



Young Adult Welcome and Inclusion Project

Final Report

Rev. Carly Gaylor and Asha Philar

Project: 2017 - 2018; report updated 2020

The Young Adult Welcoming Project – a partnership between the Canadian Unitarian Council, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada, and the Unitarian Church of Vancouver – engaged Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations in enhancing their welcome, service to, and integration of young adults (people aged 18-35, inclusive). Seven congregations participated in the project: the Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax, First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough, Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg, Unitarian Church of Calgary, Unitarian Church of Vancouver, and Comox Valley Unitarian Fellowship. Participating congregations created teams to work together on the project and spearhead actions in their congregations. Other congregations and individuals also took part in webinars and conversations throughout the project.

Project Goals

- To increase congregations' capacity to serve existing young adults
- To increase congregations' capacity to reach out to and welcome potential new young adult members
- To help congregations identify and remove barriers to young adult welcome and integration in their context
- To lift up young adult voices and experiences in our congregations and communities

Project Activities

- Webinars:
 - Webinar One: Introduction to ministry to and with young adults (open to all) – November 2016
 - Webinar Two: Deeper exploration of ministry to and with young adults (open to young adult project teams) – February 2017
 - Webinar Three: Preparing and implementing action plans for increasing young adult welcome, service, and integration (open to young adult project teams) – April 2017
 - Webinar Four: Sharing of learning and challenges to date - November 2017
 - Young Adult Ministry for Ministers – February 2017
- Young Adult Ministry Self-assessment: An opportunity for Young Adult Project Teams to reflect on the current state of young adult involvement and ministry in their congregations at the beginning and end of the project.
 - [Links and instructions for the self-assessment process](#)



- Coaching:
 - Young Adult Project Teams received coaching from Asha Philar, Ariel Hunt-Bronwin, and/or Rev. Carly Gaylor throughout 2017.
- Canadian Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Survey:
 - 50 respondents shared their experiences in our congregations and communities ([read the insightful survey report and young adult stories here](#)).
- Young Adult Welcome Packets:
 - Creation of a young adult postcard with ways to get more involved and welcoming packages for use in Canadian UU congregations; packets include the postcard, a principles and sources bookmark, the book “Becoming,” and a welcome letter from the CUC.
 - Five free welcome packets sent to each congregation that participated in the project.
 - Remaining welcome postcards to be mailed to all Canadian congregations in 2020.
- Resource Development: A number of resources were developed during and after the project, using insights from member congregations, the young adult survey, and generational research. See the full list at the end of this document, or consult the CUC’s [Young Adult Ministry Resources page](#).

Project Outcomes

The Young Adult Welcome and Inclusion Project has had a lasting impact on Canadian Unitarian Universalism, beyond the work in participant congregations. It has helped create larger conversations about what it means to be an inclusive faith community, how we allocate resources, and how our events can be truly intergenerational. Many resources were developed through the project, which are now available [on the CUC website](#), and linked at the end of this report.

The seven congregations that participated in the project made significant changes throughout the process, and we have included a few highlights of their experiences in 2017-2018 here:

- **First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg:** In 2017, Director of Lifespan Faith Development Andrea James’ job expanded to lifespan faith development, which gave her the ability to support young adult programs directly. While participating in the CUC Young Adult Welcoming Project, Winnipeg staff and volunteers made a list of young adults in the congregation; they have an active Facebook group and a YA email list. In September they hosted a games night for young adults and started a monthly YA small group, based on the congregation’s monthly theme and using materials from Faith Rocket. Andrea facilitates and supports this group. Winnipeg has also had success with social events that appeal to all ages, like a trip to see the Star Wars movie, and monthly pub nights, and coffee mornings with the minister. There is a young adult serving as both an audio tech and a Service Coordinator, so there is often a YA presence in the service, and a bridging youth/young adult (and member of this project’s team) was elected to the Board in 2017. They are also working on their welcoming and greeting systems to make sure that everyone coming in the door feels welcomed and can connect with the congregation.



- **Unitarian Church of Calgary:** In 2017, minister Debra Faulk hosted a young adult dinner, which was well attended and helped young adults get to know each other better. This group has continued to meet up for social events, with some support and encouragement from older members of the congregation. Calgary is aware that not all events are affordable for young adults, so they try to offer sliding scale or a discounted price when possible. Calgary is also working on raising their online presence with a better website, as well as planning to hire a social media coordinator who is a young adult. The monthly Pub Night is becoming more popular with young adults. They are also working to connect young adults with events and programs that might appeal to them, like becoming worship leaders, and Spirit Jam events.
- **Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough:** Small but mighty UPF has lots going on for young adults. They host a monthly pub night, are doing outreach to the local university campus, and have young adults taking leadership in worship, the board and as a lay chaplain. The congregation took a collection to provide funding for young adult activities, and they are helping young adults with the cost of attending regional and national events. It has been great having the support of older members and the minister to get these initiatives going.
- **First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa:** Leadership from the membership committee has kept young adult ministry in the congregation's priorities since their team joined the Young Adult Welcoming Project. They have brought information to leadership, written an article for the newsletter, and worked through the Membership Committee to welcome newer young adults. Ottawa held a recent Sunday service about radical hospitality and is working on becoming more welcome to people of all identities.
- **Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax:** Halifax gained useful insight and resources through participation in the project. Knowing that congregational support is helpful for young adult groups, Halifax is hoping to find ways for older adults and church staff to support more young adult activities and programs. Halifax has given a lot of consideration to different ways to bring young adult voices into the forefront for Sunday Services. They are also exploring ways to attract more young adults and make their congregation more multigenerational.
- **Comox Valley Unitarian Fellowship:** The Comox team found it useful to gather to look at young adult ministry in the congregation, and experienced some changes through their work together. Most significantly, they have made drastic changes to their Sunday Services format, including meeting in the hall in a circular format (rather than in the Sanctuary with pews), the sermon has changed into a more interactive event, and music is almost never from the hymn books and is instead more folksy and usually with guitar or similar instrument. There is a small but regular contingent of younger adults with families, who nevertheless make up a significant percentage of the congregation. The Young Adult project team would have liked to do more to support young adult ministry, but had challenges in sustaining their meetings and efforts as a small team with limited energy.
- **Unitarian Church of Vancouver:** The Vancouver team struggled to find time and energy to get together to engage in this project work. All young adults themselves, team members are active in other areas of church life, and wondered if they were just too busy. They affirm that those young adults who are active in the congregation are doing a lot of good work, which keeps them going, but fear they are losing the potential power of a unified young adult voice in the congregation.



Comments from project participants

“This was an incredibly valuable service. The resources, hearing the voices of Canadian young adults (especially via the survey, but also during webinars), and the lifting up of varying experiences of YAs were all extremely helpful. You provided a container for this work and a framework for how we might move forward.”

“The congregational self-assessment, materials and webinars, as well as the ongoing support were helpful. Well done! Thank you.”

“You’re there, and you’ve been there, in a structured and well thought out way. You’re inviting us to work, and it’s important to do this work. You get that, and you hear a need from our generation that might only be whispered, but it’s been whispered for a long time. Thank you for the commitment, for the opportunity, for the community you brought.”

“The webinars with multiple viewpoints, and then having a group discussion on how issues can be aided were helpful. It was great to have multiple voices from different congregations at different stages.”

“Convening us in the first place was helpful, even though our mini-team did not accomplish as much as we wanted. Some changes did happen.”

“Getting it on our radar as an issue, hearing what other congregations are doing, thinking specifically about things we might do and then getting feedback from Asha and Carly on implementation [were helpful].”

Next Steps

Although the structured assessment, learning and mentorship process has come to a close, there are many materials available to congregations who want to work on becoming more welcoming and inclusive of young adults. This includes the congregational self-assessment and resource guides for young adult ministry strategies. Links to the self-assessment and other resources are included below.

Resources - Congregational Young Adult Ministry

There are many great resources, articles and links on the CUC’s [Young Adult Ministry Resources page](#), which we encourage you to explore. These include studies on what Millennials are seeking in spiritual community, testimonials by young adults, and links to worship resources. The resources below were created by Rev. Carly Gaylor and Asha Philar and most were updated in 2020.

- [2017 Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Survey Report](#): Insights and stories from our survey of 50 Canadian Unitarian young adults - from newcomers to life-long UUs. The survey reveals what young adults are seeking in congregations, worship, social justice and more. A must read for leaders!



- [Top 10 Tips for Welcoming and Including Young Adults](#): Our top recommendations for creating congregations and communities that are welcoming to young people and better serve the needs of young adults. This is a great place to start!
- [Young Adult Ministry Congregational Self-Assessment - Instructions and Results](#): Complete the self-assessment, to help your congregation evaluate current strengths and challenges. Discover effective strategies in five stages of young adult ministry: welcoming, inviting, building, deepening, and growing together. At the end of the assessment, you will be given a short description of your "stage" and links to further explore the other stages and possible actions you can take.
- **Strategies for Congregational Young Adult Ministry**: A series of four guides developed by the CUC with specific actions and instructions to help congregations take steps toward more vibrant young adult ministry. Each guide includes common challenges congregations face, strategies to try and resources to explore. If you've ever wished that there was a guidebook for this work, read on!
 - [Welcome and Outreach](#): A guide of specific actions congregations can take to change and improve welcome and greeting, online outreach and help newer young adults feel included from the time they walk in the door.
 - [Building Connections](#): Specific actions congregations can take to improve young adults' connection to others in their age group, and build relationships with people of all ages through meaningful involvement.
 - [Worship and Ministry](#): A guide full of ideas to make worship and ministry opportunities more inclusive of young adults, including adding new worship elements, and building connections through small group ministry.
 - [Bridging from Youth to Young Adulthood](#): A guide to help congregations support and accompany youth as they transition into young adulthood through bridging ceremonies and meaningful intergenerational connections.
- [Guidance for Membership Committees - Welcoming Young Adults](#): Tips and actions that membership committees can take to better welcome and integrate young adults.
- [Young Adult Ministry Tips for Ministers](#): A guide specifically for ministers looking to improve the way they serve and minister to young adults in their congregation. Includes many concrete actions and tips.
- [Why Welcome - Reflection Questions](#): A set of questions to help congregational leaders and staff create a good foundation for young adult ministry work and outreach to young people.
- [Checklist for congregational websites](#): A detailed checklist to ensure that a congregation's website and social media contains essential information for newcomers and is a welcoming internet presence for young adults and people of all ages.
- [Metro Vancouver Gathering Young Adult Panel](#): Transcript and notes from a 2018 panel of four young adults who share their experiences in Unitarian Universalism and valuable insights on how we can become a more welcoming and inclusive faith community.