

# New Journeys:

Kids Help Phone's Action Plan  
for Supporting Newcomer Youth

2023-2027



KIDS HELP PHONE

TM

Feel  
Out  
Loud

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## Newcomer Initiatives at Kids Help Phone

Since 1989, Kids Help Phone has offered a critical lifeline of hope to millions of youth, including young people who are new to Canada. Being the only national, 24/7, e-mental health support service offering professional counselling, information and referrals and texting support, newcomer youth in every province and territory reach out to us to express themselves and to feel heard. Throughout our history, we've tested and launched new service offerings, continually evaluating and improving the quality of our services and the impact we have on young lives.

Over the last two years, Kids Help Phone has seen a significant increase in newcomer-identifying service users that continues to grow. With projected immigration levels expected to rise significantly over the coming years and newcomers from various countries feeling impacted by the many world crises, it is now more important than ever for newcomers to have access to the support they need, in ways that they need it most.

Building on the success of past projects such as our **Wellness Support in Multiple Languages** that offers phone counselling support via interpretation, the New Journeys Action Plan aims to further strengthen the work that has already begun for Newcomer Initiatives program. As our services grow to increase access to more languages, we will amplify outreach, develop newcomer-specific programming, and with support from donors, continuously enhance Kids Help Phone services.

**New Journeys: Kids Help Phone's Action Plan for Supporting Newcomer Youth** recognizes the importance of creating a safe and trusted space for meeting young people where they are. Built on recommendations from newcomer youth and communities, we are determined and driven to ensure Kids Help Phone will have a lasting positive impact on the mental health journeys of newcomers from coast to coast to coast.



## Amplifying the voices of newcomer youth

Kids Help Phone engaged with over one hundred newcomer and immigrant young people from diverse demographic backgrounds ranging in age from 8 to 29 years. This was done by way of virtual focus groups and online surveys conducted by The Students Commission of Canada (SCC).

Through these youth engagement sessions, we aimed to uncover some of the key barriers that young people

encounter when accessing mental health support. Youth also shared their recommendations and preferences for Kids Help Phone services. These recommendations, along with those from newcomer-serving organizations, have been incorporated into this action plan.

**Following, are some of the key barriers identified by newcomer youth:**

### Stigma and Misinformation

Stigma related to mental health has a deep impact on the way newcomer youth feel about mental health and how they seek out support. Some youth are hesitant to seek support over fear of judgement from friends, families or communities noting that the topic of mental health is treated “like a taboo” or seen “as an excuse”.

**“Family members don’t believe in it — mental health has nothing to do with struggles.”**

- Newcomer youth participant

### Fear and Distrust

Moving to a new country can be an overwhelming experience. Newcomer youth are surrounded by the unfamiliar and sometimes fear reprisal or even deportation as a result of accessing mental health services. This can fuel fear and distrust of strangers, particularly when reaching out for mental health support.

**“It is an awesome way to access e-mental services, but I worry a bit about confidentiality, and discussing something as such with a stranger might not always be the right thing to do.”**

- Newcomer youth participant

### Lack of Awareness of Kids Help Phone

Many newcomer youth have not used mental health services before and are unaware of their existence. Some youth have no current methods of support at all. This lack of awareness is mainly due to lack of outreach, engagement and promotion to this specific audience.

**“I never used it. I came to know about it today. I just came to Canada a few months back.”**

- Newcomer youth participant

### Accessibility Challenges

Few mental health services are available in different languages. Youth expressed a need for services to be offered in multiple languages in order to effectively support their use of e-mental health services. Other accessibility concerns include lack of stable internet connection, lack of 24/7 services and extended wait times for using e-mental health services in general.

**“To start with, having more languages available rather than only two languages — (I understand we are in a country that speaks English and French, but some newcomers have to learn them in order to ask for help).”**

- Newcomer youth participant

### Lack of Relatability

There is a need for a more human and relational experience for newcomer youth when using e-mental health services. Some youth suggested informal spaces for them to connect with their peers and meet needs for belonging, while building trust with the service as a whole.

**“Yes, having special services for newcomers might help a lot for kids that are newcomers.”**

- Newcomer youth participant

**Newcomer youth share the challenges of their families trying to set up life in a new country, whilst searching for jobs and housing, and building social connections. Lack of social connection, financial and employment issues, relationship concerns and pandemic stressors were some of the most frequently cited responses when youth were surveyed about issues affecting them and their communities.**

## Our guiding principles

As we implement the actions outlined in New Journeys we will continue to be guided by the following principles:

- 1** Through meaningful and proactive engagement, newcomer youth and their communities must be consulted, and their feedback integrated into services designed for them.
- 2** Services and communication will focus on health and well-being more broadly (e.g.: belonging, connection, coping with stressors) building strength and coping, and acknowledging stressors associated with social determinants of health.
- 3** We will take a partnerships-based approach that regards newcomer youth, communities and organizations as partners in collaborative work.

## Our goals

The following goals and corresponding tactics will be implemented with ongoing guidance from Newcomer Advisory Network and ongoing community engagement:

- 1 BUILD TRUST:** Foster a greater sense of trust in Kids Help Phone through increased awareness, engagement and communication with newcomer communities.
- 2 MAXIMIZE ACCESS:** Increase newcomer service use to 16% no later than 2028 by tailoring Kids Help Phone programs and services to better suit the mental health needs of newcomer youth.
- 3 STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS:** Ensure continuous integration of newcomer perspectives in Kids Help Phone programs, services and initiatives through strengthened relationships and increased representation.

Regular monitoring and evaluation will be conducted to track and report on progress made and communities impacted.



## Our actions



### 1. BUILD TRUST:

Foster a greater sense of trust in Kids Help Phone through increased awareness, engagement and communication with newcomer communities.

This goal will be achieved by employing tactics that proactively increase awareness, engagement and communication with newcomers and thereby alleviate the distrust and stigma that was shared previously in focus groups with newcomer youth.

#### 1.1 Develop a Newcomer Volunteer Network:

Develop a volunteer-based engagement program, taking learnings from Weaving Threads: An Indigenous Engagement Program to build awareness, connection and trust between Kids Help Phone and newcomer communities across Canada.

#### 1.2 Create a Counsellor in the Community program:

Create a Counsellor in the Community program offering those in community-led program spaces the opportunity to learn about Kids Help Phone's range of e-mental health support services and engage with a counsellor/representative of Kids Help Phone. This program would leverage learnings from our Counsellor in the Classroom program.

#### 1.3 Conduct Train-the-Trainer Workshops:

Conduct Train-the-Trainer workshops for newcomer-serving organizations. These workshops would train service providers on how to engage with Kids Help Phone's e-mental health resources and frontline staff in the context of a three-way call option that supports one-on-one conversations with youth.

#### 1.4 Build and enhance relationships with key influencers:

Build trust with community leaders, settlement workers and influential newcomer peers, by increasing awareness of our services.

#### 1.5 Diversify branding and communication:

Tailor marketing and promotion to the unique needs of newcomer youth by engaging them where they are, through culturally specific channels, messaging and spaces.

#### 1.6 Enhance our website:

Create a hub on the Kids Help Phone Gateway (KidsHelpPhone.ca) for newcomer youth and supporters to access content and resources that explore diverse newcomer experiences. The Gateway will grow over time to include more content that is inclusive and supporting of newcomers to Canada.

#### 1.7 Advocate for newcomer youth:

Use Kids Help Phone's national voice to advocate for newcomer youth to be able to access resources without requiring them to adapt to specific value systems and adhere to understandings of well-being that don't align with their own.

#### 1.8 Educate newcomer youth on their rights to services:

Leverage Kids Help Phone's programs, communications and other resources to educate the wider newcomer community about their right to access mental health services and counter myths that lead to fear and distrust.



## 2. MAXIMIZE ACCESS:

Increase newcomer service use to 16% by 2028 by tailoring Kids Help Phone’s programs and services to better suit the mental health needs of newcomer youth.

This goal will be achieved through expanding language access and creating dedicated spaces through our service channels and resources so that newcomer youth feel comfortable accessing our services.



## 3. STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS:

Ensure continuous integration of newcomer perspectives in Kids Help Phone programs, services and initiatives through strengthened relationships and increased representation.

Through strengthening partnerships with existing and new partners and increased staff and volunteer representation, we will ensure continuous integration of newcomer perspective and feedback in everything we do.

**2.1 Provide wellness support in multiple languages:** Maximize access to counselling by building on the success of previous service expansions and offer increased phone counselling through interpreters. More than one hundred languages will be added to reach more culturally and linguistically diverse young callers across Canada.

**2.2 Create a newcomer keyword:** Emphasize that Kids Help Phone is a safe space for newcomer youth by introducing a specific “newcomer” keyword for youth reaching out by text.

**2.3 Create an online forum for newcomer peers:** Create spaces in Kids Help Phone’s **Peer-to-Peer online community** to exchange stories and experiences and foster a sense of connection with other newcomer youth from diverse communities.

**2.4 Explore service innovations:** Explore ways to tailor our services to newcomers based on their preferences. This may include innovations like multiple session counselling, direct language counselling (without interpreters) and various digital options to support newcomers.

**2.5 Expand referrals to newcomer-relevant services (continuity of care):** Through new and current partnerships, we will add to our existing database of services for newcomers while continuing to reinvent the **Resource Around Me** tool (KHP resource library on our kidshelpphone.ca) to become more user-friendly for newcomer young people in Canada.

**2.6 Continue building staff capacity and knowledge via evolving training initiatives:** Training, education and knowledge mobilization are cornerstones to the successful delivery of all our services. To better support newcomers in mental health, we will continue to invest in training and development for our staff.

**3.1 Develop and strengthen partnerships:** Continue to develop meaningful partnerships with newcomer stakeholders across the country who interact more directly with newcomer communities. Through regular partnership development and engagement, Kids Help Phone will establish different groups, including the Newcomer Advisory Network.

**3.2 Expand the Newcomer Initiatives team:** Expand Newcomer Initiatives partnerships and engagement by hiring more engagement coordinators to focus on engagement and partnerships with specific newcomer communities across the country.

**3.3 Recruit intentionally and with transparency:** Ensure that our people including staff, volunteers and leadership are representative of the newcomer populations we serve. Actively recruit people from diverse newcomer communities to ensure Kids Help Phone benefits from varied lived experiences, while measuring progress of recruitment initiatives.

**3.4 Mark days of significance:** Commemorate or celebrate days or weeks of significance to newcomers to Canada such as World Refugee Day, and Welcoming Week.

**3.5 Continue to engage youth:** Hold engagement sessions with newcomer youth as young as 8 years of age to ensure Kids Help Phone programs, services and innovations are informed by their recommendations.

**3.6 Create newcomer youth events:** To create a more immersive and meaningful experiences for young newcomers to engage with Kids Help Phone, we will launch a newcomer youth forum and other such events to ensure young newcomers have a space to gather, share their ideas and lived experiences, and foster a more heightened connection with our service.

“Honestly, thank you so much. I’ve been suffering a lot and talking to someone about it helps a lot. Getting small compliments and praises and being thanked for talking about it made me feel safe and a bit happier. You asked questions in a respectful way. Thank you. I can’t describe how much I appreciate you and how you helped.”

– Newcomer Service User

## Continuing our journey with newcomers

As we embark on this action plan, we will continue to engage with young people and community organizations on an ongoing basis to ensure that we respond in a nimble and relevant manner to the evolving needs of newcomer populations from coast to coast to coast.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the young people and community organizations that contributed to this strategy via the Students Commission of Canada. We would also especially like to acknowledge our newly formed Newcomer Advisory Network of newcomer-serving organizations and Kids Help Phone frontline staff who will continue to advise and champion this work forward. Lastly, the work we have begun has been made possible by our generous funders at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

## Newcomer Advisory Network

Formed in 2022, the Kids Help Phone Newcomer Advisory Network is a group of newcomer-serving organizations from across Canada that meets with us regularly to advise on elements of our strategic programming. This network consisted of representative members of the following organizations along with frontline staff from Kids Help Phone:

- Immigrant & Refugee Services Association (IRSA) PEI
- Centre for Addictions & Mental Health (CAMH) Office of Health Equity
- Abrar Trauma and Mental Health Services (ABRAR)
- Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement Integration Agencies (SAISIA)
- Centre for Newcomers (CFN)
- DIVERSECity Community Resources Society (DCRS)
- Kids Help Phone – newcomer-identifying crisis responder volunteers



# Glossary

## Newcomer

An immigrant or refugee who has been in Canada for a short time (usually less than five years) is considered a newcomer (NewYouth.ca, 2019). In this document, the term, 'newcomers' is used to describe people who relate to the experience of being new to Canada regardless of the number of years that they have resided in the country.

## Newcomer-identifying

In this report, 'newcomer-identifying' is used to describe service users of Kids Help Phone who have filled out an anonymous post-conversation survey and self-identified as a newcomer to Canada.

## Immigrant

Immigrants are persons born outside of Canada who have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently. Immigrants choose to move, whereas refugees are forced to flee. (CCR, n.d)

## Refugee

A person who is forced to flee from persecution (CCR,n.d). In this document, the term 'refugee/s' is broadly used to describe all kinds of refugees including Government- Assisted Refugees (GARs), Private- Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), resettled refugees, convention refugees, asylum seekers and refugee claimants.

## Social determinants of health

The circumstances in which people live, work, and grow, along with the wider systems that influence people's lives, are known as the social determinants of health (MHCC, 2016)

## Newcomer Initiatives

Newcomer initiatives refers to the dedicated programs, services and resources that maximize access and awareness of Kids Help Phone's e-mental health support services for newcomer youth. One way in which we do this is by offering our phone counselling service in multiple languages for the benefit of the many newcomers whose first language might not be English or French. More information is available at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/SupportingNewcomers](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/supportingnewcomers)

## Wellness Support in Multiple Languages

Wellness Support in Multiple Languages offers phone counselling support in languages other than English or French, with the help of trained interpreters. More information is available at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/MultipleLanguages](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/multiplelanguages)

## Peer-to-Peer Community

The Peer-to-Peer Community is a collection of online support forums. In the community, youth can anonymously share their personal experiences, offer inspiration and ask questions to connect, comfort and cheer each other on. It's a community co-created by youth, for youth. More information is available at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/PeerToPeer](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/peertopeer)

## Newcomer Advisory Network

A network of external newcomer-serving organizations that meets regularly to advise on Kids Help Phone's newcomer services, initiatives, resources and strategic roadmap.

## Counsellor in the Classroom

The Counsellor in the Classroom (CITC) Program promotes the discussion of mental health and well-being among young people. It's available to students in Grades 6 through 12 across Canada. Classes that participate learn about mental health, Kids Help Phone's services and how / where to seek support. More information can be found at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/CounsellorInTheClassroom](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/counsellorintheclassroom)

## Community Resource Database / Resources Around Me

Kids Help Phone collects and maintains Canada's largest online database of mental health and support resources for youth. This Community Resource Database allows counsellors to provide timely and accurate referrals to service users. In addition, Kids Help Phone has developed an interactive 24/7 online resource navigation tool named Resources Around Me. This tool allows young people to find resources in their community such as Counselling and Mental Health Support, Sexual Health Support, Housing Support, Legal Support, Job Help, and more. The tool can be found at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/ResourcesAroundMe](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/resourcesaroundme)

## Weaving Threads: An Indigenous Engagement Program

A Canada-wide network of volunteer Champions and Ambassadors in Indigenous communities and urban centres who connect youth to resources and critical supports from Kids Help Phone and our partners. More information is available at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/WT](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/WT)





**Whenever you need  
to talk, we're open.**

**[KidsHelpPhone.ca/Newcomers](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/newcomers)**

**Text 686868 (Youth) or 741741 (adults)**

**Call 1-800-668-6868**



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