

External Program Evaluation: Impacts and Changes on Government-Assisted Refugee Mothers

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Abstract : The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home instruction program for mothers of children 3 to 5 years old. Using role-play as a method of teaching, the participating mothers work with their home visitors and learn how to deliver the HIPPY curriculum to their children. Applying HIPPY, Reviving Hope and Home for High-risk Refugee Mothers Program (RHH) was created to provide more personalized peer support and to respond to ongoing settlement challenges for isolated and vulnerable Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) mothers. GARs often have greater needs and vulnerabilities than other refugee groups. While the support is available, they often face various challenges and barriers in starting their new lives in Canada, such as inadequate housing, low first-language literacy levels, low competency in English or French, and social isolation. The pilot project was operated by Mothers Matter Centre (MMC) from January 2019 to March 2021 in partnership with the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC). The formative evaluation was conducted by a research team at Simon Fraser University. In order to provide more suitable support for GAR mothers, RHH intended to offer more flexibility in HIPPY delivery, supported by a home visitor, to meet the need of refugee mothers facing various conditions and challenges; to have a pool of financial resources to be used for the RHH families when necessitated during the program period; to have another designated staff member, called a community navigator, assigned to facilitate the support system for the RHH families in their settlement; to have a portable device available for each RHH mother to navigate settlement support resources; and to provide other variations of the HIPPY curriculum as an option for the RHH mothers, including a curriculum targeting pre-HIPPY age children. Reflections on each program component was collected from RHH mothers and staff members of MMC and ISSofBC, including frontline workers and management staff, through individual interviews and focus group discussions. Each of the RHH program components was analyzed and evaluated by applying Moore's four domains framework to identify key information and generate new knowledge (data). To capture RHH mothers' program experience more in depth based on their own reflections, the photovoice method was used. Some photos taken by the mothers will be shared to illustrate their RHH experience as part of their life stories. Over the period of the program, this evaluation observed how RHH mothers became more confident in various domains, such as communicating with others, taking public transportations alone, and teaching their own child(ren). One of the major factors behind the success was their home visitors' flexibility and creativity to create a more meaningful and tailored approach for each mother, depending on her background and personal situation. The role of the community navigator was tested out and improved during the program period. The community navigators took the key role to assess the needs of the RHH families and connect them with community resources. Both the home visitors and community navigators were immigrant mothers themselves and owing to their dedicated care for the RHH mothers; they were able to gain trust and work closely and efficiently with RHH mothers.

Keywords : refugee mothers, settlement support, program evaluation, Canada

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