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The Acculturation of Youth Refugees through Community Sport Programming: Year Three

Situated in a region with a declining population, Sudbury, Ontario has had a recent influx of forced migrants (i.e., asylum seekers and refugees) due to shorter wait times for social housing and employment (i.e., a 100% increase from 2018 to 2019; White, 2020). The Canadian Government, in similar fashion to other governments such as the European Union parliament, has promoted the use of sport as a site for helping forced immigrants integrate into their host communities (Government of Canada's Canadian Sport Policy, 2012; the European Commission's White Paper on Sport, 2007). The YMCA of Northeastern Ontario is one organization in Sudbury tasked with providing settlement services to forced migrants. Recognizing that sport contexts do not inherently foster positive community development, we are in the midst of a multi-year community based participatory action research project aimed at bringing forced migrant youth and YMCA staff members together to develop more socially just sport programming for all involved (Schinke et al., 2018; Spaaij, 2015). Progress during year three of our project has shifted in focus due to COVID-19. Unable to meet in person with forced-immigrant youth to conduct a second phase of data collection, we chose to use knowledge developed during phase one to begin the development of a sport-specific program for forced migrant youth to be run at the YMCA. Our framework for this program, developed from data generated through arts-based conversational interviews and a cooperative thematic analysis of the transcripts from these interviews has four focal points: (1) engendering feelings of physical, psychological, and emotional safety; (2) fostering a sense of belonging to other athletes; (3) developing confidence through skill development; and (4) supporting exploration and sharing of ethnic identities. The framework continues (and will continue) to be developed in conjunction with forced migrant youth in our community, their family members, and YMCA staff members. Through this contribution we share lessons learned and recommendations from our progress, so researchers and practitioners endeavoring to work with forced immigrant families in their community may translate this project knowledge to their local contexts.