# In Search of a Safe Harbor: An Exploration of the Experiences of K-12 International Students in Unregulated Homestays

## Community Research Report

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**SAFEHARBOR PROJECT**
Promoting security in homestay accommodations for international students

**FACTOR-INWENTASH**
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Funded by:

**LAIDLAW** FOUNDATION

**Content Warning**

This report contains details of physical, emotional, and systemic neglect and violance against underaged migrant children. It is encouraged to be emotionally prepared and practice self-care during and after reading.

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# Appreciation

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land we are living, working, and meeting on has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. This city is home to Indigenous peoples who have been profoundly impacted by residential schools, intergenerational trauma, and the broader effects of colonialism. Today, this place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

With an understanding of the historical injustices and ongoing oppression faced by marginalized communities in this country, we acknowledge that this city is home to people of diverse cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, races, gender identities, and sexual orientations, many of whom have been wronged, abused, stigmatized, and silenced.

Our research focuses on the experiences of international students, a settler population, who, while navigating their own forms of marginalization, are also part of the larger settler colonial framework. As members of the academic and research community, we recognize and honor the resilience and strengths of all those experiencing marginalization in this city. We are committed to working together to ensure their safety, justice, and the recognition of their stories and experiences.

Through our work on the SafeHarbor Project, we aim to highlight the systemic issues faced by international students in homestay accommodations, while also standing in solidarity with Indigenous communities and other equity-seeking groups. We strive together to ensure equity, peace, and mutual respect, recognizing and honoring the traditions and rights of Indigenous peoples whose land we live on and benefit from. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that our actions reflect our words, contributing meaningfully to justice, equity, and reconciliation for all communities.

# Opening Note

Coming to Canada alone as an international student in Grade 9, I have transitioned between multiple homestay placements and experienced micro-aggression, racism, illegal eviction, and many other things that I am still trying to put into words today. Only recently — 10 years after my experience — did I start to open up to discuss what happened in these placements. It was then I found so many other young students who shared my experience and thought it was their fault or just bad luck.

Not only students, but also professionals in schools and systems that interact with K-12 international students seem confused when challenges arise. Even workers don't know where to report these issues due to the students' legal status and the unique setting of homestays.

Everyone in this system is confused.

That was the beginning of the SafeHarbor Project, born from the collective resolve of those directly impacted and committed to making a difference. By documenting and sharing the stories of these students, we aim to shine a light on the inadequacies of the current homestay system and advocate for systemic change.

As we proudly present this report, we invite everyone to join us in this mission. Real change requires action from all stakeholders—students, educators, families, and community members. No action is too small. Even spreading awareness of what these students experience is powerful. Together, we can create a future where students finally have a safe harbor to call home.

Sincerely,

*Patricia Quan*

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With,

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# Executive Summary

The Canadian K-12 international student program[1] has evolved from modest exchange initiatives into a substantial component of the country's education system (Canadian Association of Public Schools - International, 2019). In 2022, over 70,000 K-12 students came to Canada, mostly to high schools (Government of Canada, 2022). In Ontario, international students in public secondary schools pay around $14,000 CAD to $19,000 CAD in tuition alone depending on school boards (e.g., Peel District School Board, 2024; Waterloo Region District School Board, 2024; Toronto District School Board, 2024a), and those in private institutions can easily pay up to over double the above (e.g., Upper Canada College, 2024; University of Toronto Schools, 2024). These students contribute not only to the financial stability of educational institutions but also to the future workforce and global competitiveness of Canada (Cudmore, 2005). However, despite their importance, K-12 international students are often treated as mere sources of revenue, with insufficient attention given to their well-being and safety.

The homestay system, which is a popular accommodation choice for international students, is largely unregulated (Quan et al, 2022). The SafeHarbor Project was initiated to explore and document the experiences of K-12 international students in these homestay accommodations, with the goal of identifying the systemic issues that contribute to challenges students experienced in and outside of homestays. This project aims to bring these issues to the forefront, providing a platform for the voices of international students to be heard and advocating for much-needed policy reforms. By understanding the specific needs and vulnerabilities of this population, the project seeks to inform the development of more supportive, safe, and inclusive environments for international students.

This study used a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. The primary method of data collection was a one-day (i.e., 6 hour) in-person storytelling forum, where 19 participants, including student speakers, professional speakers, and general participants, shared their experiences and insights. The forum was designed to create a safe and supportive environment for participants to discuss their challenges and offer recommendations for systemic improvements.

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[1] K-12 International Student Programs are academic programs, short-term or long-term, set up by individual K-12 school boards and private educational institutions across Canada that welcome students from across the globe (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2024; Toronto District School Board, 2024b). A wide range of programs are offered, including regular elementary and secondary academic courses, short-term cultural immersion program, and summer youth leadership camp (Toronto District School Board, 2024).

# Key Findings Summary

For details, please refer to pages 16-31

**Lack of Regulation**: The homestay industry is unregulated, leading to significant variability in student experiences and exposing them to unsafe and unsuitable living conditions.

**Physical Health Risks**: Students frequently face malnutrition and poor living conditions, such as inadequate heating and substandard food, which negatively impact their physical health.

**Mental Health Challenges**: Students experience mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, due to isolation, cultural shock, and inadequate emotional support from homestay families.

**Cultural Misunderstandings**: Miscommunications and cultural differences between students and homestay providers often result in feelings of judgment, isolation, and increased stress for students.

**Power Imbalance**: The power dynamics between students and homestay providers, custodians, and other authority figures lead to students feeling pressured to conform and unable to voice concerns.

**Dual/Multi-Role Conflicts**: When homestay providers also serve as custodians or other authority figures, students are left without impartial support, exacerbating their sense of vulnerability.

**Inadequate Privacy and Safety**: Many students reported a lack of privacy and safety in their homestays, with no locks on doors and instances of theft and harassment.

**Inconsistent Support from Agencies**: High staff turnover and poor communication within agencies often lead to disorganized support and unmet needs for students.

**Invisibility and Unheard Voices**: Students often feel overlooked and unsupported by homestay families and custodians, exacerbating their mental health struggles.

**Systemic Failures**: The default solution of sending students back to their home country reflects a broader failure of the Canadian homestay and education system to provide adequate support.

# Suggestions Summary

For details, please refer to pages 32-33

**Policy Reform and Regulation**: Implement clear guidelines and regulations for the homestay sector, including formal licensing and ongoing monitoring of homestay providers.

**Empowerment and Advocacy**: Create safe spaces for students to share their experiences and learn about their rights, empowering them to advocate for themselves.

**Comprehensive Training**: Provide cultural sensitivity and mental health training for homestay providers, custodians, and school staff to better support international students.

**Parental Involvement**: Encourage parents to take a more active role in understanding their children's experiences and mental health, rather than relying solely on third-party information.

**Monitoring and Accountability**: Develop systems such as regular check-ins and a "Rate My Homestay" platform to monitor the quality of homestays and hold providers accountable for their treatment of students.

# Introduction

Before the 1990s, Canada's secondary education system initiated its international student programs as modest exchange initiatives, according to the Canadian Association of Public Schools - International (2019). Over the past two to three decades, these programs have evolved into substantial international student recruitment efforts by Canadian public schools spanning from Kindergarten through Grade 12 ("K-12"). As reported by the Government of Canada (2022), by the end of 2022, there were 70,400 international students enrolled in K-12 education across the country. International students are crucial to Canada, not only supplementing university budgets and offsetting decreases in government funding, but also contributing to the nation's future workforce and enhancing Canada's global competitiveness (Cudmore, 2005; Knight, 2008).

When K-12 international students arrive, some of them stay in homestay accommodations, living with a host family in the host country (Gutel, 2007). Despite being a popular choice for international students recommended by school boards, the Canadian homestay system generally lacks regulation. Issues include homestay businesses operating in legally ambiguous areas, hosts displaying hostility, and insecure homestay environments (Schnell & Liew, 2022). Additionally, international students are sometimes exploited for financial gain without sufficient protection of their rights (Xing, 2018).

Moreover, international students residing in homestays have faced several challenges, including insecure housing and unreported instances of emotional or physical neglect and abuse. This is compounded by a lack of regulation within the homestay industry, making it difficult for students to seek help (Quan et al., 2022; Xing, 2018). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated their difficulties by leading to a lack of financial support, restrictions on international travel, and increased instances of racism and xenophobia in their host countries (Firang, 2020; Hu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

Although many students have voiced their challenges and negative experiences in their native language on social media, these issues have largely gone unnoticed in Canada's mainstream English and French-speaking media. While substantial research has been conducted on the housing and educational experiences of post-secondary international students (e.g., Firang, 2020; Morris et al., 2020), studies focusing on secondary school students in Canada remain significantly underdeveloped.

This project seeks to highlight the experiences of a frequently overlooked population and offer actionable recommendations for policymakers and professionals who work with these individuals. It deeply explores the complex situations of K-12 international students residing in insecure and unregulated homestay environments and aims to

expose their specific challenges and needs. Additionally, by incorporating perspectives from professionals across various sectors who interact with K-12 international students, this research aims to develop a thorough understanding of the structural obstacles these students encounter in homestay settings.
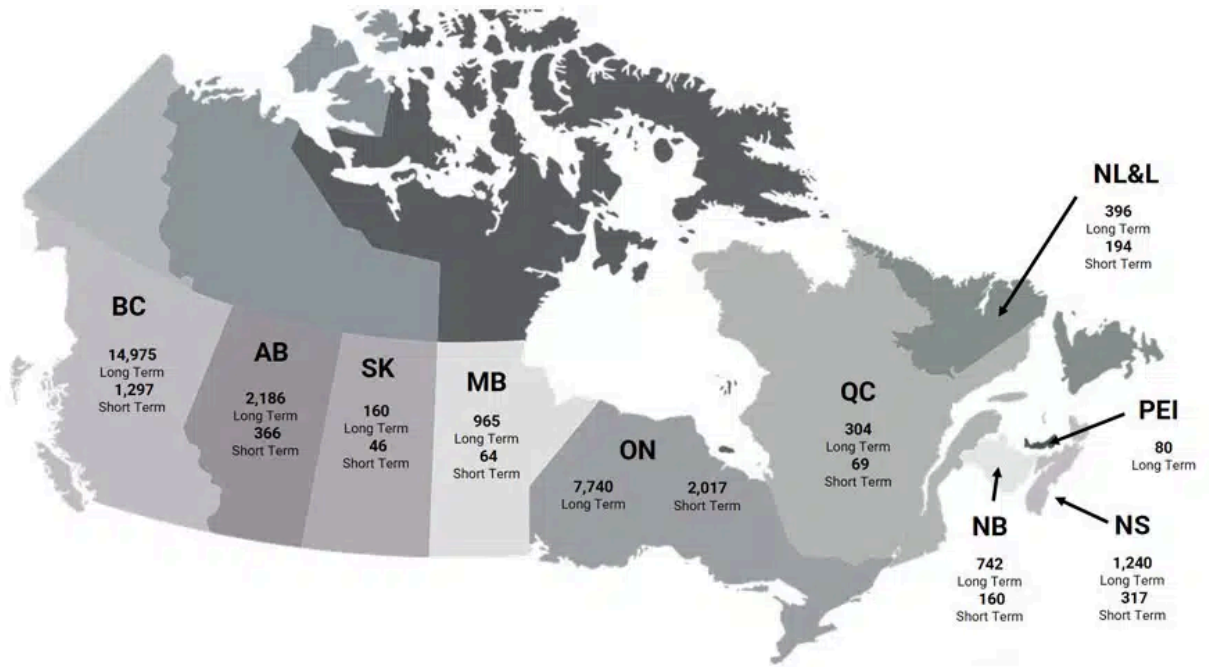


**Figure 1: Distribution of international K-12 students in Canada, 2022/23. Picture from ICEF Monitor (2023), Source: CAPS-I.**

# Research Methodology

This research adopts a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, which is a form of research conducted with the community rather than on the community (Sohng, 2008). The goal is to generate meaningful knowledge that is valuable and beneficial to the community through active community involvement, collaborative reflections, shared decision-making, and ensuring cultural significance (Leavy, 2017; Orionzi et al., 2016; Sohng, 2008).

Our research design is inspired by the work of Sakamoto et al. (2023) – we implemented a one-day in-person storytelling forum by those whose voices may not be readily heard in the public (i.e., intergenerational Chinese Canadian participants talking about their experience with anti-Asian racism), and the forum serves as our primary method for gathering data.

The study explores the lived experiences of international students in Canadian homestay families, as well as the systemic barriers that hinder professionals' ability to effectively support these students. The project aims to give voice to Canadian international students, a long-overlooked yet vulnerable population, and seeks to shed light on their unique struggles, challenges, and resilience. The insights gained are intended to inform and guide policymakers, school boards, and professionals who work closely with these students, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the structural barriers faced by K-12 international students and fostering more supportive, nurturing, and inclusive environments.

## Participant and Recruitment

The study involved 19 participants, including (1) two student speakers with lived experience in, or were living in, homestay settings, (2) three professional speakers who directly work with K-12 international students living in homestays, and (3) 14 general participants who are passionate about the welfare of K-12 international students' living conditions. All participants were recruited via flyers posted on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, X, Red).To ensure access to emotional support, the forum had a trauma-informed social worker readily available to assist participants as needed.

Interested participants were asked to contact the researcher via email and complete a sign-up sheet. For the selection of the speakers, priority was given to students who have lived in a homestay accommodation in the past 3 years and professional speakers who are directly working with K-12 international homestay students. For general participants, everyone who expressed interest was included.

Before the forum, the 5 speakers (i.e., 2 students and 3 professionals) were given a set of questions (Appendix B) to help them prepare their speech, and the research team was available to answer questions that they may have. All the participants have signed the informed consent before this forum. The demographics of the participants are summarized below.

| Demographics | General Participants (total = 14) | Student speakers (total = 2) | Professional speakers[2] (total = 3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age group | 18-30 yrs old (10) 45-55 yrs old (2) 31-45 yrs old (1) Non-disclosed (1) | 18-30 yrs old (2) | 18-30 yrs old (2) 31-45 yrs old (1) |
| Gender identity | Woman (11) Non-binary (1) Gender-fluid (1) Non-disclosed (1) | Man (2) | Woman (2) Non-binary (1) |
| Sexual orientation | Heterosexual (10) Lesbian (1) Pansexual (1) Non-disclosed (2) | Heterosexual (1) Gay (1) | Heterosexual (3) |
| Racial group | Asian (14) | Asian (2) | Asian (3) |
| Disability | No (12) Yes, not visible (1) Non-disclosed (1) | No (2) | No (3) |
| Born in Canada | No (8) Yes (1) Non-disclosed (5) | No (2) | No (3) |
| Time residing in Canada | 3yrs and above (5) Less than 3 yrs (1) Non-disclosed (8) | 3yrs and above (2) | 3 yrs and above (1) Less than 3 yrs (1) Non-disclosed (1) |

**Table 1 - Participants demographic information**

[2] Note: professional speaker 3 had an experience of being an K-12 international student themselves before working in the public education sector.

# Data Collection - Community Research Forum

The in-person research forum, conducted in English, was organized to foster a comprehensive discussion about the welfare of K-12 international students in homestay accommodations. The event, spanning six hours, began with opening remarks and an agenda overview by the principal investigator and MC of the forum.

The initial segment featured three student speakers who shared their lived experiences in homestay settings and two professional speakers who are or have been working closely with the K-12 international student population. Each speaker, provided with a set of script prompts beforehand, delivered a 20-minute speech. The student speakers discussed their experience and challenges living in a homestay, as well as navigating social services in Ontario as an international student. Meanwhile, the professional speakers talked about the systemic challenges they experienced while supporting the students.

After the speeches, the participants (total n=19) were divided into four smaller groups to reflect on the speeches and share their feelings, thoughts, and similar experiences if relevant. Each group was facilitated by one of the 4 volunteer group facilitators. These facilitators used a set of research team-developed questions (see Appendix A) to facilitate structured and productive discussions. The facilitators recorded field notes on a poster board by hand, and the speeches and group discussions were audio-recorded for further analysis.

After the small group discussions, the forum reconvened in a larger group where each group reported critical reflections and suggestions for systemic improvements. This collective debrief aimed to consolidate the discussions and highlight common themes and actionable recommendations.



**Opening Segment**
- PI opened the event, student speakers overviewed the homestay settings

**Speakers Presentations**
- Students and professional speakers addressing systematic issues

**Group Discussion**
- Small groups facilitated discussions, with notes and recordings taken

**Large Group Debrief**
- Groups reconvened to share reflections and suggestions for improvements
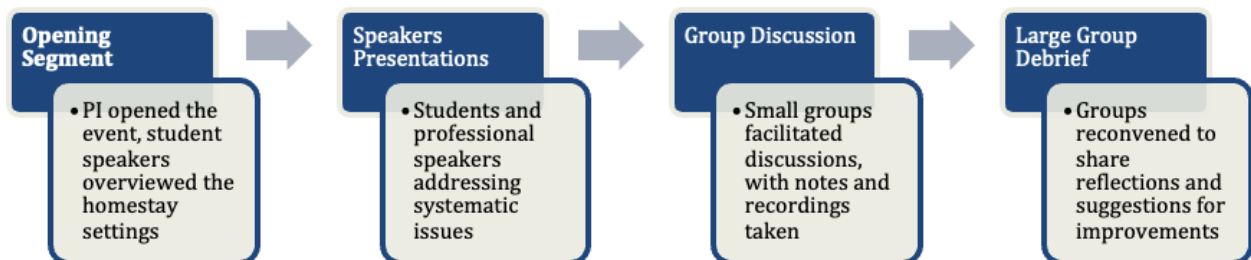
**Figure 1: Community Research Forum Process**

To ensure the emotional well-being of participants, a trauma-informed social worker was present throughout the forum, offering emotional support as needed. However, fortunately, no one needed to use the service. The forum also emphasized the importance of maintaining confidentiality, encouraging participants not to share any discussed information without consent. Terminology adjustments were recommended under trauma-informed considerations, such as replacing"homestay family" with "homestay setting/accommodation/placement" because some students may have experienced trauma in these settings and do not consider a homestay as a family.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted based on transcriptions of (1) five speeches from students and professionals, and (2) four small group discussions among participants. The audio recordings were transcribed, anonymized, cleaned, and proofread by the research team.

Coding and qualitative analysis were carried out using Dedoose, guided by the framework of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). This means that, as a team, we thoroughly reviewed the data transcripts and generated initial ideas, codes, and memos. The codes were refined and merged into meaningful themes, which were organized in a codebook to guide the report-writing process.

# Findings

## Part I - Student Experience in Homestay

This section of the findings **highlights the concerns and challenges faced by students living in homestay accommodations** (see *Figure 3*). It is important to note that not all homestay experiences are negative—some students did report positive experiences, defined by the absence of the issues described below. However, due to the lack of regulation, there is **no assurance that students' rights to safety, privacy, and protection are upheld in homestay settings.** The following section outlines common concerns and challenges faced by students, with the most frequent solution being that students return to their home country to escape these difficulties.
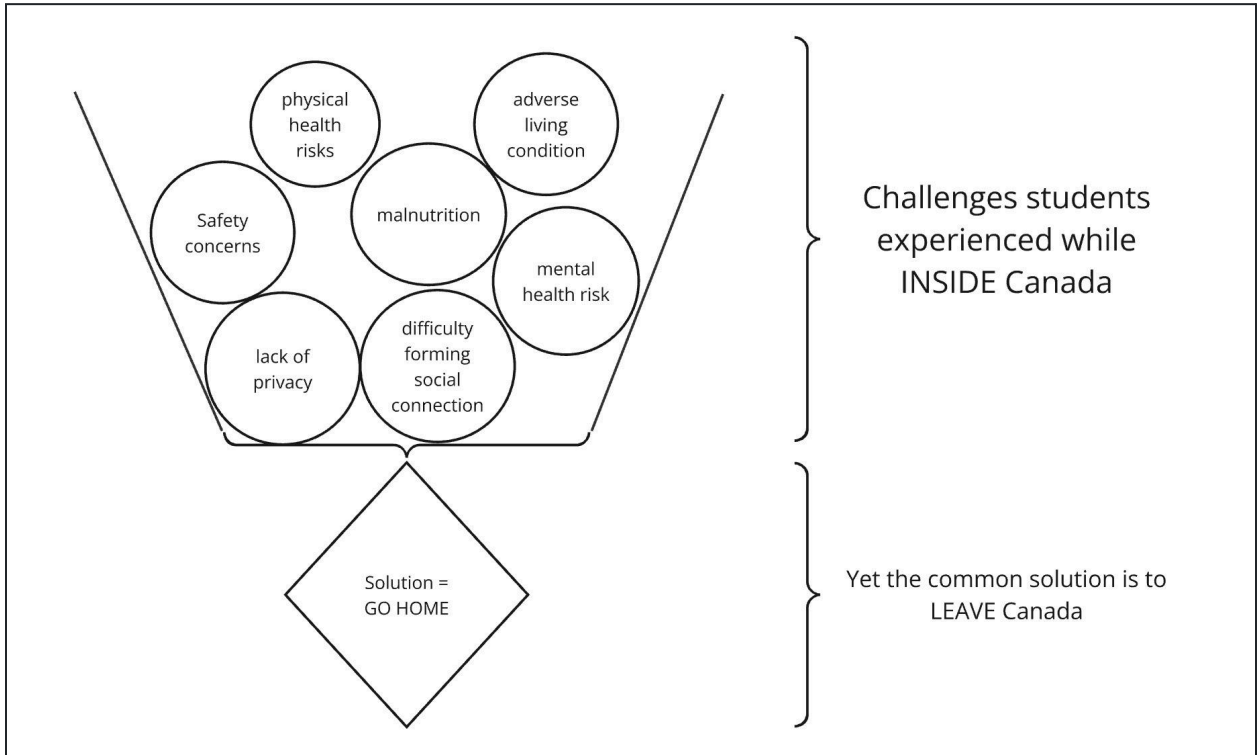


**Figure 3: "Go home" as the default solution to address all challenges students face while living in Canada.**

### Setting the Stage: Unregulated Nature of the Homestay Industry

*"And I [was] actually looking on the website while I listen to folks sharing, [to see] if there is any regulation, policy, from the government to regulate this industry. And I found nothing. And it was really shocking, because I… For example, if you are a tenant, [and] you rent a place, [then] there is an Ontario Tenancy Act. But if you are [an] international student, and you are paying so much fee to the school, and you pay so much fee to the*

*homestay, but there is no regulation or law for them to protect you. Yeah, and I felt really shocked."* (Group 2 Professional Participant)

- Participants highlighted the absence of standardized guidelines or policies governing the quality and safety of homestay arrangements, leading to significant variability in the living conditions and overall experience of students. Student participants also referred to the process of choosing a homestay as a gamble of luck.

- Several participants expressed concerns over the safety of students in unregulated homestays. Without oversight, students may find themselves in unsafe or unsuitable living situations.

- Participants noted that the unclear responsibilities between different supporting parties in the K-12 homestay sector (e.g., homestay providers, agencies and agents, custodians, school social workers) can lead to role confusions amongst staff, leaving students without adequate support.

- Participants agreed that policy reform is urgently needed. Implementing regulatory measures would not only ensure that homestay arrangements prioritize student safety and well-being, but also empower staff to provide more effective care and support.

## Physical Health Concerns In Homestay Environment

### *Malnutrition*
"I really want to know why they [i.e., Canadian homestay providers] give us expired food... you know, they [have] frozen dozens of breads, maybe, for over three months… Lots of white families have huge freezers in their car [garage] or basement, and when things [go] on sale for 99 cents they buy a bunch of them, store them, and then feed the poor international students …I believe they eat something different. From my own experience, they did eat something different." (Professional Speaker 3)

- Many students living in homestays were given cheap, frozen food purchased in bulk by the homestay providers. This food, often stored for extended periods, was served to students well past its expiry date. Such food, with diminished nutritional value, is inadequate to support basic daily functions, particularly for adolescents whose bodies are still growing. Thus, this malnutrition poses a significant risk to their physical health.

- The speaker also noted that while the homestay families consumed different, presumably fresher food, they provided students with malnourished meals. This discrepancy in treatment creates a power dynamic where students feel

disadvantaged, leading to confusion, psychological stress, self-doubt, and rumination.

- Another student shared that they experienced physical symptoms due to a no-salt diet provided by the homestay. As a result, the student faced difficulties in performing daily tasks, such as attending classes, further exacerbating the challenges of adjusting to life in a new environment, dragging students into a downward spiral.

### Adverse Living Condition
*"[The student] visited the room initially and was promised that the homestay would be smoke-free. However, after moving in, she discovered that the host smoked in the basement, posing a great health risk."* (Professional Speaker 1)

- Many participants with experience living in a homestay complained about the adverse living conditions, particularly around the cold temperature, lack of sunlight, and high humidity in their room.

- Participants also mentioned that, under severe weather conditions, students were not provided with adequate heating to maintain a safe and comfortable temperature in their rooms, despite making requests to their homestay families for improvement.

### Privacy and Safety
*"It could be a little bit triggering. Just give you a warning. That's not [a] really pleasant experience. There's no lock on my door. So the kids run through my space all the time … For my generation we [handwash] our underwear. So I feel like my privacy has been invaded all the time, because I'm hiding my underwear."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- Numerous students complained that their room did not have locks, leaving their room and personal belongings exposed.

  - The students highlight a sense of insecurity and compromised privacy in such an inadequately maintained household setting.

- Workers noticed that K-12 international students often become targets of theft and harassment in schools due to the perception that they are wealthy, a stereotype exacerbated and perpetuated by their choice of clothing and accessories.

  - This situation is further perpetuated by the fact that students also recounted having to carry important documents and cash on them because their room has no lock.

- These misconceptions not only put international students at heightened risk of robbery and other safety concerns, but also make them vulnerable targets of future endangerment.

## Mental Health Challenges Faced by Students in Homestay

*"So at that time I [felt] very sad…[it] was the first time I came to Canada, I think, [but] I cannot celebrate my own traditional festival [because my homestay wouldn't allow], it feels very sad and lonely."* (Student Speaker 2)

- Student participants reported feeling judged by homestay families for differences in lifestyle, which were treated as personal flaws rather than cultural differences. This judgment led to feelings of inadequacy and negatively impacted their mental health.

- Many students experienced intense feelings of loneliness, particularly when they were unable to celebrate important cultural festivals like the Lunar New Year with friends or family. This isolation was exacerbated by the physical and emotional distance from their families, leading to sadness and depression.

- Some students reacted to their challenging environments by becoming aggressive toward peers, reflecting the emotional toll their homestay experiences were taking on them. This aggression was often a manifestation of deeper feelings of unfairness, frustration, and depression.

- Several students developed symptoms of depression, including feelings of despair and hopelessness. Environmental factors mentioned before, such as noise from laundry rooms or inadequate heating, contributed to sleep disturbances, which in turn worsened their mental health.

- The transition to a new country and culture, combined with the challenges of adapting to homestay life, often led to culture shock. Students described this experience as terrifying and overwhelming, contributing to a decline in mental health and self-confidence.

- Students were often overlooked or dismissed by their homestay families and custodians. This lack of support contributed to feelings of being invisible and unheard, exacerbating their mental health struggles.

### *Difficulties in Forming Social Relationships*

*"Because they [i.e., K-12 international students] really want to fit in the environment. They're so isolated, they [are] eager to make new friends fitting in the native, local, domestic environment. You know, sharing pod[s] was the one way to actually connect, which is super, super unhealthy."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- Participants noted that despite locals appearing friendly, they still treat them as an "outsider".

- Participants described other challenges in forming social connections, including unfamiliarity with the local culture and language, and a lack of support from their own parents, homestay parents, custodians, and the Canadian legal system.

- Workers noted that, due to eagerness for social connections, some international homestay students engage in risky behaviors, such as substance use and entering sexual relationships with adults.

## "Go Home": The Default Response to K-12 International Student Challenges in Canada

*"We sometimes have to contact the parents [back home] because that [the challenge students experienced] is beyond our school… somehow this also stresses out the mother, [the mother] took [the student] back home for a month, then sent her back [to school]."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- Participants observed that when students face significant challenges, the most common solution seems to be sending them back to their home country, putting additional pressure on both the students and their families.

- This approach is often seen as the default remedy, regardless of the nature or severity of the issue the student is facing, whether it's related to health, mental well-being, or adaptation struggles.

- There was also a shared sentiment that this solution reflects a broader systemic failure to provide adequate support within the Canadian homestay and education system, as it places the responsibility on the students and their families to manage these crises alone.

# Part II - Factor Contributing to the Negative Experience

This section of the findings analyzes **why the various actors responsible for supporting students in Canada often fail to provide adequate assistance** (see *Figure 4*). When international students arrive in Canada, they bring with them their own vulnerabilities, navigating not only a new society and culture but also the complexities of adolescence. Adequate support from these actors could serve as a valuable buffer for the students' vulnerabilities. However, when this support fails, students are left in an even more vulnerable position, forced to face these challenges on their own. As mentioned earlier, the most common solution offered to address these issues is for students to return to their home country.

## Students' Vulnerabilities

### Cultural Upbringing

*"I came from China; the way my parents brought me up is more traditional. There are lots of rules, disciplines, or those kinds of things, like obeying, you have to listen -- the hierarchy, the authority, you know, listen to grandparents, father. So I think culturally, we as East Asian, Chinese, we really don't know how to speak up or express our thoughts."* (Group 1 Student Participant)

- Many students come from cultural backgrounds where obedience to authority and conflict avoidance are deeply ingrained. This upbringing can make it difficult for them to express their needs, challenge unfair situations, or seek help when they face problems.

- The cultural norm of not speaking up, especially among East Asian students, often results in a reluctance to voice concerns, whether it be about their homestay environment, school experiences, or personal struggles.

### Adaptation Stress

*"Then [the student] told me that while chasing the ideal of 'nativeness' he became distressed as the internal conflict between his desired linguistic identity and his Asian heritage grew stronger: 'No matter how hard I try to get along with my Canadian 'friends' I still feel that I am treated as an outsider.'"* (Professional speaker 2)

- Language barriers are a major issue, both in terms of verbal communication and understanding non-verbal cues. Students often struggle to communicate effectively which can lead to frequent misunderstanding in social situations.
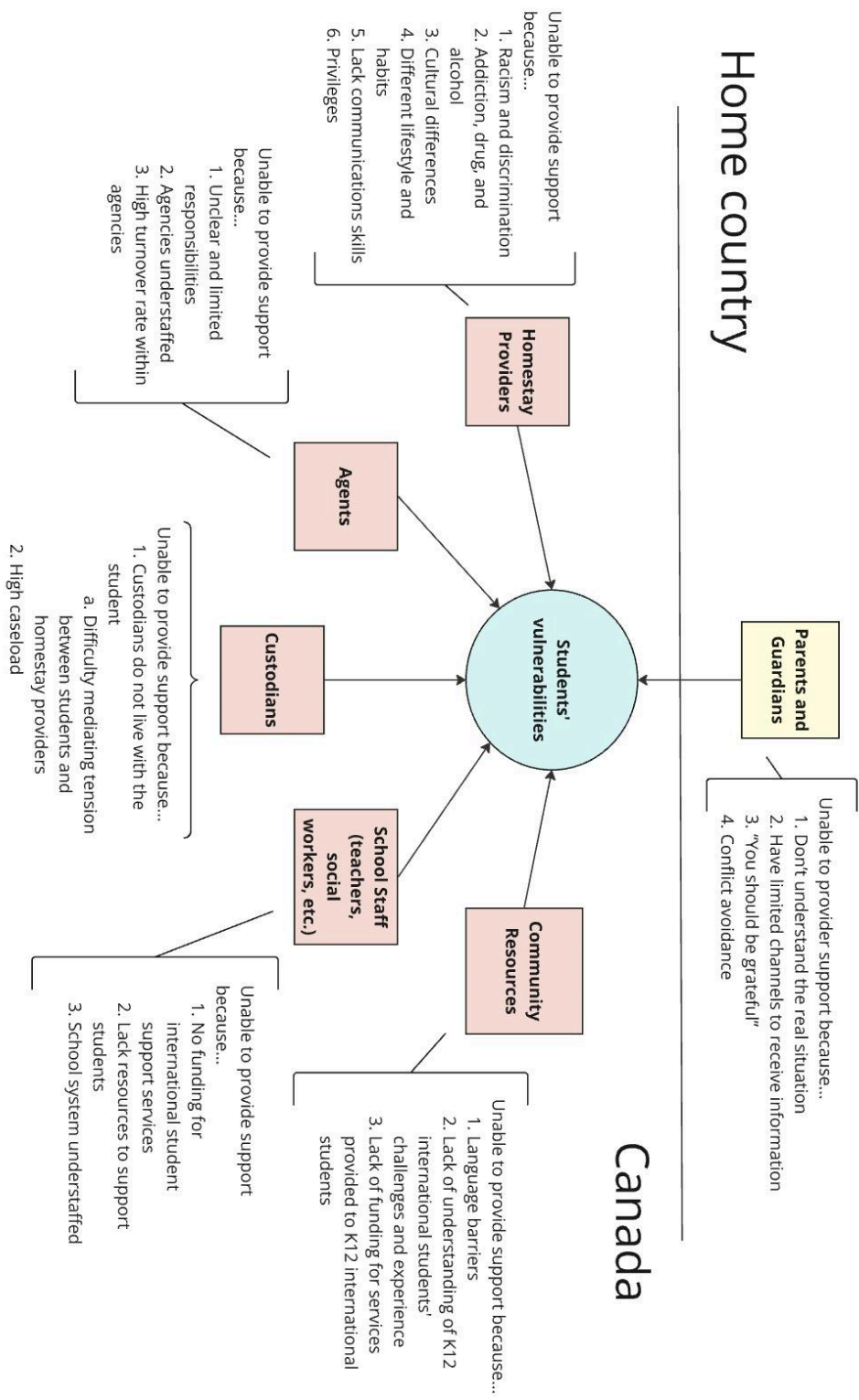
**Figure 4: Actors responsible for supporting students and the reasons they are unable to provide adequate assistance.**

- Internalized xenophobia is another challenge, where students might feel inferior or out of place due to their foreign background, further exacerbating their sense of vulnerability.

### Lacking Local Literacy

*"Even [though] I wasn't an international student, at the first time when I came [to Canada], I still faced a lot of barriers. I didn't know anyone here, and, like, I [didn't] speak a lot of English when I first came here, so I worked in a bubble tea store, in a restaurant, and I didn't know anything about my rights."* (Group 2 Professional Participant)

- The absence of proactive information-sharing from institutions means that students often remain unaware of critical protections and services that could support them during their time in Canada.

- The lack of a social support network is another significant factor, as many students arrive in Canada without knowing anyone. This absence of familiar social structures can make the adaptation process even more daunting.

## Lack of Understanding from Parents or Guardians in Home Countries

*"You know, there are lots of local issues they're not seeing, that the Chinese parents didn't see. So they just push the kids, 'oh, you have to do this [and] this'. They [parents] are living back home. They have their own imagination of how the kids [are] living in Canada, or what kind of environment there [is]."* (Group 1 Student Participant)

- These students' parents or guardians are often far away in their home countries. This long distance can thus be a barrier to these students as they cannot receive timely help from their parents or guardians.

- These students' parents or guardians also have language barriers, which prevents them from participating in their children's lives in Canada and leaves their children alone to deal with issues with the homestay family.

- Parents or guardians also try to press down these students' concerns arising from the interactions with the homestay and emphasize that they should be grateful to have a family that can host them.

## Homestay Providers Actions

Homestay providers are individuals or families who host international students in their homes, offering a place to stay during their time in Canada. The role can involve just providing accommodation and meals, or it can also involve a level of support for helping international students integrate into Canadian culture, depending on the contract

signed. Regardless of contract types, it should be noted that the actions and behaviors of homestay providers can significantly impact students' experiences, often leading to challenges that exacerbate the students' vulnerabilities.

### Cultural and Lifestyle Differences

*"Miscommunications can also arise from different ways of expressing emotions and understanding body language, which affects building mutual trust."* (Professional Speaker 1)

- Miscommunications were common due to differences in expressing emotions and understanding body language. These misunderstandings often prevented the development of mutual trust between students and their homestay families.

- Some students felt that their homestay providers did not understand or respect their need for privacy or their desire to spend time with friends outside the home during cultural celebrations, which deepened their sense of cultural disconnection and homesickness.

- There were instances where students felt judged or misunderstood by their homestay families, particularly when their behaviors did not align with the family's cultural norms or expectations.

- Variations in daily routines, like sleep schedules, further contribute to the students' stress as they struggle to adapt to an unfamiliar environment that may not be accommodating to their needs.

- Food was a recurring theme in the discussions, with many students struggling to adapt to the meals provided by their homestay families. For example, some students are used to eating three hot meals a day but found that their homestays often provided simple or leftover meals for lunch. This difference in food expectations led to dissatisfaction and a sense of neglect.

- Other students noted the lack of accommodation for specific dietary needs, such as halal food, which added to their discomfort and feelings of exclusion.

### Racism and Discrimination

*"For example, [the homestay providers] sometimes say very, like, racist remarks, or there was a lot of homophobia."* (Group 1 Student Participant)

- Some students reported living in predominantly white communities with little cultural diversity further exacerbated feelings of isolation. They described their environments as culturally barren, which contributed to their sense of being outsiders.

## Homestay Environment

*"Especially during traditional festivals such as Chinese Lunar New Year festival, I couldn't have it with my friends to celebrate it [with my homestay], but I heard that my other friends or classmates could celebrate the New Year with their homestays."* (Student Speaker 2)

- Students shared experiences of feeling isolated during important cultural events, as their homestays did not accommodate or recognize these traditions, nor allowed them to celebrate with friends from the same cultural background.

- Participants reported that some homestays imposed strict and unreasonable rules, which limited students' autonomy and created additional stress. For example, some students were only allowed to use the shower for 10 minutes, or were denied dinner if they arrived home after a certain time, such as 5 p.m.

- Participants noted that the distant location of some homestays made it difficult for students to stay connected with their peers and communities. Many students were dependent on their homestay providers for transportation, limiting their mobility and opportunities for social interaction.

## Agencies and Agents

Agencies and agents are intermediaries who assist international students with obtaining visas, applying to schools, and often managing their initial transition to life in Canada. Unlike homestay providers or custodians, their primary role is to facilitate the student's arrival and, in some cases, offer ongoing support and communication with the student's family. However, their involvement can vary widely, leading to inconsistencies in the support provided.

*"Like the [name of agency], there are always people working there, [but] always changing. So … I'm not completely sure, but I feel like the information [(about students) isn't] passed on properly."* (Group 1 Participant)

- Participants described the chaotic nature of working with agencies, particularly noting the high staff turnover and the lack of a proper system to communicate important student information within the agency. This disorganization often led to significant issues, such as students not being properly enrolled.

- Many parents rely on agencies, as well as the internet, for information about living in Canada. However, participants noted that the information provided by agencies may not always accurately reflect the students' actual experiences, leading to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the challenges the students face.

## Custodians

Custodians serve as legal guardians for international students in Canada, especially for those who are minors. Their responsibilities typically include handling emergencies, making decisions in the students' best interests, and acting as a point of contact between the students and various stakeholders, such as schools and homestay providers. However, the role of custodians can be complicated and inconsistent, often leading to challenges in providing effective support.

*"So there was a time that the students got rid of the [homestay], and we also received complaints from the homestays that the students broke some of the furniture or had some financial disputes. But there are not many things we can [do] for those kinds of issues, because we are the third party. We don't know what happens in the house, or we don't know what the interaction was like between the household and the homes, between the homestay and the parents and also the students."* (Group 3 Professional Participant)

- Participants highlighted that custodians do not live with the students, which makes it difficult for them to intervene in or settle disputes between students and homestay providers. This distance also hinders their ability to notice and address issues with students in a timely manner.

- There was concern about the lack of clear communication between custodians, students, and other parties involved. Participants shared instances where custodians were unresponsive or did not participate in important discussions or interviews, further complicating the resolution of issues.

- The role of custodians is often confused or blurred with that of other support roles, such as homestay providers or agents, leading to unclear expectations and responsibilities. This ambiguity can leave students without the necessary support when they face challenges.

## School Staff

*"You know, how many times my supervisor gave me this hard time, saying, "[staff's name], you should focus on, you know, local students or domestic students. You spend too much time with international students, because there [is] no funding for them." They pay me to [take] care of domestic students."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- A professional speaker recounted how their supervisor repeatedly emphasized that their primary focus should be on domestic students since there was no funding allocated for supporting international students.

- This lack of institutional support forces school staff to deprioritize the needs of international students, leaving these vulnerable students without the necessary assistance.

- The professional participants also mentioned that school staff themselves lack the support they need to effectively assist international students. The stress and emotional burden on these staff members can directly impact their ability to form positive relationships with students, potentially worsening students' mental health and well-being.

## Unregulated Social Services and Unclear Policies in Homestay

*"I think [that] homestay [providers] could also have some sort of … program[s] that they need to attend, to get a certificate [and] learn about how they can [be] parents [to] international students, or even just like a program to learn about different cultures … so that they can respect the culture of that kid that they're going to live with."* (Group 4 Student Participant)

- Students felt that homestay seems to be a business and a lucrative industry and the well-being of K-12 students in homestay does not get enough attention from the government and the school boards.

- Students thus didn't trust that the government or the school boards can truly solve issues arising from their interactions with the homestay.

- Students also felt that there should be measures that support K-12 students based on their individuality and ensure that these children and adolescents can live in a safe and inclusive environment.

# Part III - Imbalanced Power within Unregulated System: A Stanford Prison

A professional speaker compared the power dynamics within the homestay system to the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo et al, 1971). In this analogy, homestay families and custodians are likened to the "guards," who hold significant power and control over the students, who play the role of "prisoners." The speaker noted that this power imbalance often leads to dominating and oppressive behavior from the homestay providers, while the students become passive and compliant, fearful of repercussions if they speak out or fail to meet expectations.

Just as the participants in the Stanford Prison Experiment quickly conformed to their assigned roles, students in the homestay system may find themselves in a position where they feel powerless to change their circumstances. The constant pressure to conform to the "ideal homestay student" mold, coupled with the fear of negative consequences, creates a situation where students' autonomy and well-being are significantly compromised.

### Infantilization of K-12 International Students
*"The homestay mom told me, 'you know, ladies, we use pads every month,' [She] [told] me how to put a pad into the trash can!... 'This was your pad, how [should you] roll it, and then wrap it with toilet paper'. And she showed me in front of my face. I was 20 something years old. I am old enough to know how to deal with [this]… You treat me like a child. I feel there's no respect. There's no privacy."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- Participants felt that they were being seen as incapable and treated as they did not know anything when living with the homestay. This infantilization perceived by them shows the inequality when interacting with their homestay families and exacerbates their disadvantageous situation.

### Homestay Families and Custodians Hold Significant Power Over Students:
- Participants reported that the immense authority held by homestay families and custodians discourages students from voicing complaints or dissatisfaction. This power imbalance fosters fear of repercussions, such as mistreatment or difficulties in securing alternative housing.

### Students Feel Compelled to Conform to Unreasonable Expectations:
- Students mentioned feeling immense pressure to meet their hosts' expectations, even when those demands are unreasonable or beyond their control. This constant strain leads to feelings of helplessness and significant mental stress.

*Homestay as a Commercial Enterprise:*
- Participants observed that the homestay system is primarily driven by financial interests. Many providers participate for monetary gain rather than a genuine desire to support international students, resulting in transactional relationships that compromise the quality of care and support offered.

*"Ideal Homestay Student" Sentiments:*
- Students shared that homestay families often judge them based on lifestyle differences, perceiving these distinctions as personal flaws. This judgment creates a hostile and unwelcoming environment where students feel incessant pressure to meet unrealistic and culturally insensitive expectations.

- Many expressed feelings of frustration and entrapment as they struggled to satisfy their hosts' ideals, leading to a pervasive sense of inadequacy and the inability to escape ongoing disapproval.

*Overlap of Roles Creates Conflicts of Interest:*
- It was highlighted that when a homestay host also serves as a custodian or holds other significant roles, students are left without an impartial party to seek help from, rendering them vulnerable. This dual role often leads to stricter, more controlling behavior from hosts, further diminishing students' sense of agency and security.

*Exceeding Legal Limits and Lack of Accountability:*
- Participants revealed that some custodians exceed legal limits on the number of students they oversee, driven by financial incentives. This overload severely compromises the quality of care and attention each student receives.

- The lack of effective oversight allows such violations to go unreported and unaddressed, leaving students without essential support and recourse in challenging situations.

*Homestay Providers Prioritize Their Convenience:*
- Students reported facing restrictive rules and limitations imposed by hosts, reflecting the providers' preference and convenience over the students' needs and well-being.

- Disparities in treatment were evident, with students often receiving lower-quality food and resources compared to what hosts reserve for themselves, underscoring the profound privilege and power imbalance within the homestay arrangement.

*Burden of Proof on Students (and They Also Bear Negative Outcomes):*
- Participants stressed that the responsibility to gather evidence of misconduct falls unjustly on students, who often lack the necessary resources and knowledge to advocate effectively for themselves.

- Even when students attempt to report issues, fear of retaliation and the likelihood of their concerns being dismissed deter them from speaking up, perpetuating a cycle of unaddressed abuse and neglect.

- Many students struggle to escape unpleasant homestay situations due to legal and logistical hurdles, including difficulties in finding alternative housing caused by a lack of local credit history and financial constraints. This entrapment leads to significant emotional distress and a sense of hopelessness.

*Fear of Repercussion:*
- Students frequently expressed deep anxiety about raising concerns, fearing that speaking up would lead to immediate and tangible backlash from their homestay families. This fear results in hesitation to communicate issues or seek necessary help, causing prolonged suffering and unresolved conflicts.

- Numerous accounts detailed how voicing concerns actually led to strained relationships, hostility, and further mistreatment from hosts. These negative outcomes intensify feelings of isolation and helplessness, discouraging students from engaging in self-advocacy and exacerbating their vulnerability within the homestay system.

## The Macro Social Context That Shapes and Exacerbates Imbalanced Power

*The Commercialization of Homestay Driven by the Capitalist Market*
*"So [The Canadian government] they recruit international students to come to Canada. Because economically, they want international students' tuition, right? … International students are expected to spend more and work more to contribute to the local economy… There is no such thing as a fair exchange, because international students come here and spend their money, [but] then they are not taken care of. So I think [that] the government is not willing to take the responsibility of taking care of the students."*
(Group 4 Student Participant)

- Participants shared their frustration with the Canadian immigration and education system, as they seem to be treated as a 'cash cow', yet relevant services that support them as minor students are still missing.

- These struggles faced by participants show how the international education sector in Canada has been profoundly shaped by the capitalist market, as this macro social context has commercialized homestay, yet supporting services that are seen as the cost are neglected.

### *The 'Undeservingness' As a Result of the Temporary Status of K-12 International Students*

*"It's very barely minimum support from [the] government, from community-based organizations, or from others because every time we reach out, they're always [saying] because [of] their [K-12 international students] status: you are interna[tional] student, you don't have [permanent] status, so we don't have funding for use."* (Professional Speaker 3)

- Students attributed the insufficient support from the government to their temporary status in Canada, as most of fundings will go to communities and individuals with permanent residency.

- Students also sensed the exclusive sentiment caused by their temporary status and many also shared the confusion if returning to their home countries is the only solution.

# Recommendations

## For Community Organizations

- Participants suggested that community organizations should focus on empowering students to advocate for themselves in ways that are inclusive and accessible. This includes creating safe spaces where students can share their experiences and learn about their rights.

- There was a strong call for community organizations to mobilize international students. Participants felt that by organizing students into a collective force, they could more effectively advocate for their rights and build alliances with other groups facing similar challenges.

## For Staff, Homestay Providers, Parents and Custodians, and Other Professionals

- Participants stressed the importance of rapport-building for everyone working with international students. Establishing trust and understanding is crucial to supporting students effectively.

- Participants mentioned the need to consider accessibility in all forms of communication and support. This includes providing information in writing (e.g., brochures) in multiple languages and holding more online events, as students may have difficulty leaving their homestays beyond school hours.

- Participants called for more comprehensive training for homestay providers and staff supporting international students. This training should cover not only the logistics of hosting students but also cultural sensitivity and student mental health.

- It was suggested that students' parents should take a more active role in understanding the students' experiences. Rather than relying solely on third-party information, they should engage directly with students, and equip themselves with the adequate tools to understand students' mental health and identity development during adolescence, to better support them.

## For Government, Policy Makers, and the Homestay Business Sector

- Participants strongly advocated for the creation of clear guidelines that define the responsibilities of all parties involved in the homestay sector (i.e., homestay providers, agents, custodians, school support staff, parents, and students). They emphasized the need for a designated institution that would be truly accountable for addressing issues as they arise.

  - Participants recommended that becoming a homestay provider should require a formal licensing process, accompanied by ongoing monitoring and regulation.

  - There was also a call for policies specifically designed to protect underage international students in homestays. This includes ensuring students are informed of their rights and providing accessible avenues for them to report issues.

- Participants highlighted the need for more effective dissemination of information to students about their rights, responsibilities, and coping strategies. They suggested using various platforms to reach students and ensure they are well-informed.

- There was a suggestion to develop a student information database that would help staff know who to contact in case of issues, ensuring that students receive timely support.

- Participants proposed regular check-ins and the creation of a "Rate My Homestay[3]" system to monitor the quality of homestays and hold providers accountable for the treatment of students.

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[3]"Rate My Homestay": This is a reference to the popular online platform "Rate My Professors (2024)," used by post-secondary students. The platform allows students to anonymously rate their professors, with the ratings and comments helping other students decide which lectures to attend.

# Discussion

## Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Systemic Failures in Supporting K-12 International Students

The experiences of K-12 international students in homestays, along with the systemic challenges staff face when attempting to support them, highlight a critical issue that Canadian society has yet to acknowledge: the systemic failures in supporting these vulnerable students are, in fact, a Canadian problem. These young minors arrive in Canada, bringing with them not only the financial means that help sustain our education system amidst governmental funding cuts but also the hope of a better education and a bright future. They invest heavily in their stay—paying substantial fees for homestays, custodians, and schooling—expecting to receive the support and services that their payments should deserve. However, the reality they face is far from this expectation. Instead of being nurtured and guided, **these students often find themselves trapped in a system that is ill-prepared to meet their needs and quick to abandon them when difficulties arise.**

In Canada, the students have no one to truly rely on because none of the actors in their lives are adequately equipped or motivated to provide the level of care they require. On one hand, their parents and/or guardians back in their home countries, who should be a source of comfort and guidance, are often misinformed about the realities their children face in Canada. They hold an idealized vision of their children's lives abroad, which leads to a lack of meaningful support when challenges arise. Then, locally in Canada, the situation is exacerbated by the inadequacies of the local support systems. Homestay providers, agents, and custodians—who are often the closest points of contact for these students—are frequently ill-equipped to handle the complex needs of adolescents navigating life in a new country. These individuals and institutions may lack the motivation, resources, or training necessary to offer the support that students require. School staff, despite their best intentions, are similarly hampered by institutional limitations. With insufficient resources, inadequate training, and minimal institutional support, even the most dedicated educators struggle to provide the necessary guidance and care to these vulnerable students.

Despite the significant financial contributions these students make to the Canadian education system, they are not receiving the services and support they deserve. When they encounter difficulties—whether related to their living conditions, mental health, or academic challenges—the response from the system is often not to address these issues but to push the students out of Canada. The default solution proposed by various actors within the system is to send these students back to their home countries. This

approach does not solve the problem; it merely pushes it out of sight. **By encouraging students to leave, Canada is effectively washing its hands of the issue, failing to take responsibility for the well-being of these young minors.**

This systemic failure is a Canadian problem. The country prides itself on being a welcoming, multicultural society, yet it continues to overlook the struggles of a vulnerable population within its borders (Thobani, 2007; Zhao et al, 2022). The lack of adequate support for K-12 international students reflects broader issues within the Canadian education and immigration systems — issues that Canadian society must confront and address.

## Towards a Safer Harbor: Empowering Change and Support

Despite these challenges, the professionals working within various institutions and organizations, who participated in this project, have expressed a strong willingness and even eagerness to support these students during their work. They recognize the gaps in the current system and are keen to address them, often using their own time and resources to do so. However, they too are constrained by systemic issues—such as lack of funding, minimal training, and a general lack of understanding of the K-12 international student experience. It is clear that **the problem lies not with the individuals within the system, but with the system itself.** There is an **urgent need for systemic change to ensure that these professionals are equipped with the resources, training, and institutional backing necessary to make a real difference in the lives of these students.**

Moreover, the students themselves have shown a strong desire to share their experiences and be heard. They want to be included in the broader Canadian society, yet they are rarely given the opportunity to do so. The Canadian mainstream society has shown limited interest in their stories, with minimal media coverage and public attention. This lack of visibility further marginalizes these students, making it even more difficult for them to find their place in a society that seems indifferent to their struggles.

This report and the SafeHarbor Project are intended to be the starting points for a long overdue conversation about the systemic changes required to better support K-12 international students in Canada. The findings and recommendations presented here are not the end, but rather the beginning of a larger movement towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for these students. Canadian society must recognize that these issues are not just the problems of international students, but are Canadian problems—ones that require collective action to resolve. By bringing light on these issues, we hope to inspire policymakers, educators, and community leaders to take these insights seriously and work towards creating a more equitable and supportive system for all students.

# Limitations

Throughout this project, our team has gathered significant insights into the experiences of K-12 international students living in homestay arrangements. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations within our study. The findings are derived from a single research session conducted in Toronto, Ontario, which may not capture the full spectrum of perspectives and experiences among K-12 international students and those working in this field in different locations and contexts. Moreover, individual experiences can vary widely based on numerous factors such as language skills, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, educational and occupational circumstances, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, gender identities, age, and other intersecting aspects of identity. This project is intended to open a small window, shedding the light on an area that has largely gone unseen. It should be viewed as the beginning of a much-needed exploration, rather than a comprehensive conclusion. Future studies should aim to investigate these diverse dimensions more thoroughly to deepen our understanding and better support the varied needs of international students navigating homestay environments.

# Conclusion

This community report presented the significant challenges faced by K-12 international students in Canada, particularly those living in unregulated homestay environments. Through a detailed exploration of their experiences, it has become evident that the current system is inadequately equipped to support these vulnerable students. The lack of regulation in the homestay sector has resulted in a wide range of issues, from physical and mental health risks to cultural isolation and misused of unregulated power against underage students. These problems are exacerbated by a systemic focus on profit over student well-being, leaving many international students feeling isolated, unsupported, and unheard.

This project highlighted the urgent need for policy reform, advocating for a more regulated and supportive homestay environment. This includes implementing clear guidelines for homestay providers, improving communication between all parties involved, and ensuring that students have access to the resources and support they need to thrive.

The findings and recommendations from this project aim to initiate meaningful change and provide a foundation for future efforts to better support K-12 international students. It is our hope that stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and homestay providers, will take these insights seriously and work towards creating a more equitable and supportive system for all students.

# In Closing

As we conclude this report, we want to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who made the SafeHarbor Project possible. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders, whose commitment to the well-being of K-12 international students has been unwavering. We are also incredibly thankful to our academic collaborator and mentor, Dr. Izumi Sakamoto, who has shared their expertise, resources, and passion for this important work. Most importantly, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the participants who bravely shared their stories and insights. Your voices have brought critical issues to light, and your experiences will serve as the foundation for meaningful change in the lives of future students. It is our sincere hope that this report not only raises awareness but also inspires action among policymakers, educators, and homestay providers.

As we look towards the future, we are filled with hope and optimism. The challenges highlighted in this report are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With continued collaboration, advocacy, and commitment to change, we believe that we can create a safer, more supportive environment for all international students. We would like to continue these efforts into meaningful, concrete next steps throughout community engagements – we are rebranding SafeHarbor Project into **Project Anchor**, a **grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to providing peer support and advocacy for K-12 international students** facing homestay-related challenges, social isolation, and other struggles. We will continue to use our social media handles (e.g., [Instagram](#), [X](#)). Project Anchor is founded and driven by students who have experienced these challenges, with the mission of fostering a strong sense of belonging for those who are navigating similar hardships. To our awareness, there are very limited available peer-based resources that are specifically tailored to K-12 international students' needs. It is our hope that this community initiative will continue to shed further light onto deeply stemmed systematic issues in our Canadian society and immigration system, and begin the process of providing support for those struggling in the darkness.

Sincerely,

Sijia Joyce Luo, MSW RSW

Founding Board, Co-Chair
Project Anchor

Patricia Quan, MSW RSW

Founding Board, Co-Chair
Project Anchor
Principal Investigator
SafeHarbor Project

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# Appendix A: Information sheet, including discussion guide, used in the research event

**SafeHarbor Project: Promoting Security in Homestay Accommodations for International Students Research Forum Information Sheet**

**Trigger Warning:** please be aware that the speakers' sharing and the discussion may contain descriptions of violence including but not limited to physical, mental, and verbal forms. You may leave the room, walk around in the hallway, or seek support from the on-site psychotherapist should you experience discomfort or challenge during the forum.

**Mission of the Research Project:** Uncovering the forms of violence experienced by students living in homestays as well as the structural vacuum that exists in the fields supporting international students, leaving professionals confused and powerless when working with this population.

We want to uncover the SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS underlying these issues. Please DO NOT blame/target any workers/students/groups/populations.

Note:

We ask everyone to NOT share anything discussed during the forum with others without the speakers' consent.

We encourage everyone to replace "homestay family" with "homestay setting/ accommodation/ placement."

**Homestay in Ontario – Background information**

- Definition of Homestay: A family/individual providing at least a room with basic furniture (i.e., a bed, a closet, and a table) to the international student in exchange for payments.
- Homestay providers may be contacted through third-party website listing (e.g., Kijiji, RED), or via matching programs in organizations/agencies.
- Meals may be provided based on the type of contract signed.
- Homestay providers are NOT legally responsible for students' study, socialization, or wellbeing, unless they are also the students' custodians.
- Currently, NONE of the three major school boards in Toronto (i.e., TDSB, TCDSB, YRDSB) provide homestay programs directly.

- Definition of Custodian/(Legal) Guardian: A Canadian citizen or permanent resident designated by parents (usually through the agencies) to provide care and be legally responsible for the student while they study in Canada.
- Custodians, acting on behalf of the parents, is responsible for making the necessary arrangements for the care and support for the student.
- It is common, in an organization/agency, for one custodian to be responsible for multiple students simultaneously.

**Event Agenda**

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-10:10 | Welcome booth; settle down |
| 10:10-10:40 | Opening |
| | Introducing project and team |
| | Background |
| 10:40-12:40 | 5 speaker presentations |
| 12:40 – 1:40 | Lunch 1h |
| 1:40 – 1:50 | Explain small group discussion |
| 1:50 – 3:20 | 90 min facilitator-led small group discussion |
| | 4 participants per group |
| 3:20 – 3:50 | Report back |
| 3:50 – 4:00 | Closing |

**Small Group Discussion Questions**

- Please introduce yourself, how does your work/study/lived experience connected to K-12 international students living in homestay accommodations?
- What came to your mind when / after hearing about the student speaker's experiences? Do you have a similar experience that you wish to share?
- What came to your mind when / after hearing about the professional speaker's experiences? Do you find their experiences relatable to your own work?
- What's one thing that you think you can do for K-12 international students in homestay accommodation in your current role?
- As a group, please discuss and pick 3 policy recommendations to help improve K-12 international students' homestay living arrangement.

**Report Back Guiding Questions (for facilitators, but please decide as a group)**

- What are some common themes being discussed? Anything that was particularly inspiring for the group members?
- What are the top 3 policy recommendations your group decided on?
- Anything else interesting or significant that you wish to add?

# Appendix B: Speaker prompts used in the research event

**Student speakers:**

- What's your general experience in your homestay(s)?

- Did you encounter any challenges? Can you describe a challenging event – what was it, and how was it resolved?

- Did you feel supported during your stay in the homestay(s)?

    - If yes, who supported you and how?

    - If not, what did the staff/homestay providers do when you needed them?

- Were you aware of your rights and responsibilities during your stay?

- Any suggestions on how the homestay system/field can improve?

- Anything else?

**Professional speakers:**

- What's your role in supporting K-12 international students?

- What do you think is the greatest challenge these students face when living in homestay accommodations?

- Did you encounter any challenges supporting the students?

- Were you aware of the students' rights and responsibilities during your stay? Do you think they are aware of their rights and responsibilities?

- Any suggestions on how the homestay system/field can improve?

- Anything else?

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