

## Community Engagement Initiative – Welcome Hive

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This community initiative was designed with the goal of building social connectedness among asylum seekers and refugees. Two sessions were conducted as pilot models for a community-based, peer-to-peer, informal mental health intervention. Given the general reluctance to access formalized mental health services amidst refugees and asylum seekers, it was predicted that a more informal intervention that focused on building social ties, engaging in fun activities, and offering any practical support that was needed would go a long way in buffering some of the stress associated with the resettlement process.

These sessions were conducted and designed in collaboration with Dr. Rachel Kronick, a child psychiatrist and researcher at [SHERPA](#), as well as the Welcome Collective, a non-profit organization that works towards reducing the stress and isolation felt by newcomers. As pilot sessions, the ultimate goal is that the lessons learned from these events will inform a longer-term intervention led by SHERPA and the Welcome Collective.

The first session took place on August 11 at Centre St. Pierre with approximately 22 adults and 30 children in attendance. All participants were asylum-seeking families that had left the YMCA and begun the resettlement and integration process in Montreal. During the session, families shared food, conversed, engaged in art activities (collage-making, photo-frame making, drawing), presented their art, and made music together.

The second session took place on August 27 at the Atwater Library with approximately 45 newcomers, most of whom were children. This session included several families and individuals staying at the YMCA as well as some families who had left the YMCA. This session involved a collective-map making activity, arts and crafts, drama performances, and interactive music.

The sessions were facilitated and animated by volunteers including music and art therapists, MSF association members, SCSC fellows, and volunteers from SCSC's welcome sessions. All families were called or messaged individually to the event, which also added a personal element and helped build more intimate social ties.

The response to both sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Families were enthusiastic about the idea of regular events of this nature. Many also highlighted how much their kids enjoyed the activities.



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“I love it! It was a very good event and I wish you invite me again.”

“I really liked it. We should do it again. I find that it reduces stress, and we enjoy ourselves. We’re happy, we get to know others, build relationships. So, really, it’s fantastic. There should be more of these, it’s great!”



“...many families and we enjoyed the gathering, we enjoyed the singing. I really loved it. Very enjoyable!”