

Indo Canadian Women's Association

Summary Report for:

Engaging Men for Building a Healthy Community Forum (EMCH)

Completed: December 5, 2018

Funded by: Aqueduct Foundation

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EMCH Forum Report
"Engaging Men For Building a Healthy Community"

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since 1984 ICWA has been working with immigrant families (men, women, children, and seniors) from all countries of origin, to support and enhance their settlement in Canada. Immigrants come to Canada with different backgrounds, belief systems, and cultural values. Settling in a new country brings physical, economic, social and psychological challenges and often, the stresses of these challenges in combination with their perception of their roles, translates into aggression, abuse and violence. Through our many programs and studies we often found women at the receiving end of these behaviours and have been working extensively to broaden women's knowledge about their roles, rights, and resources.

ICWA is committed to gender equality, eradication of abuse, violence and discrimination in the community. These social evils affect everyone in the community. Though the victimization of women and girls is many times more prevalent than the victimization of men, the negative impact reaches all men as fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers. We strongly believe that the community in general can progress with more strength and speed if we all have a common purpose. To enhance and support such a movement, we consider it necessary to work with all sectors of the community, and working with men is one step in that direction.

The intent of this forum was to explore three questions with South Asian men:

- What is their perception of what it means to “be a man” in the South Asian Community?
- How does this perception of “being a man” relate to the goal of “*Engaging Men for Building a Healthy Community*”?
- Develop an understanding of how to invite and support these men and their cohorts as partners in building healthy communities in the current Canadian climate.

The forum was conducted in an interactive narrative format including small group discussions led individually by skilled moderators, and guided large group discussion with care taken throughout to provide accurate translation, feedback, and support to participants.

The ICWA would like to thank the following people for their generous contributions planning and executing the EMCH forum:

Dr. Andrew Greenshaw: Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at the University of Alberta, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Veena Khatri (MA): A member of the Alberta College of Social Workers, registered as a Clinical Practitioner.

Lahn Jones (BCYC): Privately practicing certified Child and Youth Care Counsellor, and program consultant for engaging men and healthy masculinities.

ICWA wishes to acknowledge the relentless efforts of the members of the ICWA board, staff team and facilitators in supporting this project.

We strongly believe that community can progress with more strength and speed if we are all working together with a common purpose. Thank you for your support.

ACTIVITIES

Process:

This three day event was implemented as an evolutionary discussion forum in which each day's activities, responses, and wisdom was captured and used to inform and construct the following days content. As the intention of the forum was to create a positive and sustainable engagement with the men of the South Asian community, exercises were orientated around understanding the challenges, successes, and solutions they experienced while honouring their inherent wisdom.

Each forum day was begun with a safety orientation to the premises, an introduction to the ICWA committee members and its generous funder, volunteers, facilitators, translators, onsite support personnel, review of group rules and expectations (E.g. confidentiality), an overview of the day's events, and a group building exercise (Icebreaker). All three forum days included snacks, a hot lunch, and ended with a request to complete a satisfaction survey and an invitation to return for either the following weeks forum (day 1 and 2), or ongoing connection and collaboration (beyond day 3). Contact information was collected each of the three forum days to maximize capture rate.

Though not originally a planned component of the forum, the group members of day three requested time be put aside to create a vision statement for what a “healthy community” meant to them. Their vision statement, which guided group discussion from that point forward is as follows:

“People coming together to interact in a safe and inclusive manner for the benefit of a harmonious community.”

Forum Day One:

Goal: Explore what it means to “be a man” in the South Asian Community.

Process: The group was supported through an exploration of what “being a man” meant for them, what aspects of culture, media, community, and family influence these views, how they are propagated, and how these beliefs influence the behaviour that create our communities.

Forum Day Two:

Goal: Explore how the groups perception of “being a man” relates to “Engaging Men for Building a Healthy Community”?

Process: The model “Five Stages of Masculinity” by Dr. Joseph Gelfer was introduced as a medium to explore the group's perception of masculinity, it's role determining what it means to “be a man” in society, and an engagement framework for inviting men as collaborative community building partners.

The curated themes from day one were presented back to the group for review and discussion. The day one group thematically clarified the importance of men's involvement in the creation of healthy communities, and the existence of socio-cultural norms such as gender roles, hetero-normative masculinities (The “Man Box”), and histo-cultural social behavior (culturally appropriate or expected behavior) that contributed to their perception of “*what it means to be a man*”.

Such themes included:

- Perception is the gateway to experience.
- Men are multifaceted and include physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects.
- Healthy men require networks, supports systems, and a means to access them.
- Elders and mentors play a significant part in building healthy men and communities.
- A feeling of commonality (shared experiences, attributes) brings men together.
- Interaction with other men can be energizing and support positive change.
- It is helpful to have someone to break the ice (facilitated gatherings).
- Leadership is a choice that can be supported by the community.

Challenges included:

- How can we best increase the partnerships of men in creating healthy communities?
- How to work with cultural stereotypes in our efforts to create safe invitational spaces in which to support men?
- How do we bridge cultural barriers between mainstream Canadian culture and minority cultures/newcomers?
- Gender roles/norms including women's increasing equal representation in the workplace.
- Role conflict - role reversal, blurring of roles, roles are too defined.
- Loss of traditional values in community; Times are changing.
- The increase of technology in our lives (+ and - effects).

Successes included:

- Older men (or men with experience) have knowledge they want to share.
- Morals/values connected to religion (humanitarianism) that unite us.
- Advancements in technology "is helping" (networking, internet). How is it helping?
- There are already locations that facilitate positive safe space for men (church, school, community halls, etc).

From these reflections, the small groups populated a list of suggestions for future change in support of "Engaging Men in Building Healthy Communities".

Future changes suggested by participants:

- Create engagement around something structured (activity, topical).
- Long-term residents can support newcomers.
- Being sensitive to cultural etiquette (how different genders are used to communicating?).
- Begin conversations of "engaging men in building healthy communities" early in life (schools etc.).
- Self-respect as a divine-being with equal respect to others as also being divine.

- Improve ourselves first before setting examples to others.
- Denormalized genders; Difficult to shake up the gender roles- changing of mindset which society has created is difficult, being judged, maybe if other men came along, balancing of traits would be a good thing.
- Colours that may make men feel safe: White, Yellow, Blue, Black, Gold, Green, Purple (winter palette).
- Make sure that family has time to discuss challenges, busy lifestyle.
- Spirituality beyond religion.
- To feel safe to talk. Men want to; Be greeted with a smile, handshake, hug, high 5, be happy to see you, welcome you, say hello.
- Create safe spaces to have dialogue; Create discussion about diversity, confidential, non-judgemental, a place where it is ok to disagree (safe to challenge), start young.

Forum Day Three:

Goal: To explore how to engage men in building healthy communities.

Process: Themes from day one and two were again brought forward for review and discussion. The focus of the final day's events were to collaboratively generate at least three community-based initiatives from the identified list of changes created by day one and two's participants. Three working groups were convened and given four suggestions from the "future changes" list above. They were then asked to vote on the two they considered most important to engaging men in building healthy communities. These two suggestions were collected from each group, and used to populate the short-list of community initiatives below.

Short-list of Initiatives requested by the community:

- Community leaders are needed to create community safe spaces and guide the conversation and development of healthy communities.
- Create engagement around something structured (activity, topical).
- Begin conversations of "engaging men in building healthy communities" early in life (schools etc.).
- How do we respectfully create healthy men and communities in light of Canadian social norms such as equality, diverse gender-roles, and (LGBTQ+)?
- Encourage family time to discuss challenges.
- Create safe, non-judgemental, confidential spaces for men to talk together where it is ok to disagree.

Each group was then asked to pick two initiatives from the short-list to outline into actionable programs including the following parameters:

- What can we create?
- How can we create it?
- When can we create it?

- Where can we create it?
- Who can create it?

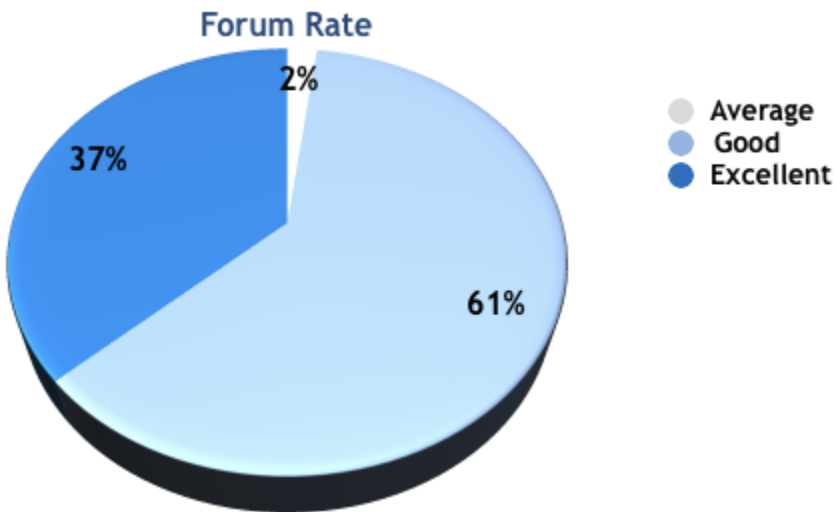
Note: All shortlisted initiatives were explored except “Create engagement around something structured”.

The assessment and implementation of these community initiatives will be part of the next phase of proposed work by the ICWA in their commitment to engage men in building healthy communities.

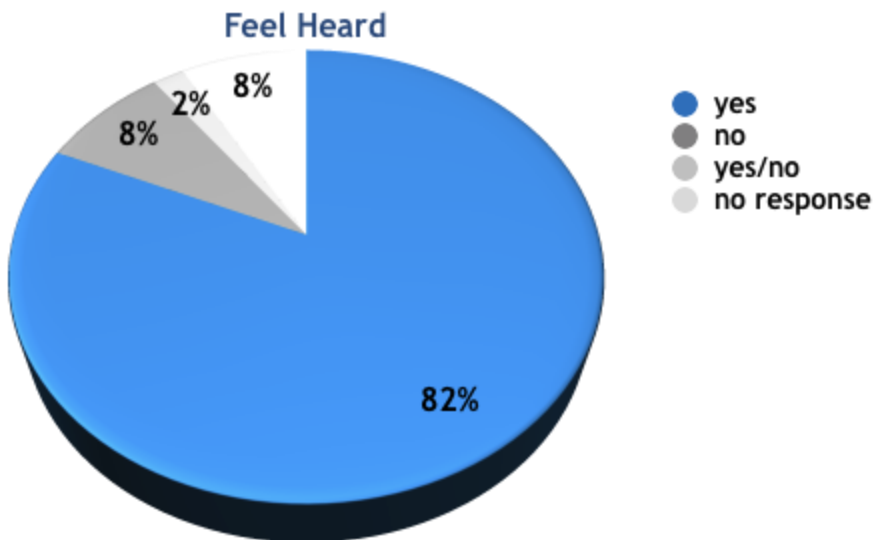
QUESTIONNAIRE AND TABLE OF FEEDBACK

The following are graphical representations of the feedback from the evaluation forms completed by participants. (See Appendix A). These forms were collected at the conclusion of each of the three day-long sessions. A total of 49 evaluations were aggregated.

Participants were asked to rate the days session as either excellent, good, average, fair, or poor. No responses were received for the fair or poor categories.



Participants were asked if they felt heard during the course of the day’s programming. Yes or No responses were requested.



Of the remaining questions, 100% of participants indicated they would recommend the forum to other members of their community, while 28.6% of participants indicated they would be prepared to provide a testimonial. Testimonials will be collected by the ICWA as part of a planned follow-up with forum participants who provided contact information.

Written feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive and reflected responses from the rating sections. Over the three days, 68 written responses were collected; 36 containing positive comments, and 32 offering constructive areas for improvement, both of which will be explored below.

Participant Comments

SIGNIFICANT LEARNINGS AND NEXT STEPS

This forum was conceived to answer three main questions: Are men from the South Asian community interested in partnering to build healthy communities, how these men viewed healthy communities, and how they could be supported to do so. At the conclusion of this forum, the men of the participant groups helped us decisively answer these questions.

Firstly, the men of the “Engaging Men for Building Healthy Communities” (EMCH) forum asserted a belief that they are essential partners in the process of building healthy communities. They expressed a strong preference, when invited to this partnership from a place of respect, to collaborate with agencies and community groups alike towards this goal. Forum members were comfortable discussing, challenging, and creating positive and creative solutions around difficult topics such as sexuality, abuse, patriarchy (inequality), gender roles/norms, social norms/expectations/tradition, spirituality, and multiculturalism.

Secondly, forum members clearly articulated what a “healthy community” was for them, as well as men’s integral role in its creation. This assertion was offered from a

feeling of shared responsibility and accountability to each other and their respective communities. This was highlighted in the creation of the groups vision statement which read: *“People coming together to interact in a safe and inclusive manner for the benefit of a harmonious community.”* The group clarified the meaning of “safe” to be synonymous with healthy community traits such as the ability to safely challenge each other, maintain confidentiality, disagreeing respectfully, resolving conflict peacefully, and striving towards unity and strength as people inclusively rather than exclusively of their differences (E.g. race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, etc.).

Lastly, forum members indicated a need for an increase in available quality support services for a variety of needs such as (but not limited to) healthy masculinities, mental health, parenting, social networking, and community building. Collaborations between community partners and service providers (such as the ICWA) were seen as positive and able to provide points of community connection, resources centers, and structured initiatives with the resources to fulfill them. One of the most salient points raised in relation to their access of these supports beyond basic availability (which was identified as very low in Edmonton, AB) was how they were invited to access these supports and how these services were delivered. While the forum groups were able to identify with Canadian cultural and gender stereotypes in relation to men (Eg. “big boys don’t cry”, etc.), they clarified these were not the traits they wanted to persist, and was not the frame of reference they want service providers to use when engaging them.

Next Steps:

Facilitated activities (such as this ICWA forum) were identified as valuable, as they were perceived to create a safe and inclusive engagement space capable of supporting the identification of community issues and facilitating a collective process by which to create solutions and provide support.

Participants expressed their forum involvement had created valuable moments in which to find and feel the pulse of the community, energize themselves, build and strengthen relationships, and invite challenge and positive change. This experience was strongly attributed to the ICWA’s choice to engage professional facilitators, safety staff, translators, guest speakers, and culturally sensitive catering throughout the three day event. The ICWA would like to thank these individuals for their voluntary support of this event and its success.

The next phase of the ICWA’s efforts to engage men in building healthy communities is to actively explore and implement a selection of the short-listed initiatives (as above) proposed by this forums work groups, in addition to the following recommendations:

- Act as a central social/communication/support hub through which key community issues could be identified.
- Facilitate ongoing monthly forums themed around these key issues.
- Encourage the development and identification of community leaders.
- Explore and share with the community generally accepted definitions of Canadian norms and expectations.

- Explore and implement methods to engage men from the 20-55 yrs age group unrepresented during this three day forum.
- Explore methods that leverage advancements in technology to improve community connectivity (networking), initiative planning, and communication/dissemination of relevant information.

Forum members indicated they are proud members of Canadian society, and feel their country of choice is a dynamic world leader in the area of creating equal opportunity and multicultural inclusivity.

Suggestions for Improvement:

Constructive feedback from forum members included procedural requests that would streamline future events such as start times, check-in procedures, additional venue space and time, and expanded use of overhead projected slides.

ICWA commitments:

- We hope to continue working with the men in the immigrant community to support them to actively participate in creating a healthier community, families and personal relationships.
- We hope to expand this work to all sectors of the community and not limit it to men, women and their relationships.
- We hope to create awareness, sensitivity and a social resolve to eradicate the social evils of inequality, abuse, violence and discrimination.

Appendix A: Evaluation Form as Presented to Participants:

Rate today's session

1. Poor
2. Fair
3. Average
4. Good
5. Excellent

Did you feel heard?

1. Yes
2. No

Something you liked about today's session.

Something you did not like about today's session.

Suggestions for improvement.

If you were to tell someone about this event what would you say?

Would you be willing to write a testimonial?

1. Yes
2. No