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The Young Men Leading Change Project:

What did we learn about anti-violence allyship programming with racialized and immigrant young men?

A community Report for OCTEVAW

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Introduction

Women-led anti-violence organizations have been engaging men in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) for several decades, and successful programs operate in local communities across Ontario. Recently, the Young Men Leading Change project, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, built on this work with young racialized and immigrant men, and explored the important role they can play in violence prevention. The project brought together feminist anti-violence organizations with newcomer agencies in Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, amplifying the impact of these agencies through their combined reach and knowledge.

Men in Canadian society are rewarded with certain privileges, but they are often not given access to the tools and support to extend their care to others as allies, heal from their own experiences of violence, and take responsibility when they cause harm. Racism and white supremacy, patriarchal ideas about what it means to "act like a man," economic marginalization, and stigma around mental health intersect to sustain male violence and ensure the silent suffering of all genders. Racialized and immigrant young men, particularly Black and Muslim youth, face many stereotypes, including that they are violent or a threat to others. These stereotypes are rooted in interlocking forms of oppression and discrimination – particularly anti-Black racism and Islamophobia.

In the Young Men Leading Change (YMLC) project, young men and adult allies across Ontario explored how they could use their strengths as part of the solution to gender-based violence in their communities. They practiced leadership that increased connection to other community members and questioned male domination. This community report explores what was learned in the program, which operated from 2018 to 2021.

Addressing gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a problem in all communities, including newcomer communities which face more barriers to services. In the mainstream movement to end violence against women, work to address gender-based violence began in the 1960s with support to the victim/survivors, followed by programs to address the male perpetrators of violence. In the 1990s, prevention programs began to emerge, which worked with men as allies in reducing and preventing GBV.

Programming developed by frontline anti-violence feminists to engage men in the prevention of violence is an ongoing inquiry into what women and gender diverse survivors of GBV ask of men and boys in their communities. How do we engage men in ways that address survivors' safety, justice, and healing needs, and how is this connected to more safety, justice, and healing for men?

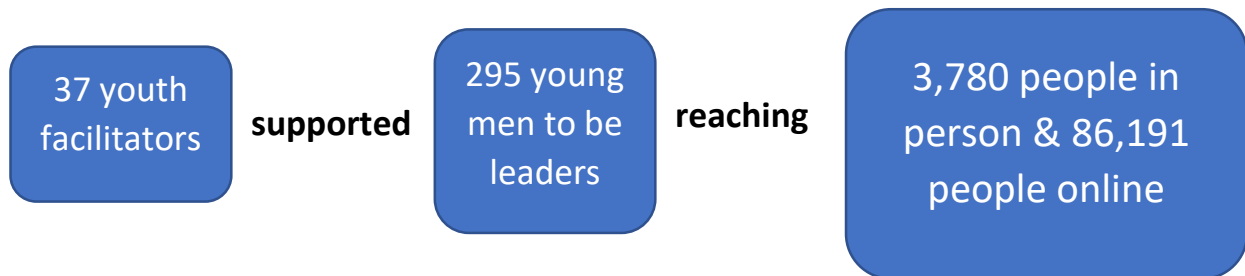
The YMLC project provided participating agencies with the opportunity to adapt the MANifest Change model of ally engagement. This model, informed by intersectional feminism, has been developed over the past 12 years by OCTEVAW (Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women) and evaluated in several studies validating its effectiveness. MANifest Change has evolved in the hands of immigrant service providers, Indigenous community leaders, feminist activists, and white male allies. The model was scaled up in the Young Men Leading Change project to four regions in Ontario. Projects in each city were shaped by the local expertise of one immigrant-serving agency and one anti-violence agency.

The regions and partners involved in the project were: London - Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration and Anova; Kitchener-Waterloo - Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre and the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region; Peterborough - Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre; Ottawa – OCISO (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization) and OCTEVAW. Immigrant Women's Services Ottawa played an advisory role in the project.

The project also responded to a Public Health Agency of Canada-commissioned review of existing programs in 2012 which found a significant lack of 1) programming involving immigrant boys and men in reducing violence against women and 2) evaluation of men and boys' GBV prevention programs (White Ribbon Campaign, 2012). The YMLC project addressed both gaps.

Taking Action

In each region, young men were supported by adult allies to build leadership skills, act as peer facilitators, and adapt the MANifest Change model to be relevant to their cultural and geographic communities. With support from adult allies, 37 youth facilitators engaged 295 additional young men in leadership workshops to develop knowledge, commitment, and skills for violence reduction. Putting these skills into practice, young men designed and implemented their awareness-raising actions about GBV, reaching an impressive 89,780 community members with positive messages about gender equality and men's role in preventing GBV.



How do we know that men and boys can help prevent GBV?

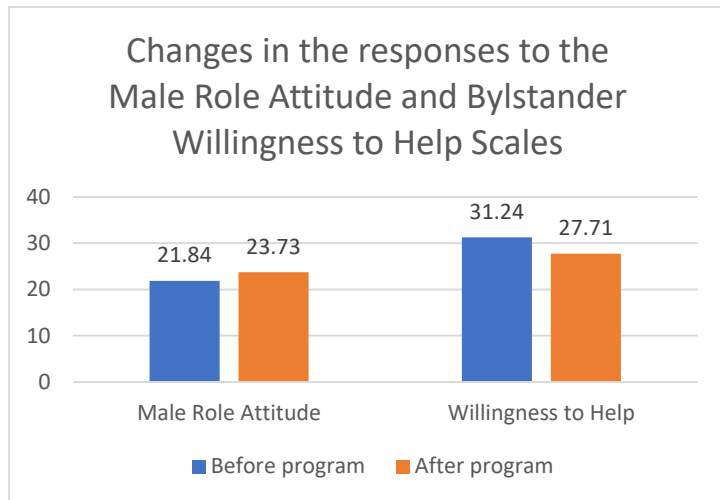
This project was built on a solid foundation of past successes. In 2017, OCTEVAW co-developed a Youth Engagement Framework with the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa in a youth-led cyberviolence initiative. The MANifest Change model was developed incorporating best practices for engaging boys and men in preventing GBV. These practices included youth co-design, adult allies, strengths-based, opportunities for self-reflection, skill building and community action. Several evaluation projects had demonstrated the effectiveness of the model. Indigenous and immigrant facilitators adapted the MANifest Change workshop model to engage racialized and immigrant youth in recent partnerships. In each of the YMLC project regions, the partner organizations had their own well-developed male ally programs and youth engagement strategies that aligned with the MANifest Change approach.

The evaluation of the project adapted three existing quantitative scales to measure (i) male role attitudes from domination-based to egalitarian, (ii) bystander willingness to help in risky situations, and (iii) motivations and barriers to helping. Participants completed the questionnaire before and after

participating in the program. In the second year of the program, four open-ended questions were added to the questionnaires to allow participants to provide additional written responses. A focus group in year three captured the experiences of the youth facilitators in the program.

Two hundred and twenty-nine questionnaires were filled out. The respondents ranged in age from 13 to 29. The results documented statistically significant changes toward gender egalitarian attitudes. This statistic is important because it measures the program's effect on individual attitudes to male role norms. The results also showed an increase in willingness to intervene in a variety of situations. The third scale measuring motivations and barriers did not show a significant change, which may indicate problems with the implementation of the scale rather than a lack of efficacy of the program.

We found a significant correlation between the scales: changes to scores on the Male Role Attitude scale were associated with changes in the Bystander Behavior scale. Changes in the Bystander Behavior scale was associated with changes to scores on both other scales. Of course, correlation is not indicative of causation, but it is a strong indicator that there are statistically significant relationships between the scales, providing further validation for the results.



The increase in the male role attitude score indicates a more egalitarian gender role attitude. The lower score on the willingness to help scale indicates increasing willingness to help in situations involving GBV. There is a negative correlation between these two scales. This indicates that as scores move towards more egalitarian gender roles, they also move towards increased willingness to help in GBV situations.

“...I will keep an eye on the person and express that I'll be there to help when they want it. However, [if] I feel like things have gotten worse than when I found it, I will bring it up with that person and intervene.”

The qualitative results reinforced the quantitative findings. Responses showed more egalitarian attitudes at the end of the program than in the pre-survey. For example, one pre-program response explained that being a man meant “to be wiser than girls”; the post-programme response was “to respect others the way they respect you,” a significant change in perspective. When addressing how they might intervene, those entering the program

offered interventions that involved giving directives to the victim (“...breaking up the relationship would be best”); those leaving discussed a staged approach which moved from offering support, to being available, to intervening if things got too bad. There were indications of learning in the qualitative responses regarding barriers and motivations that were not present in the scaled questions. These

suggest that participants shifted from an abstract desire to help others to more personal motivations based on their own experiences. They were initially concerned that they did not know how to help and could make situations worse. The barriers to intervention were reduced because of their new knowledge about how to successfully intervene. For example: "...Obviously I will keep an eye on the person and express that I'll be there to help when they want it. However, [if] I feel like things have gotten worse than when I found it, I will bring it up with that person and intervene." This response highlights program learning such as practicing consent in all relationships and assessing when it is important to act and how to do so if there is escalating harm. This response also demonstrates the relationship between male role attitudes, bystander behaviour and the need to support motivation and address barriers to helping.

Perspectives of the Youth Facilitators

Young Men Leading Change relied on a dynamic relationship between youth facilitators and adult allies. Youth facilitators participated in leadership formation, co-designed strategies for inviting participants and shaped how each group approached the topics under discussion. Youth facilitators provided focus and coordination as groups decided how to take public action in the community.

Two focus groups with youth facilitators provided another perspective and validated the survey findings through observed changes in the behaviour of participants. Some facilitators saw participants outside the program in school or during other activities and noted that behaviors outside of the group changed in similar ways. "There was less name-calling," one facilitator noted. Facilitators observed participants putting consent into practice and showing more respect for other participants, facilitators, and adult allies. Many participants may have already been leaders in their social groups or communities. This could mean that the actual function of the program was to help *shape* leadership skills that already existed rather than *create* new leaders. The MANifest Change model is based on the expertise and lived experience of survivors and anti-violence advocates, so adult women allies were sometimes present. Their participation provided a "bridge" to women's experience and an opportunity for empathy. A number of the facilitators expressed a need for more preparation dealing with the complex interactions of racism and masculinities, as for example, participants expressed a tension between a desire to adopt a more egalitarian practice of masculinity and a wish to protect women and girls close to them subject to both racist and sexist abuse.

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A way forward

The YMLC program was successful in its goal to support young men's growth in recognizing and safely intervening against GBV, empowering them to actively prevent GBV. Young men's meaningful engagement will help benefit the wider community by building skills and awareness that prevent violence against girls and women and demonstrating that racialized and immigrant young men are not defined by negative stereotypes about them as violent or disengaged. Key to the success of this three-year project were the local collaborations between immigrant-serving and VAW organizations. It the hope of the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) that further collaborative work will be implemented in Ontario, continuing to shift societal norms attached to GBV, reducing barriers to help in these situations and ultimately creating a safer community for all.