

News Release



FRESH VOICES

Vancouver, Canada, February 28, 2017

Youth and senior immigrants and refugees use film to build friendships and share their personal experiences of starting a new life in Canada.

In today's political climate, empathy and understanding are paramount to building a safe and welcoming community for those new to Canada. Immigrant and refugee seniors offer profound insight into the complexity of journeying to a better life, and provide a unique opportunity for newcomer youth to connect to seniors who share experiences of displacement and finding home in a foreign country.

Reel Youth and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House are teaming up for "Celebrating Journeys", a film program designed to record and share the unique stories of newcomers to Canada, while fostering intergenerational relationships between immigrant and refugee youth and seniors.

Over the course of two weeks, 11 immigrant and refugee youth are being trained in documentary filmmaking and editing, as well as leadership and alliance-building. They are working in small groups with 10 immigrant and refugee seniors to create 10 short documentary films that celebrate their journeys to Canada, reveal their experience of building a life here, and honour the challenges they faced along the way. The films will be premiered at a gala at Kiwassa Neighbourhood House on Wednesday March 29, at 7pm and then released online at ReelYouth.ca.

What participants are saying:

Rosa Brand is one of the senior participants. She is a refugee from El Salvador, who moved to Canada with her husband and three children in 1984. She and her husband were teachers, persecuted for their involvement in unions during the civil war. Her husband was smuggled out in a trunk to Costa Rica, and Rosa and her children escaped shortly after. She says, "I am thankful to Canada for helping me build happiness with my family. Canada is giving the United States an example by welcoming people in need. It's saving people's lives." In Canada, Rosa worked as a settlement worker and counselor, and continues to volunteer helping other refugee families who have to Canada.

Rosa's youth partner is Ayan Ismail, a young woman of Somali origin, who spent ten years in a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to Canada on an education scholarship for International Studies at UBC. "The way the media and many people view refugees is often very different from who we really are. As a Black, refugee, Muslim woman here, it is difficult to be who you are because of a lot of racism and Islamophobia. I am involved in this project to showcase the real picture, not just negatives but the many positives. I want to help refugee people here in Canada and those living in camps around the world."

According to Reel Youth Director and project facilitator, Mark Vonesch, "This program is significant because it brings immigrants and refugees from different generations together. The films will give a personal face to immigrant and refugee stories in a time when migration is such an important issue globally. In order to foster empathy and understanding we need to know the stories behind the statistics."

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Media opportunities:

There is opportunity for the media to film or interview participants as they edit the films on March 4th and 5th. Media is also welcome to attend the 7pm gala screening on March 29th. Phone or in person interviews can also be arranged.

High resolution photos from the project can be downloaded here:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/reelyouth/albums/72157677437898553>

Note, Rosa Brand and Ayan Ismael are featured in the first two photos.

Program partners:

The film program is a partnership between Reel Youth and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, with funding, support, and participation from Fresh Voices and New Horizons for Seniors.

Reel Youth empowers young people and communities through the media arts. Their programs are designed to engage people who might not otherwise have access to filmmaking training, and whose voices are marginalized or underrepresented in conventional media. Reel Youth is a project on Tides Canada's shared platform, which supports on-the-ground efforts to create uncommon solutions for the common good. Tides Canada is a national Canadian charity dedicated to a healthy environment, social equity, and economic prosperity.

Kiwassa Neighbourhood House is a grassroots, multi-service community agency that has been promoting inclusion and providing social services and programs to children, youth, adults, seniors and families in East Vancouver for 60 years.

Fresh Voices is an initiative of Vancouver Foundation. They are a group of immigrants and refugees making BC a better place for young newcomers by engaging in dialogue and action to identify and remove barriers to their success.

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Ayan (left) and Rosa getting to know each other