

Toronto Conference Explorer Project
Evaluative Report
September 2017

Prepared by Carol L. Hancock for the Toronto Conference Executive

Background

In September 2014, sparked by conversations about recruitment for future ministry leadership, Toronto Conference Executive approved a new initiative to encourage young adults to consider a ministry vocation. The Project was designed to involve people who have demonstrated leadership in our Church but who have not yet discerned a call to ministry or begun the candidacy process or theological education. The Project does not replace or substitute any part of the candidacy process.

The Project

Toronto Conference partners with other Conferences to identify active young adult church members who would value this opportunity. Each selected Explorer is given an honorarium and their round trip expenses to their site are covered. Each Explorer is placed in a site away from his or her home Conference. The normal pattern is for a three-month experience, from May through July. Each participating Conference is also asked to identify host sites which would offer an exciting experience of contemporary church identity, mission and ministry. The Host Sites create a Host Committee and appoint a Mentor. The first iteration saw three Explorers experience the project and the evaluations from all parties was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the results.

The first iteration saw three Explorers experience the project and the evaluations from all parties was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the results. After the results of the first iteration, Toronto Conference Executive proposed a second iteration. Toronto Conference was joined by British Columbia Conference, the Conference of Manitoba and North-Western Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference and London Conference. All Conferences agreed to cover the costs of travel for Explorers from their Conferences. B.C. and Newfoundland and Labrador also made additional financial contributions to the overall Project. M.N.W.O. also assisted their sites with additional costs.

Based on the experience of the first year, we completed the recruitment phase earlier and by January we were able to match seven Explorers to their sites. All Explorers completed three month assignments.

Upon receiving the evaluations from the 2016 experience, Toronto Conference Executive gave approval for two more years of the project, maintaining its commitment to provide up to \$75,000. for each of the two years.

In creating the Project, the following outcomes were identified:

- Up to eight already involved younger adult United Church members will be encouraged to consider ministry as a vocation. They will be affirmed as people who are

valued and appreciated by their Church and as individuals who have gifts for this vocation

- Ministry sites will have the benefit of meeting these people, benefitting from their shared experience, and being affirmed as healthy communities who can help develop and mentor future leadership. They may be assisted in their own ministries to develop something new and they will experience the service of this healthy spirited young person.
- Committee members will experience the privilege of relationship with vibrant younger members of our Church and be encouraged by their commitment to discipleship.
- Whether the experience leads to a sense of vocation to the orders of ministry or not, we trust it will deepen the sense of joy in discipleship for all who are involved.
- All involved will have an expanded sense of The United Church of Canada, gaining insight into the diversity and distinctiveness of ministry in other parts of the body.

While it has been agreed that more than seven Explorers could be appointed, as long as the funding could be found, the third year of the project once again saw seven Explorers matched with seven sites. From the evaluations of the 2017 iteration, all of the outcomes were, once again, achieved. It has been wonderful to see that the host sites and mentors express appreciation for gifts from the experience, as well as the Explorers.

In 2017, there were five Partnering Conferences: Toronto, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The 2017 Matches between Explorers and Sites

Kaylyn Munro, 19, from Richmond, B.C., Student at Simon Fraser and Rosedale U.C., TOR

Mallory Brennan, 25, from North Vancouver, Post-grad student, Capilano University, and Minnedosa United Church, MNWO.

Ian Wilgus, 24, from King City, ON, Post-grad student, Seneca College, and Knox-Metropolitan U.C., Regina, SK.

Alexandra Vancaeyzeele, 19, Keswick, ON, Student at Brock University, and Oak Bay U.C., Victoria, B.C.

Liam Cummins, 19, Saskatoon, Student at U. of Sask., and Crossroads United Pastoral Charge, Carman, MB, MNWO

Marissa Smirl, 19, Winnipeg, Student at U. of Manitoba, and First United Church Owen Sound, TOR

Brooke Munford, 19, Winnipeg, University Student, Drama, and Humber United Church, Corner Brook, NL/LAB

Leadership by Conference Appointed Lead Staff

This project was designed to have low central administration and its success depends on the careful work done by Conference Staff and/or volunteers who serve as Lead Staff to the Project. Each year, that group, working with me, have refined the process, creating tools and resources that we find beneficial. Having central co-ordination and some help remembering dates and tasks was seen to be helpful, since all the staff took summer holiday and had busy workloads to juggle. I monitor our progress throughout the summer and respond to queries as needed. The Lead Staff were the prime contact throughout the summer for the host site and Explorer within their Conferences.

Innovations/Refinements for the Third Iteration

We again invited connections amongst the year's group of Explorers; both before and during the summer. With their permission, their contact information was shared amongst them.

We again hosted a conference call amongst mentors in advance of the projects beginning; helping them think about how to discuss vocation choices and issues with the Explorers and answer any questions.

We made it a necessary component for hosts and explorers to talk to each other prior to the start of the experience. We asked the Explorers to develop learning goals to share with first their Home Committee and with the Host Committee.

I, as project co-ordinator, made direct contact with the Home site and followed up with those contacts at the end of the summer.

We encouraged new Explorers to connect with past Explorers prior to their placement.

This year we had the month-end evaluations sent directly to the Co-ordinator, as well as to the Lead staff so I could monitor.

As in previous year, all the participants were asked to complete evaluations at the end of the summer: Explorers, Lead Staff, Host Sites, Mentors and Home Sites. A sampling from those evaluations is provided in a separate document.

Reflections on the Project

This project was designed to give young adult leaders in our church an opportunity for discernment about a vocation to paid accountable ministry. It was also intended to encourage them to continue to offer their skills and gifts in leadership, whatever their vocation might be. This year, amongst the group, there was greater clarity for each Explorer about that vocational question, ranging for confirmation of a vocation, to discernment that this is not the call; we trust that their learning, whatever it has been, will serve them well.

The Explorers were, generally, very well equipped to handle the challenges of the summer experience, but careful and supportive work from the Host Site Committees and Mentors also helped when growth in maturity was needed.

All participants ended the three month term with expressed appreciation for the opportunity. All said that they would recommend the program to others and some have already volunteered to repeat their role, if asked. As we have heard each year, a host site and the mentor need to be aware that many congregations experience a different rhythm over the summer, and so careful thought has to be given in advance for opportunities that will engage an Explorer throughout their term. They also express awareness that May through July can accommodate more young adults than a winter term would.

Finances

At the time of writing we believe that the final total for this year will be \$ 43,574.73. With funds contributed to the overall project costs by other Conferences, the net draw on the Toronto Conference budget should be under \$39,000. That has included administrative costs which consisted of Conference Call expenses and a fee paid to me, Carol Hancock, for the project co-ordination. Honoraria were given at the rate of \$1500. month. Host sites provided accommodation, most meals, and transportation. Where expenses were high, grants of \$500. were provided to host sites so that the Explorers would experience similar levels of support. As noted earlier, the participating Conferences covered the travel costs.

The Project needs to have the security of the Toronto Conference funding up to \$75,000, but it could be expected that next year the full amount will not be needed. Based on the experience of the first three years, I believe this project could offer as many as ten experiences next year, and even more if the Conferences can provide the necessary support.

Planning for a 2018 summer iteration will begin in September. As of writing, the following Conferences have expressed interest in participating: British Columbia, Alberta and Northwest, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, London, Toronto and Newfoundland and Labrador. This could be our largest project iteration yet!

