

**Promoting Green Living and
Environmental Leadership among
Newcomer Communities:
Determinants, Challenges and Planning Implications**

2017



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is based on a community based action research study conducted by Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance). Partners on the project included Earth Day Canada and Harmony Hall. The study was funded by the Healthier Cities and Communities Hub Seed Grant Initiative (jointly supported by Toronto Public Health, The Wellesley Institute and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health).

The research team members for this study included:

Yogendra Shakya, Senior Research Scientist, Access Alliance (Co-PI)
Akm Alamgir, Manager of Quality and Accountability, Access Alliance (Co-PI)
Anjana Aery, Project Coordinator, Green Access Action Research Project
Morris Beckford, Director of Community Health and Wellbeing, Access Alliance
Nadia Jamil, Community Based Research Coordinator, Access Alliance
Shadwa Mohamed, Peer Researcher, Access Alliance
Keith D'Silva, Peer Researcher, Access Alliance

Member of Project Advisory Committee included:

Lara Mosrovsky, Green Access Community Animator, Access Alliance
Ziadh Rabbani, Green Access Community Health Worker, Access Alliance
Saira Ansari, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Earth Day Canada,
Sarah Singh, Program Manager, Harmony Hall Centre for Seniors

Please cite this report as: Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (2017). *Promoting Green Living and Environmental Leadership among Newcomer Communities: Determinants, Challenges and Planning Implications*. Toronto.

INTRODUCTION

There is now a wealth of evidence that climate change and other environmental degradations and risks (pollution, deforestation and loss of green spaces, loss of wildlife) result in damaging social and health impacts (WHO, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Often low-income and vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted by these environmental threats and risks (WHO, 2008a).

With the growing concern of climate change and environmental degradation there has been a shift in discourse towards individuals and communities practicing green living. The term “*green living*” refers to activities and practices that are better for the environment and thereby reducing one’s carbon footprint or negative impact on the environment. Green living (also referred as being eco-conscious or living sustainability) can range from individual practices like recycling and composting, buying locally produced organic food, to “greening” the home or workplace. Green living can have positive impact on the environment and on people’s health.

However, there is growing evidence that socio-economic marginalization can prevent people from having access to tangible infrastructure, tools and supports to practice green living (Able 2008; Downs et al, 2009; Perkins, 2011; Resnik and Portier, 2008; WHO, 2009, Welsh and McRae, 1998). This is particularly true in the case of food production/consumption systems. Due to socio-economic barriers (income insecurity; precarious jobs) and or structural barriers (food desert; fast food dominance), people living in low-income neighborhoods may not be able to afford or have access to locally produced, organic foods even when they know that locally produced organic foods are good for the environment and for their health. Even people with intimate knowledge of growing foods may not have access to land or resources to do so (Downs et al, 2009; WHO, 2009; Welsh, 1998)

A major barrier to green living in terms of food consumption reported in the literature is the high expense and inaccessibility at local stores (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007; Harris, Rowe Minniss, & Somerset, 2014; Hordyk, Hanley, & Richard, 2015; Gray, Guzman, Glowa, & Drevno, 2014). Enablers to green living described in literature include having access to fresh, organic produce (Gray et al., 2014), learning about healthy living/eating, home gardening, community gardening and the desire to involve children in gardening to foster healthy eating habits (Food Empowerment Project, 2014). Similarly, while existing literature suggest that immigrant communities may have more pressing needs (e.g. immigration process, finding a job and housing, supporting family) which outweigh “worrying about the environment”, none cite a lack of interest in environmental issues (Gibson-Wood & Wakefield, 2013; Vahabi & Damba, 2013).

The most cited barrier to green living is economic marginalization with income and/or a lack of food security as a barrier to healthy eating and green living. A program evaluation of The Stop Community Food Centre revealed the majority of program participants were low-income, and more than half were born outside of Canada (The Stop Community Food Centre, 2013). Ethnic

minorities and racialized populations are often excluded from mainstream environmental discourse despite the fact they are disproportionately affected by negative social and health impacts from environmental harms (Gibson-Wood & Wakefield, 2013; Teelucksingh, 2002). Language barriers (Vahabi & Damba, 2013) and limited outreach to racialized communities (Gibson-Wood et al., 2012) also affect knowledge and awareness of green living and access to community resources among diverse communities.

There is limited research about environmental knowledge, attitudes and practices focused on low-income families, particularly those who are newcomers. Further, evidence is also limited on enablers and solutions for increasing green living and environmental action among newcomer and low-income communities. In order to bridge this gap, we conducted a community-based action research project focused on evaluating the impacts of a peer-led environmental leadership and green living workshop series (Access Alliance's Green Access Academy program) geared at newcomer communities living in Taylor Massey neighbourhood in Toronto.

The Taylor Massey neighbourhood has a large immigrant and newcomer population with 61% of residents born outside of Canada (City of Toronto, 2014). Additionally 35% of the population is low income compared to the city average of 19% (City of Toronto, 2014).

Research Objectives and Methodology

The key goal of this study was to assess the implications of community-engaged, place-based approaches to promoting green living among low-income, newcomer residents. This research study used a community-based action research approach and mixed-method study design. The study received approval from University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board. In line with community-based research principles we engaged two peer researchers – Keith D'Silva and Shadwa Mohamed - to be a part of the research team. Both peer researchers are residents of Taylor Massey and completed the Enviro-Leaders program in the past year. Both peer researchers immigrated to Canada and one of them arrived less than 3 years ago. The peer researchers received training on research ethics, recruitment, data collection and analysis and were active members of the research team.

We investigated three inter-linked questions:

- 1) What are the systemic enablers and barriers to building green living knowledge and practice among newcomer families?
- 2) How does engaging local residents in leadership capacity as environmental leaders affect community uptake of green living knowledge and practice?
- 3) How does building green living knowledge and practice impact food security for newcomer families?

About the Enviro-Leaders Program

The Enviro-Leaders Program, based at the Access Point on Danforth, is an eight-month program that trains community members in the Taylor Massey neighbourhood about environmental issues and organic gardening practices. Enviro-Leaders are provided training and mentorship to develop workshops on different green living topics and later present workshops to members of the community.

Green Living Workshops and Surveys

The key goal of the study was to assess how a peer-led framework (Enviro-Leaders program) affected community uptake of green living knowledge and practice among newcomer families living in low-income neighbourhoods. We completed a literature review of existing evidence of place-based initiatives for advancing green living knowledge and practice particularly related to green and healthy food production/consumption to assess the gaps in the literature.

Four “Green Living” workshops were conducted by Enviro-Leaders at Access Point on Danforth. Eligibility criteria for the study were: (a) living in the Taylor Massey neighbourhood and (b) arrived in Canada in 10 years or less. The four workshop topics included:

- Making a self-irrigating water pot
- Growing herbs indoors
- Worm composting
- Making healthy salad dressings for leafy greens

Interpreters were available at each workshop if requested. Workshops were evaluated by a pre- and post-survey to document immediate workshop learnings and existing knowledge and attitudes towards green living and environmental issues. Surveys were piloted with four newcomers to ensure clarity and cultural acceptability of survey questions.

Qualitative Data Collection

Participant Focus Groups

Focus groups were co-facilitated by a Peer Researcher and Research Coordinator. Follow-up focus groups were conducted one month following the workshop with 18 workshop participants. In these focus groups we explored:

- Perspectives on green living and health
- Participants’ knowledge and application of workshop content
- Perception of Enviro-Leaders program

Enviro-leader Focus Groups

A focus group with three Enviro-leaders and one individual interview with an Enviro-Leader were conducted to understand their perspectives of the Enviro-Leaders program including strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations for the future. Focus groups also examined enablers and barriers to green living for newcomer families.

Service Provider Focus Groups

A focus group with five service providers was conducted to understand enablers and barriers to green living, key ingredients for successful initiatives promoting green living, and challenges faced by community agencies.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics on sociodemographic characteristics and frequency of pre-survey scores were analyzed. T-tests were conducted on pre and post workshop scores comparing the average mean scores for 12 items.

Thematic analysis of qualitative data was completed using Nvivo. Four team members coded a transcript and compared initial codes to develop a preliminary coding framework. Subsequent transcripts were coded by at least two team members. Collaborative data analysis meetings with peer researchers and the research team were held to discuss key themes and refine the coding framework. Additionally, summaries of all transcripts were prepared to get an overall picture in analysis and complement the line by line coding analysis.

Findings

Impact of Enviro-Leaders Program

Program Strengths

The peer-based community led workshops on green living were effective in increasing knowledge on green living and introducing newcomers to low-cost gardening techniques. After completing one of the four workshops there was a significant increase in participants' knowledge on where to get information, resources and training to practice green living ($t=5.8$, $p<0.0001$), knowledge on how to grow food in a way that is good for the environment ($t=4.24$, $p<0.0001$), and knowledge on healthy eating ($t=3.53$, $p<0.001$). There was also a significant increase in the number of people who agreed one person's actions could make a difference to the environment ($t=2.99$, $p<0.004$).

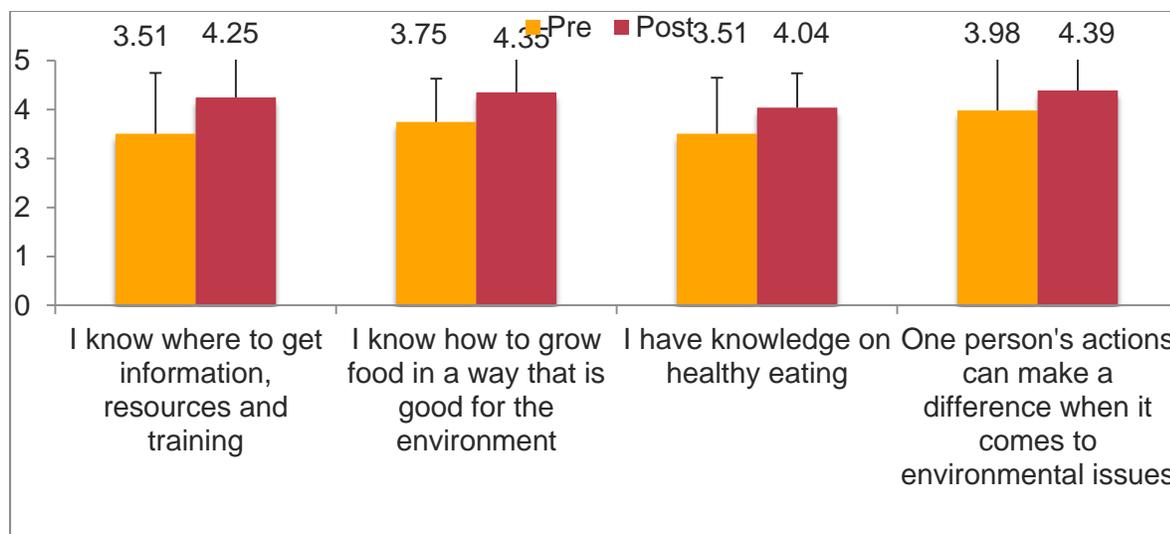


Figure 1. Newcomer knowledge about green living and healthy eating.

The key ingredients of program success were providing practical demonstrations and supplies that could be taken home, the non-judgmental space and the openness of staff and facilitators. The workshops were made accessible through provision of childcare and TTC tokens to cover the cost of travel and language interpretation for non-English speakers.

“I like the fact the staff were helpful and nice. It is an inclusive workshop.” - Workshop Participant

16 of 18 workshop participants who participated in the 1 month follow up focus group described practicing what they learned at home or sharing it with family/friends:

“Because we learn these things, how to do it. And the [self irrigating] pot...how to keep it in small space. We can keep green all the year. We can do it...And it is so easy. So, economical, not expensive...what we throw it out we can utilize it to make certain things. It is very helpful for us. And we are practicing this at home.” – Workshop participant

Another impact of the Enviroleaders program was an increased sense of community among participants who made new friends and got to know their neighbours better. Participants felt inspired to reduce their carbon footprint and share knowledge with family/friends and at work and school. Many participants were interested in joining the community garden or accessing other programs through Access Alliance’s Green Access Program. By having community members facilitate workshops (i.e. Enviro-Leaders), participants felt more comfortable asking questions and felt the content was relevant to people living in Taylor Massey.

Enviro-Leaders felt they had increased knowledge on gardening, healthy eating and environmental issues such as climate change and water conservation. Enviro-Leaders also had increased confidence, improved presentation skills and enhanced their problem-solving and

interpersonal skills. These skills could be applied in the future in work and school and were a positive outcome of the leadership model. Two of the Enviro-Leaders spoke about spreading knowledge in the community and hoping to inspire others to help the environment.

“Before I thought like, we couldn’t do much about it. But I thought like, it’s happening right now. Well, if we need to improve the environment we have to like, stop a lot of developments of- that’s what I used to think. But now after I joined enviro leaders programs, I realized that’s not the case. And you can like, take small steps to help improve the environment by like, planting, stuff like that.” - Enviro-Leader

“I go to a party so there is different type of food. Then I explain to them that I learned in this workshop, that this, uh, food is good for health...that this one is not good for health. Uh, then they appreciate this, then they say wow what wonderful program workshop is this. And also, I uh, uh, brought my uh, friends with me here as well.” - Enviro-Leader

“And I try to like, I try to, like, after what I learned from enviro leaders, I try to not waste foods and things. Because food is very precious. Um, apparently, one third of the food that is produced is wasted in the United States and, I think in North America. And then that was big impact on me. Because I, before like, I used to waste food sometimes. But now I, I scarcely waste food. Or unless it’s like, I can’t eat at all, then I save it for later to finish it. So I practice green living like that. I also buy like, I like, I also use more environmentally friendly things. So that it doesn’t like, it doesn’t have a bad impact on the environment. And also during the winter heating is a big problem. So like, I use less heating and then try like, insulate my house in different ways. So, that like, I’m need to use like, so much heating.” - Enviro-Leader

Improvements

Enviro-Leaders discussed how workshop participants with language barriers may not understand the workshop content even with an interpreter and would not feel included in the discussion. Future workshops could be facilitated in a different language if there is enough community interest is there. A large number of Bengali and Pashto speakers reside in the Taylor Massey neighbourhood and could be an area for further exploration. Enviro-Leaders also recommended doing outreach in other communities by presenting their workshops in other agencies throughout the city.

Community members also identified a need for newcomer friendly green living information and longer-term programming to build on their knowledge and support their efforts in living green. Community-based workshops alone do not address the structural barriers faced by newcomers. However a peer-led community-based workshop can be a catalyst for raising awareness on environmental issues and working together to address local problems.

Green Living Knowledge and Practice among Newcomers

Survey findings and focus groups revealed that newcomers have substantial knowledge on green living and environmental issues. Survey participant characteristics are found in Table 1.

47% of participants agreed they practiced growing food at home. Prior to the workshop 89% agreed they were aware of current environmental issues, 47% knew how to grow food in a way that was good for the environment and 87% had knowledge about healthy eating. In follow up focus groups participants identified several ways they practice green living at home including taking public transit or walking, recycling and reducing waste, composting food scraps and using less electricity/heat in the home. The majority of newcomers surveyed identified family or friends (39.3%), the internet (54.7%) and/or Access Alliance (66%) as the major sources of information on green living (see Figure 1). Very few participants identified environmental organizations (17%) or government (15.1%) as information sources.

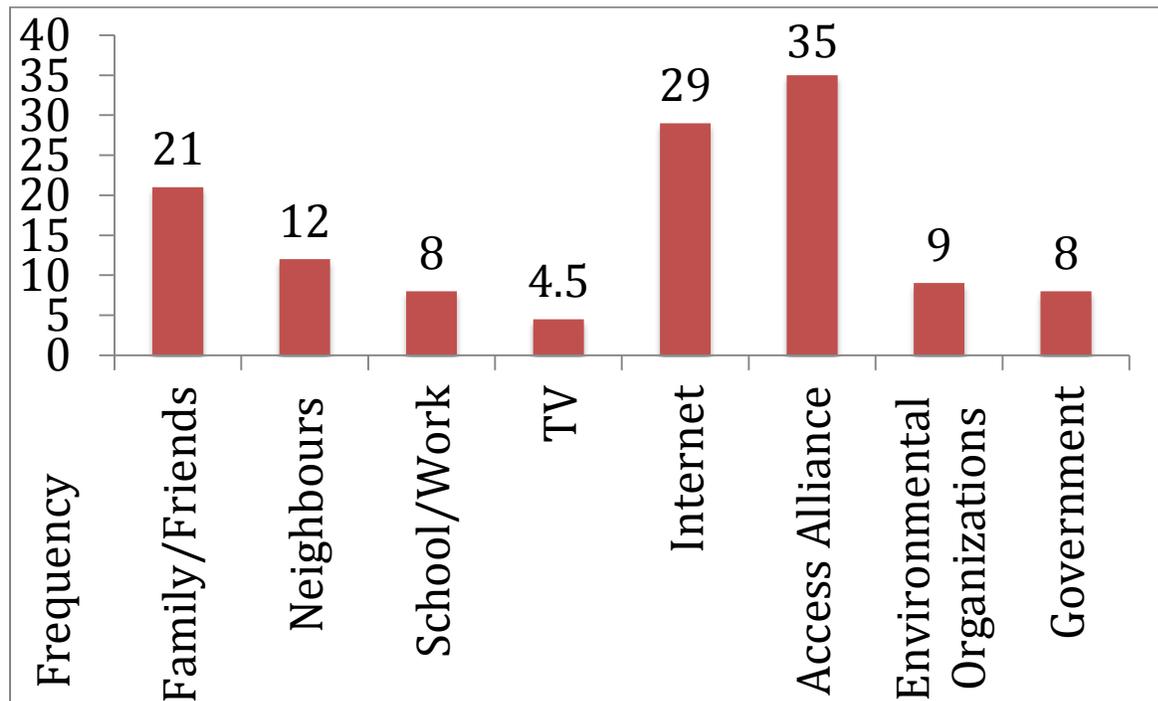


Figure 2: Sources of Information on Green Living

The access and support of community agencies, including Access Alliance helped newcomers become more aware of environmental issues and promoted an interest in green living. One workshop participant stated:

“So in not being expert in the field...whenever the problem arise there are people here at Access Alliance that have resources and openness to help anybody, with an interest in green living and...encouraging self and others...for healthy living.” – Workshop participant

Role of Community Agencies in supporting green living

Community agencies and networks can be a catalyst for community action supporting environmental action and food security. For example a service provider described linking a community garden program with donating food to a community centre:

“Some of the very successful gardens have very dedicated teams and have another social initiative, donating to food banks that run out of the community centre or a local one. And that helped...People who have a different motivation to be there than bringing home produce for themselves while they garden at the same time...I find, where some of the most tightly knit community gardens I have been to.” – Service provider

Barriers to Green Living

Money Matters

The major barrier to green living for newcomers was limited income and the lack of affordability. The workshops encouraged organic growing practices and also increased knowledge on organic foods but the high cost of organic products and other eco-friendly products made it difficult for newcomer families to practice regularly. Approximately 45% of newcomers reported they did not have enough income to meet daily needs. Community-based programming alone is not sufficient for encouraging green living without access to financial resources. In a focus group a community member described the challenge of embracing a green lifestyle:

“Inorganic food, they are much cheaper than organic food. So like, maybe, people would choose the cheaper way to feed themselves... it’s hard to, you know, spend extra money just for organic lifestyle.” – Workshop participant

“Um, the problems are like, sometimes it’s more affordable to like, buy things which are like, less green than like. Some fields have improved in this. Like, most of the papers now are recycling paper, right. Recycling papers are much cheaper than it used to be before. Like, sometimes, like, plastic for example, things which are made out of plastic so much more cheaper than like, containers for example. Plastic containers are much cheaper than ceramic, like, glass. Yeah, those kind of containers. So, like, it’s more like, it’s about affordability. And like, sometimes plastic just does things better. Like, plastic containers like, if it falls it won’t break. but if it’s like, glass or ceramic, if it falls it will break. And plastic is more durable. So, those are the kind of things that are barriers to green living. Also like, we live in an apartment, like, heating we can’t. Like, we need heating. Plus, Canada is so cold we can’t overcome the hot water need, hot water. And like, plants, I try to grow plants but like, what’s it called, in an apartment you can’t. there’s not enough space. Like, space thing is also a problem to green living. Yeah.” – Enviro Leader

Structural Barriers

The majority of newcomers residing in Taylor Massey live in rental buildings with 86.5% of survey participants indicated they rented their housing. For community members interested in growing their own fruits and vegetables they have limited space (see Table 2). For families living in apartment buildings growing food in the balcony is often discouraged or prohibited:

“As well living in the apartment. So that is a big concern and even the building management do not allow for gardening in the...veranda” – Workshop Participant

“Some kind of food we cannot grow in our home. Because in Canada, summer is a very short time. We cannot grow all kinds of vegetable or all kind of things. Because our country is very hot country. We can grow all seasons. But I think, Canada is suppose, if I have balcony, I cannot grow pumpkin or broccoli. Doesn’t grow inside. It’s grow outside, it takes long time.” – Workshop participant

Additionally creating supportive environments were also seen as necessary to support green living at a larger scale:

“I think it’s the environment...Because if we go to the shops, we get the plastic bags. So, like, everywhere, it’s not only us, the surrounding is like that. And that’s the big challenge. Somebody support us then easy for us to do. But it’s really hard. Because it’s not one person’s duty to do this.” – Workshop Participant

Barriers for Agencies

Community agencies have a large role in promoting green living among newcomers. Many agencies are working in urban agriculture and food security. Limited funding makes creating sustainable programs that adapt to the needs of the community challenging. With the short-term nature of grants there is high staff turnover and difficulty measuring long-term outcomes for funders:

“The challenge is that...funders don’t give you the time that you’d need to build a relationship...you can’t do that within six months...and time is a huge factor...I think you need to have like very long terms goals. And this is what we want to give, our vision, right. And we know it’s gonna take some time to get there. And we are okay with that. But then communicating with funders that this maybe the outcome, you know. We may not be able to achieve the outcomes.” – Service provider

Environmental Awareness

It Worries Me

All focus group participants discussed environmental concerns showing newcomers are aware of many environmental issues through news sources and experiences in their home country. The key concerns revealed by workshop participants and enviro-leaders include an increase in pollution, climate change and the use of chemicals in food production.

“One big concern is that there’s global warming that’s happening. So like, things can just change unexpectedly. And some people just don’t realize it. Because they just assume that the earth can just take any action that humans have taken.” - Enviro-Leader

“I think that more like, problem is, so I grow the plant and fruit like when you use the chemicals or fertilizers or, so this causes like, people sick. Like back home in Afghanistan there was everything different type of germs but nobody was getting sick so easily, because there was no chemicals or it was fruit and vegetable, plants, they were organic.” – Enviro-Leader

Workshop participants were very concerned about the links between environmental pollutants and chemicals and increased incidence of cancer. Three participants discussed the rise in fossil fuel use and the volume of cars contributing to worldwide pollution. News reports of increased flooding and natural disasters and personal experiences of declining air quality in their home countries made participants aware of the need to protect the environment.

Everyone's Responsible

Many newcomers spoke about the shared responsibility of protecting the environment by both individuals and the government. Protecting the environment was important for future generations. A few participants felt that individuals were responsible for taking small steps towards green living such as the proper disposal of waste and buying less plastic. One participant described the interconnectedness of the environment and how governments around the world need to take action to address environmental issues:

"When it comes to environment, Canada or any country cannot be considered in isolation. We are part of the pollution. Worldwide...the pollution of China, is not the problem of China alone, it is the problem of the whole world ...because production is from the overseas countries. They are from Europe, from the United States, from Canada. So we are also responsible. Europe is also responsible for the pollution in China. So, it's a big issue...we can leave this world a little better for the future generation. But I don't think they are making real talks." – Workshop participant

"I think there should be a lot of programs like this—open out to the public because like a very small community is knowing about this. So, like, they also will have—people have not known or people less interested in going to see, and doing all of this hands on experiences like this—like you provide everything for us and you allow us to take back home. So, something programs like this if are open and frequently happening, like many people it'll be a better fit and then they'll try to do at least something from their part. As everyday there is one other new buildings coming up. I think at the same point, the number of trees also should be growing. So it should be, like, balanced equally. And also related to gardening and everything that's being sold like the soil, the seeds, or anything related to it. The cost must not be high as well. It should be reasonable, and if somebody's interested it must be easy also to get it." – Workshop participant

"So I have one more thing to say. To respond to the query about responsibility of the government. Actually the developments should not be vertical, it should be horizontal. More people coming, more buildings are going. Bring up more industries, more of shop—so this is one primary reason for pollution. So if the city expands horizontally that is it expands on size, on some other grounds. And, so the concentration is less and less, there may be some decentralization in some part of the city. We would take them to other rural areas. And they can be linked to rules and other things." – Workshop participant

Back Home is Different

A few participants who had arrived in Canada within the last year also perceived Canada to be doing better for the environment because in their home countries there was a lack of infrastructure for things like waste management:

“Actually I am just compared to my country to here. Because we have been here...only 6 months. So, I saw the waste system in here is very nice, so actually ...there is nothing to do extra. Just to dispose our personal waste in the right way. So that is a really good practice here. Just to obey, the follow the instructions.” – Workshop participant

Two participants also described when they first came to Canada they were unaware that tap water is safe and were only consuming bottled water. Many newcomers continue to follow practices that are common in their home countries and aren't aware of the different regulations and infrastructure that are common in Canada. A lack of newcomer friendly information on green living and local infrastructure is a major barrier for newcomers interested in the environment.

Green Living is Healthy Living

For many newcomers their interest in green living and attending the workshops was motivated by an interest in making healthier choices for themselves and their families:

“...not only this, I'm in the peer nutrition program. Even there we get to know about the awareness about like, how do we eat healthy food. Not only growing, eating is also as part of it. So there are for kids what is needed, what kind of food and how do we give them. So these program is one way the communities and the government have to support for us to learn a lot.” – Workshop participant

We cannot buy everything organic. That's a good point. But at least we can try. Try to minimize it's like, having lot of poison and little poison- makes really differences. Because, this is because of kids. I was asking my friend. She is not in this country. But in other country. The bananas are there really good. The fertilizer and pesticides- now it's so much that we can try to minimize the level. So, okay, if you are supposed to grow chilies or coriander or spinach at home. When you cook that for your kid, at least, one day maybe you just reduce. So, the factor of trying to implement, trying is important. We cannot try always, but we have to try. Before trying, we would not be able to implement it, it's not going to happen. Someday, some point we have to start that. So, she was trying to give all the organics to the kids. Maybe it was a good point. Because, the kids, their immune system is really weak and they have to be stronger. I think, for the kids, maybe, all the fruits organic. It's not bad, it's good for them. That's my point.
– Workshop participant

Service providers also described connecting environmental initiatives with health such as combining yoga with their community gardening program were important in gaining buy-in from the community and introducing green living to recent newcomers. There was a clear

interest from participants in the Enviro-Leaders program to connect gardening practices to healthy eating, nutrition, reading food labels, understanding GMOs and healthy cooking. Enviro-Leaders and several workshop participants also described the links between the physical environment and health with concerns about chemicals in soil and water as illustrated below:

“There’s so many industries that release pollutant in the water...Also herbicides and like, pollutants in the soil, and the soil which gives you the plant. And we eat those plants...And that harms our body. So, environment, um, is, correlates to our health. And like, if the environment s good, then our health is good.” – Enviro-Leader

Being Connected to Nature

Interestingly, newcomers described the benefits of green space and gardening in improving mental health. One participant discussed how being with nature improved her mood and reduced stress:

“And I feel like, when you are with nature...you’re not really stressed out. It’s just you planting, you gardening...no tension or anything. It’s just, you know, you are focusing on environment. I think it’s really relaxing ...And you are more active rather than just being at home and not doing anything at all.” – Workshop participant

“And in generally I think, um, it’s my opinion we have to have, uh in future more of these type of workshop because we are human, we live in this, uh, big city is Toronto and everywhere we can see just concrete and uh we need, um, we need to touch with nature. So people they need the right um how can I say in English...we need touch... I need have some like small pot and uh grows apple, any plants or flowers. That is something nice and good for, uh, how can I say? ... For mood ... When we see— Yes, when we see, when I open balcony and we see something grows up...in that concrete, this is the touch with nature.” – Workshop participant

Many participants agreed that spending time outdoors or nurturing plants was important for wellbeing. Participants valued the socializing aspect of working in a community garden and enjoyed staying more active by gardening. Another participant suggested the government could increase green spaces in cities and have more car-free areas in the central core.

Food Security

In focus groups participants discussed how learning to grow organic food and joining community gardens increased their access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Instead of buying expensive organic products at markets participants could grow some produce themselves and in a community garden produce could be shared with other families. Nevertheless the affordability of healthy food was highlighted as major issue. One community member spoke about the low cost of junk food:

“The thing is I think the green things in the market should be lesser, because compared to that KFC and other McDonalds are—those foods which are really not good, we all know because the expense is low we go for that.” – Workshop participant

“We get the organic things at home without expense. We can grow it at our own. We don’t need to go outside to buy it. So, that is very nice. We learn how to grow it. How to do it our own. So that is very important thing for me.” – Workshop participant

Diversifying Green

Environmental agencies lack knowledge and any institutional policies on equity and diversity. Their staff may tend to lack diversity and they tend to target more well off groups and assume that low-income and newcomer families are not interested in environmental and green living issues. As one service provider describes:

“Some of it is a disconnect between, where the resources are equipped for advertisement and recruitment for these programs... other neighbourhoods that are affluent are very aware of the program. So I think, the disconnect is where the dollars for advertising about our programs are being put. To try and get a return, obviously you wanna get some return. So, there’s this disconnect.” - Service provider from ENGO

Many newcomers are highly educated from their home countries and some have technical skills such as in engineering that could be transferable in the green sector and lead the way for environmental initiatives that engage diverse communities. There is a definite interest among newcomers to learn more about environmental issues and integrate programming with health is important in addressing the needs of newcomers who want access to more information.

Making Green Living a Part of Daily Life

Several newcomers discussed limited time and other priorities as a barrier to green living. Service providers also perceived green living as a low priority for newcomer families who are in the process of settling in a new country:

“When their parents come it’s all about survival. And just being able to provide some kind of stable life for their children. And they are finding survival jobs. And then it’s hard for them to move forward too.” - Service provider from ENGO

By contrast a workshop participant who newly arrived to Canada mentioned the benefit of learning green living practices that were practical and cost effective:

“Of course. It is something we can do right now. It is implemented and it helps our normal daily life. We can practice it...here we learn and we apply it in our own life. We think that we do something. We learn something that help people, help ourselves. And we can save some money with it. Yeah, in this way it helps...It is for everybody’s daily life. – Workshop participant

“Also, we took the tea with us at that time so for example, like, I had a stomach pain so it was hard for me to go to sleep during the night. It was bothering me a lot but after using that tea so it worked very well so now I go really good uh, like, to sleep and I have no pain so I don’t know how. Yea I need the name of that tea or herb like what was that I want to share this uh, to my doctor that I took this one so now I’m okay.” – Workshop participant

When green living is not seen as a competing priority but something that can be incorporated into one’s daily life it can become more feasible to newcomers and provide a different outlook on what it means to be environmentally friendly. In fact many newcomers already practice things at home that are better for the environment and an introduction to green living acknowledges what they already do to have a low carbon footprint.

Implications for Service/Policy

Although this is a small study there are several key implications for service delivery and policy. Firstly, newcomers valued the peer-based community led workshops and the Enviro-Leader Program Model could be replicated in other neighbourhoods in Toronto to engage newcomers on green living.

Secondly, this study showed that there is a common misconception that newcomers do not have an interest in environmental issues. There needs to be more newcomer friendly green living information available that recognizes their knowledge and need for specific information on local practices and infrastructure such as promoting the safety of tap water.

Newcomers appreciate system level interventions on addressing environmental issues with their recommendations for governments to act by stopping the sales of bottled water, promoting car-free zones in the downtown core, creating more green spaces and city parks, promoting greater transparency on chemicals used in food products and making organic and local food more affordable.

The lack of diversity in environmental organizations must be addressed through institutional policies that promote diversity in hiring practices. Increasing job opportunities for newcomers in the green sector could bridge the divide in the mainstream environmental organizations.

References

- Bond, D., & Feagan, R. (2013). Toronto farmers' markets: Towards cultural sustainability? *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 3(2), 45–60.
- Campigotto, R. M. (2010). *Farmers' markets and their practices concerning income, privilege, and race: A case study of Wychwood Artscape Barns in Toronto*. (Unpublished Thesis). University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.
- Carter, E. D., Silva, B., & Guzmán, G. (2013). Migration, acculturation, and environmental values: The case of Mexican immigrants in central Iowa. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103(1), 129–147.
- Clarke, L., & Agyeman, J. (2011). Is there more to environmental participation than meets the eye? Understanding agency, empowerment and disempowerment among black and minority ethnic communities. *Area*, 43(1), 88 – 95.
- Corburn, J. (2007). Community knowledge in environmental health science: co-producing policy expertise. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 10(2), 150 – 161.
- Engler-Stringer, R., & Berenbaum, S. (2007). Exploring food security with collective kitchens participants in three Canadian cities. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(1), 75–84.
- Food Empowerment Project. (2014). *Bringing community voices to the table: Food Empowerment Project food access in San Jose focus groups qualitative data analysis results*. Cotati, CA: Food Empowerment Project.
- Gibson-Wood, H., Wakefield, S., Vanderlinden, L., Bienefeld, M., Cole, D., Baxter, J., & Jermyn, L. (2012). "A drop of water in the pool": information and engagement of linguistic communities around a municipal pesticide bylaw to protect the public's health. *Critical Public Health*, 22(3), 341 – 353. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2012.674633>
- Gibson-Wood, H., & Wakefield, S. (2013). "Participation", white privilege and environmental justice: Understanding environmentalism among Hispanics in Toronto. *Antipode*, 45(3), 641–662.
- Gray, L., Guzman, P., Glowa, K. M., & Drevno, A. G. (2014). Can home gardens scale up into movements for social change? The role of home gardens in providing food security and community change in San Jose, California. *Local Environment*, 19(2), 187–203.
- Harris, N., Rowe Minniss, F., & Somerset, S. (2014). Refugees connecting with a new country through community food gardening. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 11(9), 9202–9216.
- Hordyk, S. R., Hanley, J., & Richard, É. (2015). "Nature is there; it's free": Urban greenspace and the social determinants of health of immigrant families. *Health & Place*, 34, 74–82.
- Johnston, J., Rodney, A., & Szabo, M. (2012). Place, ethics, and everyday eating: A tale of two neighbourhoods. *Sociology*, 46(6), 1091 – 1108.
- Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2010). Assessing the relevance of neighbourhood characteristics to the household food security of low-income Toronto families. *Public Health Nutrition*, 13(07), 1139–1148.
- Lautenschlager, L., & Smith, C. (2007). Beliefs, knowledge, and values held by inner-city youth about gardening, nutrition, and cooking. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 24(2), 245–258.

- Richer, C., Htoo, S., Kamizaki, K., Mallin, M., Goodmurphy, B., Akande, A., & Molale, A. (2010). Beyond bread and butter toward food security in changing Parkdale. Toronto, ON.
- Scharf, K., Levkoe, C., & Saul, N. (2010). In every community a place for food the role of the community food centre in building a local, sustainable, and just food system. Toronto, ON: Metcalf Foundation.
- Teelucksingh, C. (2002). Spatiality and Environmental Justice in Parkdale (Toronto). *Ethnologies*, 24(1), 119 – 141. <http://doi.org/10.7202/006533ar>
- The Stop Community Food Centre. (2013). *2013 annual program survey report*. Toronto, ON: The Stop Community Food Centre.
- Tiedje, K., Wieland, M. L., Meiers, S. J., Mohamed, A. A., Formea, C. M., Ridgeway, J. L., ... Sia, I. G. (2014). A focus group study of healthy eating knowledge, practices, and barriers among adult and adolescent immigrants and refugees in the United States. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 11(1), 63.
- Toronto Public Health. (2010). *Cultivating food connections: Toward a healthy and sustainable food system for Toronto*. Toronto, ON: Toronto Public Health.
- Vahabi, M., & Damba, C. (2013). Perceived barriers in accessing food among recent Latin American immigrants in Toronto. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 12(1), 1.
- Wakefield, S., Yeudall, F., Taron, C., Reynolds, J., & Skinner, A. (2007). Growing urban health: Community gardening in South-East Toronto. *Health Promotion International*, 22(2), 92 – 101.
- Zick, C. D., Smith, K. R., Kowaleski-Jones, L., Uno, C., & Merrill, B. J. (2013). Harvesting more than vegetables: the potential weight control benefits of community gardening. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(6), 1110 – 1115.
- Zoellner, J., Zanko, A., Price, B., Bonner, J., & Hill, J. L. (2012). Exploring community gardens in a health disparate population: Findings from a mixed methods pilot study. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*, 6(2), 153 – 165.