Fostering Change and Fresh Voices: Vancouver Foundation's Youth Engagement Journey

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<div style="float:left; writing-mode:vertical">Reflective Practice</div>

Introduction

By name alone, one might think that community foundations are experts in creating inclusive change in communities. Not necessarily so. Typically known as broad-based, responsive funders concerned with donor-advised funds, community foundations have not always worked deeply in and alongside community. Yet by circumstance and desire, these foundations are now taking steps toward embracing their roles as change-makers, advocates, and active community participants. Here at Vancouver Foundation, we believe the time is right to embrace those roles.

The foundation funds across the Canadian province of British Columbia. While the majority of money leaves us through donor-advised and designated funds, the balance of dollars within our responsive grantmaking funds social innovation and systems change, grassroots grantmaking, capacity building for other province-based community foundations, and youth engagement. This article focuses on our work over the past five years with two youth engagement initiatives: Fostering Change and Fresh Voices.

These initiatives emerged from work that was already happening at the foundation. Fresh Voices began in 2011, when the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth — an advocate appointment by the provincial government — approached the foundation and asked for assistance convening newcomer youth to plan a policy forum focused on their realities. The foundation, with its previous experience running programs such as the Youth Philanthropy Council and Youth Vital Signs,
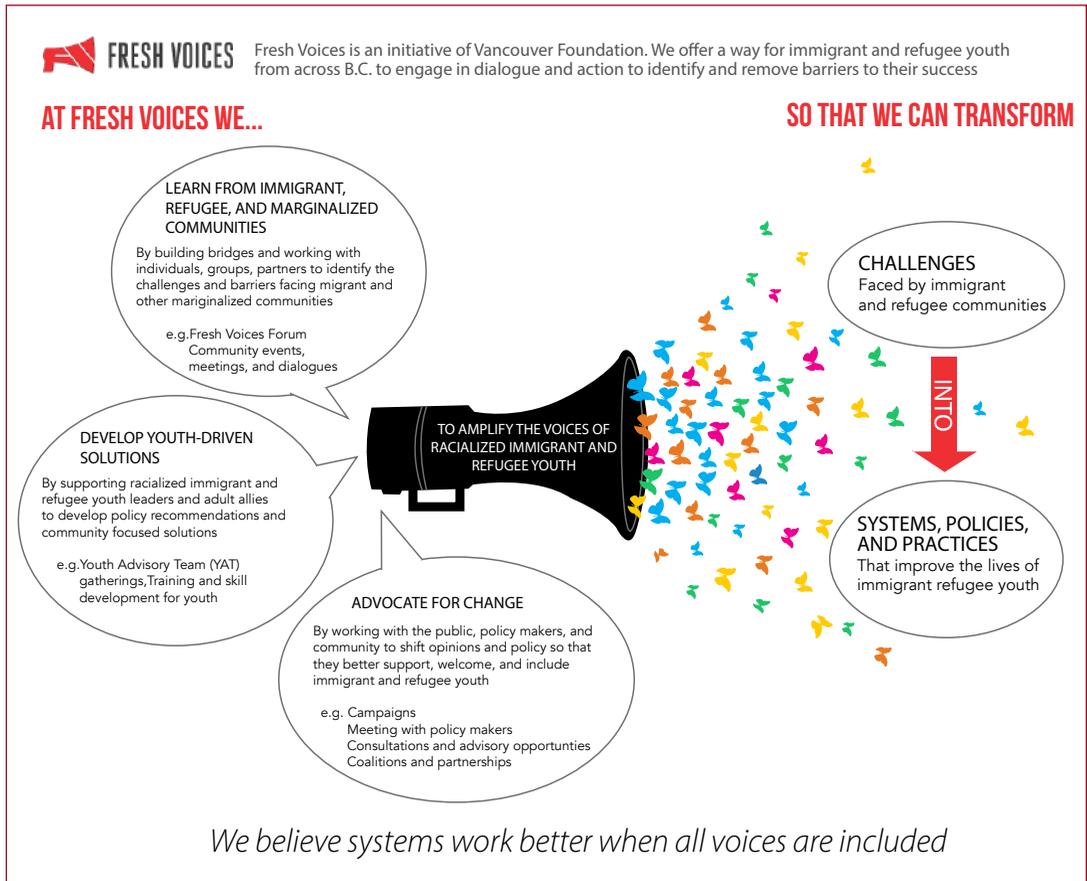
> ### Key Points
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> - Since 2011, Vancouver Foundation has invested significant time, energy, ideas, and money in bringing together immigrant and refugee youth and young people with lived experience of the foster care system in British Columbia.
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> - Through its Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, the foundation has listened and worked in partnership with these young people to address the issues that affect their lives, and important progress has been made in the forms of meaningful policy changes and improved political engagement. The foundation is now in the process of returning these initiatives to the communities that inspired them.
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> - This article describes the roles the foundation played in these inclusive community change efforts, and reflects on the commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to effectively perform each of those roles.

drew on its network of young leaders from diverse backgrounds.

To support momentum from the conference and fill gaps in leadership opportunities for newcomer youth, the foundation continued hosting the initiative. It supported the Fresh Voices youth advisory team with significant time, energy, ideas, and funds to bring together immigrant and refugee youth, listen to them, and empower them to address issues that affect their lives. The Fresh Voices theory of change was developed

FIGURE 1 Fresh Voices Theory of Change

FRESH VOICES

Fresh Voices is an initiative of Vancouver Foundation. We offer a way for immigrant and refugee youth from across B.C. to engage in dialogue and action to identify and remove barriers to their success

AT FRESH VOICES WE...

SO THAT WE CAN TRANSFORM

LEARN FROM IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE, AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

By building bridges and working with individuals, groups, partners to identify the challenges and barriers facing migrant and other marginalized communities

e.g.Fresh Voices Forum
Community events, meetings, and dialogues

DEVELOP YOUTH-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

By supporting racialized immigrant and refugee youth leaders and adult allies to develop policy recommendations and community focused solutions

e.g.Youth Advisory Team (YAT) gatherings,Training and skill development for youth

ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

By working with the public, policy makers, and community to shift opinions and policy so that they better support, welcome, and include immigrant and refugee youth

e.g. Campaigns
Meeting with policy makers
Consultations and advisory opportunties
Coalitions and partnerships

TO AMPLIFY THE VOICES OF RACIALIZED IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

CHALLENGES
Faced by immigrant and refugee communities

INTO

SYSTEMS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES
That improve the lives of immigrant refugee youth

We believe systems work better when all voices are included

retrospectively as part of the five-year evaluation[1] of the initiative, conducted in 2016. (See Figure 1.)

The Fostering Change initiative developed differently. Vancouver Foundation had been making grants for several years to reduce homelessness, and youth homelessness in particular. Research and consultations with the community and policymakers pointed to the need for upstream solutions to better address why young people become homeless in the first place. Since youth who have experienced the child welfare system are vastly overrepresented among homeless youth, a new strategy, Fostering Change, was launched in 2012 with the vision that every young person leaving foster care would have the opportunities and support necessary to thrive as an adult. (See Figure 2.) Unlike Fresh Voices, the Fostering Change team had an embedded developmental evaluator who worked alongside staff, grantees, and young people to feed data back into the work in real time.[2]

While the two initiatives developed differently, practices and approaches were often similar. (See Table 1.) Both initiatives worked at the individual, community, and systemic levels. Both initiatives kept young people at their core and aimed to influence change that would improve the circumstances of all young people aging out of foster care, and all immigrant and refugee youth.

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[1] To review the Fresh Voices Evaluation Report, please see http://freshvoices.ca/2017/06/05/fresh-voices-evaluation-report.

[2] More information on this approach can be found on the Fostering Change website: www.fosteringchange.ca

Reflective Practice

FIGURE 2 Fostering Change Placemat

VISION:
Every young person leaving foster care will have the opportunities and support needed to thrive as adults

MISSION:
To improve policy, practice and community connections for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood

fostering CHANGE
vancouver foundation

Outcomes	A growing public constituency is aware and engaged in issues facing young people in transition from care to adulthood.	Young people have increased voice and influence in planning and decision-making.	Community organizations have increased resources, knowledge and connections to better support young people.	Research, evaluation and learning expand knowledge and effectiveness.
Community Grants	• Arts and media projects highlight the issues for public understanding • Public participation projects directly engage people in the issues	• Projects led by young people highlight issues of importance to young people and provide an opportunity for the practice of meaningful youth engagement	• Projects increase inter and intra organization capacity, as well as community capacity • Multi-year support for program services provides direct support to young people making the transition from foster care to adulthood	• Real-time, supported, collaborative learning contributes to improvements in practice and highlights gaps – "what we don't know"
Youth Engagement	• Young people advise and participate in public engagement and communications work and act as co-hosts for events	• Young people are involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of everything that we do	• Expanded number and improved quality of tools and supports for young people and adult allies collaborating in community • Community organizations and communities are better able to engage in meaningful youth engagement	• Train and support young people to advise on research • Train and support young people to participate as active researchers and respondents
Shared Learning, Evaluation and Research	• Public release of findings from shared learning, evaluation and research help public understand issues facing young people in transition	• YAC captures and shares learning about meaningful youth engagement • Youth-led and youth-directed research and learning highlight issues of importance to young people and expands evidence base of what we know	• Shared Learning and Evaluation (SLE) workgroup learning products support better practice in work with young people and inform possible system and policy changes • A community of providers is built, providing a foundation for greater sharing of knowledge, resources and opportunities	• SLE workgroup collectively identifies issues and learns together (practice-learning feedback loop) • Contracted research contributes to evidence base of what we know • Ongoing measurement of experience of young people contributes to evidence base of what we know (Measure key indicators; Health, Housing, Employment, Education, Support Networks, Finance)
Public Engagement	• Increase broad public awareness of key issues • Invite participation and grow constituency • Engage public in developing possible solutions and actions	• The voice of young people and the expertise of youth leaders are amplified • Provide a platform for young people to directly interact with and influence decision-makers	• Capacity of communities is developed to be able to confidently take public roles in promoting goals for youth in care • Build credibility of organizations • Showcase what is working and amplify success • Highlight gaps in the system	• Learning with communities about issues of importance to them and where they see strengths/gaps • Generate a set of community tested "asks" that are meaningful and can be taken forward by stakeholders and assessed for relevance with broader public audiences and potential allies
WHY THIS MATTERS	Research shows that systems change is enabled by public will which requires increased visibility of and engagement with the issue.	All people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Research shows that authentic youth engagement leads to better individual, programmatic and policy outcomes.	Research shows that fragmented services lead to poor outcomes, therefore, communities need to be supported to collaboratively surface and demonstrate programs and practices that enable better outcomes for young people.	Developing a collective understanding of what works in a BC context and what we still need to learn supports effective practice and can inform policy and system change.

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TABLE 1 Fresh Voices and Fostering Change: Program Overviews and Outcomes

	Fresh Voices	Fostering Change
Annual program budget (excluding grants and staff, CAD)	$277,400	$468,500
Grants budget	$150,00	$901,869
Number of community groups receiving grants	8	19
Youth Advisory Team	15 youth, 6 adult allies	6 youth, 3 adult allies
Staff	2.5 FTE	3.5 FTE
Selected outcomes	• Successfully advocated for the renaming of English as a Second Language to English Language Learning (ELL); continuing advocacy for ELL graduation credits through our Make It Count campaign • Facilitated Syrian Refugee Consultation, in partnership with Immigrant Services Society of BC, to capture refugee youth experiences within the first 100 days of their settlement in Canada • Created Fresh Voices Awards to recognize the contributions of immigrant and refugee youth	• Obtained 17,000 petition signatures, demonstrating that public wants action on support for those aging out of foster care by government, business, and the community • Expanded youth engagement by nonprofits, including youth with lived experience as staff and partners in research and project implementation • Published research showing costs of up to $268 million per year are associated with the adverse experiences of youth from care, while only $57 million per year is required to improve outcomes • Created a "Candidates Pledge," signed by 147 BC election candidates, to further improve support

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The foundation played various roles in supporting inclusive community change, each with its key commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to do the work. In the context of this article, commitments are defined as the core activities in which the foundation engaged to do the work of the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives; mindsets are the principles the foundation holds as an organization and that gave us our bearings throughout the initiatives; and capacities are the areas where we did the work, learned new skills, and developed new functions for the foundation. (See Table 2.)

A final note on terminology: The word "community" is heavily used in this article, and it is a word that has many meanings: most common are a geographical location, a shared identity, or a group of people coming together around a specific issue or interest. In the context of this article, community is used generally to refer to some combination of these three meanings, and, more specifically, to the community outside of Vancouver Foundation's walls.

The Role of Grantmaker

At its core, Vancouver Foundation is a grantmaker. However, while its Fostering Change initiative provided grants in every year of its existence, Fresh Voices granted only in its final year, providing two opportunities:

TABLE 2 Commitments, Mindsets, and Capacities: Summary

Foundation Role	Commitments	Mindsets	Capacities
Grantmaker	Actively support community.	The grantmaker role is to fund, support, learn, and share.	Be willing to fund things that might not work.
Ally to Young People	Involve youth in building, implementing, and adapting strategies, and be clear what is possible in any given situation.	Young people are the experts.	Build trusting relationships, accept a different pace of work, and stay humble.
Public Engagement Catalyst	Build capacity for public engagement for both youth and the foundation.	The foundation must be staunchly nonpartisan; don't fight against government, support it to make change.	Fund research to support an evidence-based approach.
Advocate	Advance specific policy solutions to improve lives of immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care.	Advocacy is a moral imperative for our organization.	Combine the foundation's credibility and influence with the power of young peoples' voices.
Learning Partner	Increase resources for learning and evaluation.	The foundation is an active partner in learning; rigorous learning is best done in the context of relationships.	Develop the internal capacity to support learning and evaluation.
Research Supplier	Fund and use research to further the goals of the initiatives.	Expand the definition of evidence to include multiple forms.	Listen more, talk less, and gather evidence along the way.

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- Fresh Voices Small Grants provided up to $10,000 for youth- and community-led activities intended to activate ideas and solutions addressing the top 10 priority areas identified by immigrant and refugee youth.

- Fresh Voices Education Grants were one-year grants for school districts that had demonstrated experience, interest, and previous relationships with the Fresh Voices youth advisory team to advance the initiative's education priorities for English Language Learning (ELL) in their district. To be considered for funding, applicants were asked to demonstrate significant opportunities for immigrant, refugee, and ELL students to be engaged in advocacy, policy and practice development, research, and community engagement.

The Fostering Change approach to grantmaking evolved over time. Initially, larger multiyear grants were given for single-agency, direct-service approaches to supporting young people aging out of foster care. While this filled an important need and allowed critical services to be delivered to young people, it was not necessarily the most effective way to create change at the systemic level. Grants of different sizes with different granting criteria were eventually developed, with the aim of supporting multiple

aspects of the work. Over the lifetime of the initiative, five types of grants were given:

- Fostering Change Youth Engagement/ Youth Partnership Grants, to amplify the voices and engagement of young people and to support creating knowledge, awareness, and dialogue about experiences of youth transitioning from care to adulthood; connections between young people in and from care and their local community members; youth-led research; and creative arts-based projects. Young people were to be included in design and delivery.

- Fostering Change Community Planning and Engagement Grants, to support strategies that built capacity and common ground for shared action and learning by community stakeholders. The grants supported such work as convening and scoping early-phase engagement of stakeholders in development of practice and policy innovation; coordination of initial collective impact strategies; and local advocacy and awareness work connected to Fostering Change.

- Fostering Change Multiyear Grants, focused on supporting implementation of multiyear community-impact strategies that aligned with the priorities and principles of the initiative and helped to achieve its outcomes. The expectation was that pursuit of those outcomes would generate evidence to improve practice, policy, and levels of collaboration and community engagement. (In later years, there was an explicit requirement for applications that extended beyond direct-service and case-management approaches.) There was an expectation of participation in the foundation-supported shared learning and evaluation agenda, as well as communications, public-engagement, and youth-engagement activities.

- Fostering Change Small Grants provided up to $10,000 for youth- and community-led initiatives focused on youth engagement, relationship building, community convening, and public engagement.

With Fostering Change, the foundation knew it needed to be actively supporting community to do the hard and important work of supporting young people aging out of foster care.

- Fostering Change Legacy Grants were for legacy projects to build upon and carry forward the work of the initiative in the categories of youth engagement, capacity development, shared learning, and research.

The cumulative learning from all Fostering Change grants is still developing. Multiyear grants are still active, as is work that grew out of the grants. These grants gave organizations, communities, and young people the opportunity to think differently about how to support the needs and build on the gifts of young people aging out of foster care.

With Fostering Change, the foundation knew it needed to be actively supporting community to do the hard and important work of supporting young people aging out of foster care. Community is comprised of experts who know what is needed in this province to do a better job. Our role as a grantmaker was to fund those efforts, support and learn from them, and share that learning with people who could use the information to make change. Additionally, as a nongovernmental funder, the foundation had the ability to provide flexible funding for approaches that people thought might succeed but hadn't had a chance to test. We also had the ability to fund efforts that don't easily attract grant support: engaging youth, bringing community together, launching advocacy campaigns, and working across agencies.

The foundation funded many grants simultaneously, allowing evolution on many levels. We

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convened grantees and facilitated their sharing of what was working and what was challenging. Without the ability to fund what was meaningful to young people and the community, we would not have been able to implement other components of the initiative. Fostering Change grantmaking was also a big step for us, as a foundation, to demonstrate willingness to fund prototypes and things that might not work — but that might! By offering grants of different sizes and by offering the opportunity to share learning as it was developing, these grants offered new possibilities for a funder-grantee relationship.

The Role of Ally to Young People

Fostering Change and Fresh Voices intertwined youth engagement and political advocacy — neither of which is a common activity for a funder, especially a community foundation. In both initiatives, the youth advisory bodies were at the center. The Fresh Voices youth advisory team was composed of 15 young people, ages 14 to 24, and six adult allies; the Fostering Change Youth Advisory Circle was composed of six young people, ages 19 to 24, and three adult allies. The teams brought focus and informed the strategies every step of the way. Especially at the beginning, but also throughout the lives of the initiatives, investments were made in building trust, gathering knowledge, learning

how to work together as a group, and exploring the issues.

In our work with young people, we were guided by their principle: nothing about us without us. The young people were the experts. They dreamed with us about what we could do and were very clear about what we could not do. The work unfolded at their pace, which was both fast and slow. We certainly made missteps along the way. We learned how to talk about our expectations — and what to do when each of us, at some point, did not live up to those expectations. As one of the Fostering Change youth advisors said: "In youth engagement there are no mistakes, just learning opportunities." Among these lessons were that we need to acknowledge power differentials, not ignore them; we need to support staff well to do youth-engagement work; and we need to develop deep and trusting relationships.

In 2018, the foundation worked with a consultant to develop a Youth Engagement Learning Report that gathered and shared what has been learned about hosting deep youth-engagement initiatives at a community foundation. Through our own exploration of and reflection upon what we learned during these two initiatives, we developed a list of practices that are critical in doing youth engagement well (Glass, 2018):

- Work collaboratively with youth and staff to create clear goals for the initiative.

- Involve youth fully in building, implementing, and adapting strategies and activities through shared work plans.

- Develop terms of reference that clarify responsibilities of youth advisory members, adult allies, and foundation staff.

- Establish transparency about the extent of youth decision-making power in different situations.

- Keep youth in the loop regarding budgets, workloads, and timelines.

- Engage youth in problem solving about opportunities and constraints.

- Involve foundation staff not directly responsible for initiatives in getting to know youth and working on shared tasks.

We also identified specific ways in which we as a foundation could make it easier for youth to participate (Glass, 2018), including providing food at meetings (healthy, full meals, not just pizza), honoraria, and mass transit fare, including registration fees and travel expenses to events and conferences; scheduling meeting times that work for youth (e.g., Friday evenings); employing a variety of communication methods (e.g., graphic recording, silent reflection, sharing circles); distributing print material for young people to review rather than relying on electronic communications; and offering individualized support, such as obtaining a passport to travel and present at an overseas conference.

After taking time to reflect, we have identified several lessons learned about youth engagement work (Glass, 2018):

Involve youth early in the process and keep them in the center throughout the initiative. In both initiatives, the foundation started with youth themselves. We did not immediately develop action plans; rather, we took the time to build trust, gather knowledge, and explore the relevant issues. This early investment in young people meant that when the time came to set goals and create strategy, youth were full, informed partners.

Be intentional about which youth are being engaged and why. Both Fostering Change and Fresh Voices focused on groups of youth that experience exclusion and barriers to opportunity. This is different than a more general approach to youth engagement that imagines all youth are on a level playing field.

Acknowledge power; don't ignore it. For young people to be authentically engaged, they need to have information. Transparency about budgets, workloads, timelines, administrative

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requirements, concerns, and opportunities create a habit of openness. Building mechanisms for regular communication when things are going well helps to ensure open channels when disagreements or challenges arise. Reciprocity and respect can exist even with a power imbalance. Clarity about what is possible in any given situation is critical. This way of working takes time, dedication and patience. This clarity is underscored by a Fresh Voices youth advisor:

> When it comes to marginalized communities, it's tricky to figure out why people want to invest in you. For example, Fresh Voices could be seen as an advertisement for Vancouver Foundation, but the amount of money spent on us was a small fraction of the foundation's budget. Are they just doing this because the foundation needs to fundraise? As youth, we need transparency and clear communication to make sure that our communities are not being tokenized.

Sharing power means sharing information and responsibility. It is not empowering for youth to say what they want and expect others to implement it. Nor is it empowering to get involved in a project only to be tokenized. The highest level of engagement is when adults and youth, community members and institutions, are in it together, pooling knowledge and sharing responsibility to address challenges. One Fostering Change youth advisor characterized it this way: "I am expected to come prepared because it is part of my commitment. Be clear on what's expected of the young people and what young people are expecting of the organization supporting them."

Foundations need to create supports that allow youth engagement staff to do their best work: job security, decent pay, trust and openness with leadership, commitment to reduce barriers to youth within the organization, and efforts to ensure the youth program is understood and valued by all staff and board.

Staff who build bridges between youth and the institution are the key to success. The program managers of Fostering Change and Fresh Voices had the professional skills to lead deep community engagement. They also knew from personal experience what it was like to be a foster kid or a migrant youth. The value of this lived experience was critical to the success of both initiatives and should not be overlooked. As one Fresh Voices youth advisor put it, "Hire people who understand our journeys."

Youth engagement staff need to be well supported to support everyone else. Youth engagement staff work at the intersection between overall vision and daily practice, between adults learning to share power with youth and youth learning to work with an institution, between marginalized youth's realities and systems that were not built for them. Foundations need to create supports that allow youth engagement staff to do their best work: job security, decent pay, trust and openness with leadership, commitment to reduce barriers to youth within the organization, and efforts to ensure the youth program is understood and valued by all staff and board. Supervisory staff can also play an important role, coaching youth engagement staff who may not have experience working in a foundation to understand the institution's processes and expectations.

Respect the knowledge youth bring with them while supporting them in building the new capacity they need to lead. Fostering Change and Fresh Voices each had a dedicated training budget that youth could use for their learning priorities, such as group workshops in public policy or facilitation skills. One Fresh Voices youth told us that "being on the youth advisory team provided us with so many learning opportunities, not only within the group but also by providing us with means to go to events and learn from other amazing work that people are doing." Staff and adult allies also provided ongoing informal coaching. When youth presented at a conference or met with an elected official, program staff helped the group prepare thoroughly so that they entered with confidence and a clear message. As a Fostering Change youth advisor said,

> Real youth engagement is going that extra mile in making sure the young people are actually prepared and comfortable in the new settings that they are going to. Not just throwing them into a room and saying, "Here you go!"

In the youth advisory council, make time to get to know each other and to stay on track with the work. Youth advisory members were most proud of two things: the relationships they built with one another and the achievements they accomplished together. Time needs to be allocated to both.

Designated adult allies play a quiet but essential role in a youth advisory council, supporting young people to contribute to their fullest. From the beginning, each youth advisory council included adult allies, who are people experienced working with youth and dedicated to the goals of the initiative. Allies attended all advisory meetings and received the same modest honoraria as youth members. Their role was to build trusting relationships with the youth and assist the group to learn and work together.

The Role of Public Engagement Catalyst

To create change at a systemic level, Fostering Change and Fresh Voices both focused on building public and political will. To do this

overtly and with specific strategies was new for Vancouver Foundation, and we needed to start with building internal comfort and capacity. This is why having young people at the center was so incredibly important. The grounding and focus of the youth advisory councils provided social license or credibility to the foundation to speak out on issues of importance to immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care.

In the Fostering Change initiative, public engagement began with public opinion research. This was important to understand how much the public knew about the issue of youth aging out of foster care and how they felt about increasing support to this population of young people. This research set a baseline for later comparisons and helped to develop the strategy for public engagement. Bringing the issue into public view was important in that it demanded that the public pay attention to something that previously had been thought to be a problem for government or for individuals and their families. By shifting the narrative to one of universality, the foundation was able to make this issue something to which everyone could relate.

Through the public opinion research, we learned that more than 90 percent of parents in British Columbia are supporting their children well into their 20s. The foundation asked why government should not do the same for the children and youth it has been parenting in the foster care system. The universality of young adulthood is undeniable; everyone has a story to tell about the help they received when they were making that transition in their own lives. It wasn't hard to engage the public in imagining the same future for these young people as they did for their own children.

From basic public opinion research, we moved into campaigning, certainly a new activity for the foundation. The first step in the campaign consisted of a supporter acquisition strategy: "Write the Future." Employing a petition to build a list of supporters, we used a combination of online outreach and street teams to gather petition signatures. In six weeks of active

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campaigning, we gathered more than 15,000 signatures from people who backed increased supports for young people aging out of foster care. We now had a group with whom we could share stories, policy developments, and other news related to Fostering Change. This was important as we built toward a provincial election set for the following year.

The next phase of our campaign, "Support the 700," was focused on the 2017 provincial election in British Columbia. The foundation developed a pledge that asked candidates to commit to four actions related to improved supports for young people aging out of foster care. We activated our Fostering Change supporters, who reached out to the candidates; 40 percent of them signed the pledge. The platforms of the three primary parties included specific mention of youth aging out of foster care, and in a televised debate leaders were asked what they would do to improve support for these young people.

The May 2017 election resulted in a change of government, and since then Fostering Change has been working to hold officials to their promises; 41 of the candidates who signed the pledge were elected. One of the pledge's actions was to "meet with young leaders from foster care this fall to hear their insights and ideas on how to make a successful start in their adult years." That

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meeting took place, and work is ongoing to hold these elected officials to their promise to "advocate for increased funding for youth aging out of foster care so that they get consistent financial support, long-term relationships with caring dependable adults, and stronger community connections."

Acting as a public engagement catalyst exercised lots of new muscles for the foundation. We did not have in-house expertise on running campaigns, but simply contracting out this work would not be easy, since our commitment was to involve young people in as many aspects of the campaign as possible. We wanted to both build their capacity for public engagement and have their insights and knowledge inform the developing strategy. Further, we wanted to develop the capacity of the foundation. We opted to partner with contractors who had the skills and capacities to teach and learn as they worked.

Another critical mindset (and necessity) was to remain staunchly nonpartisan — as a registered charity, it is unlawful for the foundation to engage in partisan lobbying. We educated ourselves — and our executives, board, and young people — on the rules as they pertain to election campaigns. And we were fortunate to be working on an issue for which there was strong bipartisan support.

Part of our approach was to give the provincial government license for something that we knew it already wanted to do. We began with the belief that the government wanted to do the right thing and that we were not fighting against it. This was not a commonly held belief in the sector, but we held the line and acknowledged that government has a lot of constraints — and it makes choices about the issues it wants to champion. It was our belief that elected officials are more likely to work hard to change policy when they think the public is behind them. We wanted the government to know that more than 15,000 British Columbians were in favor of greater support for youth aging out of care, and the foundation-funded economic research found that the province could save $200 million annually by offering that support. All of this information was aimed at helping government make the necessary changes.

The Role of Advocate

In a sense, being a public engagement catalyst and being an advocate go hand in hand, but it's possible to engage the public without being an advocate for a particular policy solution. Once again, Fostering Change and Fresh Voices broke new ground for the foundation in advancing specific policy solutions to improve the lives of immigrant and refugee youth and young people aging out of foster care. Advocacy again required being strictly nonpartisan and making explicit use of the foundation's influence.

Recognition of and comfort with our own influence is a process that has been evolving at the foundation over the past couple of years through the development of our own theory of philanthropy. We are a well-connected and well-respected organization in the community. We can ask for help from our mayor and prominent local people. We have a history of working with multiple levels of government. We often appear on Canadian Broadcasting Corp. television and radio and in our local newspapers. Through Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, we used all of the tools at our disposal to amplify the voices and experiences of young people. Our deep engagement with young people and community, and our investment in research and grantmaking, allowed us to feel confident in our advocacy positions. Here are some concrete components of our advocacy work:

- Work with young people to identify and prioritize policy recommendations; then get input from other system actors when choosing where to focus. Influencing policy usually requires sustained effort on a small number of solutions at the relevant jurisdictional level. Shopping around recommendations with policymakers can help to focus and build advocacy strategies that are aligned with young peoples' vision. We also learned that advocacy is about windows of opportunity, and we worked hard to align our work to those windows.

- Create venues where youth and decision-makers can discuss public policy. This is not a common occurrence, but Fresh Voices and Fostering Change worked hard to build opportunities for young people to speak directly with policymakers. In the Youth Engagement Learning Report, a Fostering Change youth advisor stressed that "it is important to engage young people to talk about the systemic issues, and not just personal storytelling." Fresh Voices youth met on numerous occasions with British Columbia's minister and deputy minister of education, and young people from Fostering Change held a Policy Solutions Day in Victoria, where they spoke directly to elected officials, including the premier and cabinet ministers. As one Fresh Voices youth advisor said, "We did our best to create spaces where policymakers and young people were equals in expertise."

- Combine the foundation's credibility with young peoples' voices. A powerful example of this came in early 2017, when the United States issued a travel ban on certain countries. Vancouver Foundation's CEO quickly issued a public statement alongside a Fresh Voices youth advisor who had arrived in Canada as a refugee from Iran.

Many of the commitments, mindsets, and capacities related to the role of public engagement catalyst are also applicable to advocates. In addition, the foundation views advocacy as a moral imperative for the organization. As Roger Gibbins

In both initiatives, the foundation's interest has been to learn as much as possible and then to use what it has learned to influence change at the systemic level. This endeavor has been approached with humility and a beginner's mindset. The foundation is not the expert, and must always be conscious of the role it is playing and the power dynamics that are inherent in its relationships.

(2016), a Canadian academic and philanthropy leader wrote in The Philanthropist, "Policy advocacy is a moral obligation, and if charities do not make government uncomfortable, they are not delivering on their charitable mission."

The Role of Learning Partner

In both initiatives, the foundation's interest has been to learn as much as possible and then to use what it has learned to influence change at the systemic level. This endeavor has been approached with humility and a beginner's mindset. The foundation is not the expert, and must always be conscious of the role it is playing and the power dynamics that are inherent in its relationships.

In Fostering Change, the decision was made early on to approach evaluation differently than the foundation had in the past. Up to this point, it had operated on the model of an accountability relationship: funding individual grantees at a modest level to conduct evaluations of their own projects, which were then shared with the foundation as part of grantee reporting. However,

Our role was to help figure out the best structures, processes, and resourcing that would allow grantees to reflect on what they were learning, share that learning with others, and then build the collective learning into their own work. This shared learning was evident in grant applications, partnership agreements, youth capacity development, and many other places.

the benefits of those evaluations were limited to the grantee and the foundation. There were no opportunities to share what was being learned among grantees, and the foundation did not make extensive use of the individual project evaluation findings. So, the decision was made to remove the requirement for individual evaluations, and the grantees were instead given funding to compensate for staff time to participate in shared learning and evaluation activities.

This shared learning and evaluation work evolved over time. It was the first time that the foundation had a dedicated staff person for learning and evaluation. That staff person began by forming a shared learning and evaluation working group composed of representatives from grantees who were receiving larger multiyear grants. The foundation was very conscious of not asking for too much from grantees that were only receiving small grants. This learning and evaluation working group co-created a learning agenda and set out to learn together.

After approximately a year of working in this way, the shared learning and evaluation work

was made accessible to all grantees at their request. This arrangement made it no longer tenable to have only one table or working group, so the model evolved into learning "pods." Each pod was focused on an aspect of the work, such as housing, education, or culture. Grantee staff self-selected into these pods, and each worked through a prototyping cycle, selecting a practice that they were interested in trying and then planning, studying, prototyping, reflecting, and sharing.

All grantees across the pods came together periodically for Grantee Learning Days to share what they were doing and to learn from one another. The work then evolved into a much more open and large-scale attempt to involve people from across the community, although primarily Fostering Change grantees, who were involved in supporting young people aging out of foster care. Throughout, the foundation acted as a learning partner. Our role was to help figure out the best structures, processes, and resourcing that would allow grantees to reflect on what they were learning, share that learning with others, and then build the collective learning into their own work. This shared learning was evident in grant applications, partnership agreements, youth capacity development, and many other places.

In Fresh Voices, learning and evaluation looked different. Because there was no granting component until the final year of the initiative, the funder-grantee relationship did not exist and the need for accountability around grant expenditures was not present. However, learning was still very much a part of the work. As with Fostering Change, foundation staff worked from a place of humility and a beginner's mindset.

Fresh Voices was rigorous regarding documentation and reporting from all its events, forums, and other gatherings. Learning at each step of the journey was always folded back into whatever was being planned next. The foundation hired an evaluator to conduct a more formal external evaluation of Fresh Voices at the initiative's five-year mark. This evaluation grew out of the desire to synthesize and make meaning

of the experience, and to articulate strengths and accomplishments as well as any challenges. The evaluation was guided by an advisory committee, composed of equal membership of youth advisory team members and foundation staff. Together with the evaluator, the advisory committee ensured that the evaluation was meaningful to Fresh Voices stakeholders, particularly young people.

The role of learning partner required a substantial shift in how the foundation had approached evaluation. The commitment to learning and evaluation increased through this work, as the foundation became a much more active participant and invested significantly more time and money resources in supporting learning and evaluation. In this approach to learning and evaluation, process was as important as content. The processes we relied on were drawn heavily from the Art of Hosting approach to leadership,[3] which contributed greatly to the building of relationships between grantees and between the foundation and grantees, and allowed us to hold up the wisdom of community and young people.

Working in this way also required different capacities. Instead of relying on an external, third-party evaluator, we were all getting into the muck, rolling up our sleeves and trying to make sense of things. Evaluator became facilitator, relationship builder and champion.

The Role of Research Supplier

In both initiatives, building the body of evidence was critical. Although we know a great deal about the life experiences of young immigrants and refugees and young people aging out of foster care, there is not a wealth of research in these areas — particularly focused on British Columbia. So, through a variety of channels, we acted as a research grantmaker, a research contractor, and a research supporter.

Fresh Voices youth advisory team members were called upon repeatedly to share their newcomer experiences for various research projects. For

example, a Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia School of Nursing was conducting dissertation research with male immigrants and refugees ages 15 to 22 on their perspectives on and experiences of mental health. Young men who were current and former Fresh Voices youth advisory team members were interviewed, filmed, and co-directed a video that accompanied the completed dissertation.

The foundation also led a study published as *Employment, Mobility and Integration: Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in Metro Vancouver* (Vancouver Foundation 2018). The primary data for this research were obtained through surveys conducted in the community, facilitated and led by a youth research subcommittee from Fresh Voices. The research asked: "How does physical mobility, economic access, and social networks affect immigrant and refugee youth employment integration over time?"

The most high-profile piece of research for Fostering Change, which was critical to public-will building and advocacy efforts, was *Opportunities in Transition: An Economic Analysis of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care,* (Vancouver Foundation 2016) Although there has been some economic analysis done previously in other jurisdictions in Canada, this work took a groundbreaking approach and worked with data that were specific to British Columbia. The findings of this research, together with our public opinion research, helped to build the case that most people in British Columbia were in favor of increasing support for young people aging out of care and that a shift in policy made economic sense as well.

For better or for worse, traditional academic research can garner significant media attention. It is the kind of evidence that people recognize as such, and therefore has legitimacy in a way that other kinds of evidence are only beginning to achieve. By working with academics who were willing to utilize participatory research methods and engage directly with young people,

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[3] The Art of Hosting approach scales up from the personal to the systemic using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation, and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges.

By working with academics who were willing to utilize participatory research methods and engage directly with young people, we were able to build the capacity of both the academics and young people.

we were able to build the capacity of both the academics and young people. We were also better able to integrate this traditional form of evidence with the other forms of evidence that we were building.

Funding research is not a new role for funders, or even for community foundations. Traditionally, however, funders provide grants for research, but don't necessarily get involved in any substantial way in the actual research. In Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, research was used to further the goals of the initiatives and foundation staff, young people, and other stakeholders were deeply involved. From advisory committees to co-researcher relationships, they helped to shape the methodologies and the framing and reporting of the findings.

Although we did rely on and fund traditional forms of research and evidence in Fostering Change and Fresh Voices, it was part of a greater strategy of expanding the definition of evidence. The foundation intentionally challenged itself and others to rethink evidence. We worked to ensure that the voices of those most affected by the issues we are striving to change are louder. We wanted to listen more and talk less. We wanted to explore evidence where it lives. We knew that we didn't have time to try a fully developed approach, see if it worked, and then five years later realize that it was the wrong approach. We need to edit and curate on the fly, capture information as we went, and use multiple methods to gather intelligence. Listening to young people, giving grants to community,

bringing agencies together to reflect on what they were learning, conducting systemic analyses, learning what the public is thinking, influencing what the public knows, and talking to those who hold political office were all part of our strategy to mobilize multiple forms of evidence.

Conclusion

Throughout the lives of the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, Vancouver Foundation acknowledged that the wisdom and commitment to this work resided in community. In 2018, both were returned to the communities that inspired them. While the board was clear from the beginning that these initiatives would not reside permanently at the foundation, there is no playbook or set of rules for how a foundation sunsets its funding for an initiative and hands over the leadership to the community. We are still navigating this process. For each initiative, a community agency was given a grant to sustain the work, and the first year of the shift to community ownership is just ending.

Youth engagement remains a permanent capacity of the foundation, and our new youth engagement initiative, LEVEL, builds on the relationships, lessons, and capacities developed through our work on Fresh Voices and Fostering Change. LEVEL includes grantmaking, grassroots organizing, and a public policy component to address racial equity within the nonprofit sector. Additionally, LEVEL continues the practice of being intentional about the youth we are engaging and focuses explicitly on indigenous and racialized immigrant and refugee young people.

For Fresh Voices and Fostering Change, the foundation is now supporter, cheerleader, ally, former funder, and legacy holder. Through this work we have been given the gift of walking alongside the community. We have explored the edges of what is feasible for a community foundation funder, and it is at those edges where inclusive community change is possible.

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