of inclusion and acceptance of all faiths and all cultures. In addition, it is important to have Muslims in positions of authority and as role models, including female role models, such as more teachers and principals who are Muslim.

d) Supports for parents

Parents need a supportive school system, including honest and frank feedback about how their children are doing, and suggestions on how parents can help their children succeed at school and cope with the pressures and work there. It is also important that the schools be free of bias and prejudice, both in their dealings with parents and especially in how students are treated.

More social workers and resource people are needed at schools; there have been many cutbacks to these essential supports for parents and students. There is a pastoral support group which is unique to Ottawa and has been helpful to many parents.

Some parents are very hard for the schools to reach. A number are single parents and this may have impacted on their ability to manage or cope with difficulties.

Section H

Moving Forward: The Kit

H. Moving Forward: The Kit

As part of this project, a kit has been prepared that provides both of the partners of the project the opportunity to widely distribute the information through hard copy or on the website.

The kit includes:

1. A facilitators' guide on doing community focus groups.
2. A CD with all of the handouts and samples of material.
3. Community Building sheets on:
 - a) Creating a steering committee
 - b) Running a focus group for youth
 - c) Running a focus group for parents
 - d) Working with the schools
 - e) Organizing a conference
4. Issue sheets on the four themes:
 - a. Identity
 - b. Relationships and Family Dynamics
 - c. Racism and Discrimination
 - d. Gender Issues

The kit is intended to be used by any member of the community that wants to find better solutions to integrate Muslim youth into Canadian society.