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The Role of Sport in Forced Immigrant Youths' Acculturative Journeys

One of the hallmarks of high-quality community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) is the development of project deliverables that are sustainable beyond the involvement of the academic research team (Schinke et al., 2013). One facet of my doctoral work has been to assist in the development of project deliverables for a CBPAR project being conducted with the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario and forced immigrant families living in Sudbury, Ontario. As one of the organizations tasked with providing services to forced immigrant families, the project began with a request from YMCA management staff for assistance in developing new approaches to providing sport programming for forced immigrant youth. Drawing inspiration from a report by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (2014) they felt that sport programs for youth represented one way they could help forced immigrant families learn more about Canadian culture and connect with members of their host Canadian community. However, there was a recognition on behalf of YMCA staff members, and shared by our academic team, that forced immigrant community members, whose life stories are vastly different to the majority of host community members, needed to be centralized in the program development process so that the program would reflect their values and needs (Schinke et al., 2018). Not wishing to silence the telling of any stories, the decision was made to engage in a storytelling approach to data development, analysis, and re-presentation. Stories are a call for relationships to be developed between storyteller and story listener (Frank, 2000), and through this contribution our project team hope to bring the broader academic community into the storytelling relationship. Drawing on sections of a three-scene polyphonic (i.e., multi-voiced) vignette, we share the role of sport in forced immigrant youths' lives in their home countries, during their journey to safety, and re-settlement in Canada. Storylines from the vignette are also used to provide insight into how sport may support forced immigrant youths' psychosocial development by helping them develop and maintain positive attachments to others and maintain and/or improve their mental well-being. Strategies for how researchers and practitioners may engage in and use storytelling approaches in their work with athletes, coaches, and sport team staff members are shared through an example that stems from initial discussions regarding cultural sensitivity and competence training for YMCA staff members. We highlight how we plan to use our polyphonic vignette to stimulate critical discussion that leads to a more inclusive and socially just sport context.