

# Engage Respectfully With Young People (From Refugee Backgrounds)



## Participant's Handbook

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## Acknowledgements

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- written by Margaret Piper AM.

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# Introduction

This unit:

- has been designed to facilitate the development of the competencies required for people working or intending to work with young people from refugee backgrounds. It aims to provide participants with the skills and knowledge to address the specific needs of this client group and to develop constructive attitudes to this work. The unit reflects the opinion that working with young people from refugee backgrounds requires knowledge, skills and attitudes additional to and distinct from those required to work with other young people or other newly arrived groups;
- is based on the unit: **CHCYTH001: Engage Respectfully with Young People**, modified to focus specifically on working with young people from refugee backgrounds;
- may apply to community services work in a range of contexts including but not limited to settlement services, youth work, education, health and disability services, training, family support, employment, income support and recreation. It is equally applicable to those engaged in direct contact with young people from refugee backgrounds and those responsible for policy or program development;
- can be imported into a number of relevant qualifications or be taken as a stand-alone unit. Material from this unit can also be used for professional development purposes without a link to a formal qualification.

The training covers 12 topic areas.

Topic	Content
1	Adolescence
2	The Refugee Experience
3	Entry Pathways
4	Settlement
5	Family and Community
6	Unaccompanied Minors
7	Good Practice When Working with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds
8	Core Skills for Working with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

9	Some Vulnerable Groups
10	Other Significant Issues
11	Advocacy
12	Self-Care

## Elements and Performance Criteria

The following elements and performance criteria are embedded within **CHCYTH001: Engage Respectfully with Young People**.

Element		Performance Criteria	
1.	Communicate effectively with young people	1.1	Listen to the young person to gain understanding of their experiences
		1.2	Foster communication exchanges that support the development of trust and rapport
		1.3	Process information about the young person's situation from their perspective
		1.4	Use a range of appropriate communication strategies to engage with young people
		1.5	Consider cultural sensitivities in communication techniques and adapt style and language to accommodate different cultural values and practices
		1.6	Maintain young person's confidentiality in the context that the young person is the primary stakeholder
2.	Reflect understanding of youth cultures and subcultures and young person's own development	2.1	Consider youth culture and subcultures of the young person in all actions and decisions
		2.2	Consider the young person's individual development in all actions and decisions
		2.3	Evaluate issues in relation to young person's culture and modify approaches appropriately
		2.4	Select activities and resources to promote awareness, respect the young person and value diversity
		2.5	Establish guidelines that are relevant to the culture and background of the young person
		2.6	Assess the impact of own cultural values, cultural lens and ethnocentrism in youth work

<p>3. Work with the young person as the focus</p>	<p>3.1 Apply youth-centred practices when working with young people</p> <p>3.2 Respect the rights, needs and responsibilities of the young person</p> <p>3.3 Explain worker rights and responsibilities to the young person as necessary</p> <p>3.4 Establish a professional relationship and boundary expectations with the client</p> <p>3.5 Identify and manage power inequities in the professional relationship</p> <p>3.6 Apply principles of ethical decision-making in working with young people</p>
<p>4. Reflect on own practice and values</p>	<p>4.1 Identify opportunities to reflect on own interactions and practices with young people</p> <p>4.2 Recognise areas where own biases, background and opinions may have impacted on work with the young person</p> <p>4.3 Seek opportunities to address any concerns or areas for development</p>

## Assessment

### Performance Evidence

You must show evidence of the ability to complete tasks outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage tasks and manage contingencies in the context of the job role. There must be demonstrated evidence that the candidate has completed the following tasks at least once.

Applied youth-centred practices when working with young people, include:

- using interpersonal skills to engage with at least three young people;
- applying engagement skills with young people with diverse range of presenting issues and experiences;
- applying principles of ethical decision-making to ethical dilemmas when the young person is the primary client;
- establishing and maintaining a professional relationship with at least one group of young people.

## Knowledge Evidence

You must be able to demonstrate essential knowledge required to effectively do the task outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage the task and manage contingencies in the context of the identified work role. These include knowledge of:

- aspects of human behaviour and development related to young people, their personal and social development and relationships;
- current issues facing young people and existing services to address their needs and rights;
- different world views and the interrelationship of society, culture and the young person;
- diversity in all forms – across cultural, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic and geographic spheres, and the experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers;
- own cultural values, cultural lens and ethnocentrism;
- own work role within the context of the youth sector;
- access and equity principles;
- principles of ethical decision-making;
- statutory frameworks in which the work role functions;
- the impact of judgement-making skills in working with young people;
- youth-centred practices with focus on the young person as the primary stakeholder;
- youth cultures, social, political and economic and professional frameworks.

## Assessment Tasks

If, in taking this unit, you are seeking credit for a course of study or a certificate of attainment, you will be asked to complete a number of allocated assessment tasks.

## Certification

If you undertake this study through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that has this unit on its official scope of registration and they are assessed as competent, they can be awarded a Statement of Attainment from the Australian Qualification Framework for the following unit: **CHCYTH001: Engage Respectfully with Young People**

In such cases it is recommended that an amendment be made to the Statement of Attainment to the fact that the material covered in the unit focused specifically on working with young people from refugee backgrounds.

If you have been assessed as Not Yet Competent, another assessment opportunity might be arranged.

## Assessment Appeals Procedures

If you wish to have your assessment results reviewed, you may request this you're your trainer immediately after you have participated in the assessment task. Any unresolved disputes may be referred to the relevant RTO Manager.

## Important Background Information

Approximately 50% of those granted refugee or humanitarian visas by Australia in any one year are likely to be under 25 years of age. Many have never known a 'normal' life. They have experienced conflict and violence in their home country plus the disruption of flight, or they have lived their entire lives in refugee camps or urban slums.

In addition to facing the challenges that confront adolescents, young people from refugee backgrounds are likely to face a range of additional challenges including some or all of the following:

- the impact of disrupted or very limited education;
- learning a new language (sometimes in a foreign script);
- grief, guilt and loss;
- anguish over separation from family members and friends;
- negotiating new or changed family structures, roles and responsibilities;
- living with parents or carers who are traumatised and who may only be able to provide limited emotional or educational support;
- balancing expectations from parents/carers and their cultural community with finding their own place in Australian culture and society;
- leaving family and friends behind and having to find a new support community;
- dealing with racism and discrimination.

Despite these challenges, young people from refugee backgrounds come to Australia with many strengths and resources. Many have broad international and cross-cultural knowledge, multilingual skills, are adaptable and resourceful, and have a strong desire to achieve and succeed. It is important that this group of young people receive targeted support to ensure they access and remain engaged in economic, social and cultural opportunities.

## Underpinning Principles and Definitions

As you are working through this unit, there are some very important principles that you need to keep in mind:

### **In relation to terminology:**

- The terms '**youth**' and '**young people**' are used in this context to denote people between the ages of 12 and 25.
- When speaking about people outside Australia, the term '**young refugee**' is used. This is an accurate reflection of their status at this stage. When speaking about this group after they have arrived in Australia, however, the term '**young people from refugee backgrounds**' is used.

- **Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs)** and **Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs)** are important and particular groups within the wider context of refugee youth in Australia. These terms define a minor's status for migration and settlement purposes. Topic 6 focuses on unaccompanied minors.
- The term **best practice** will not be used in this unit as it implies that a finite point has been reached, i.e. that it is as good as it ever can be. **Good practice** is the preferred term and this training package is designed to provide some guidance on good practice with young people from refugee backgrounds. Anyone working with young people from refugee backgrounds should strive for good practice through:
  - recognising that no two groups of people from refugee backgrounds are the same;
  - being conscious of the fact that no two young people have the same needs;
  - responding to the linguistic and cultural needs of the young person with whom they are working;
  - engaging in critical reflection on practice;
  - reviewing what they are doing to ensure it is meeting the needs of the current cohort and the person with whom they are working.

#### **Further:**

- Young people from refugee backgrounds are not inherently exceptional people. They are **ordinary people who have survived exceptional experiences**. There are three important elements to this statement:
  - Their 'refugeeness' does not define who they are. It is only one element of a young person's identity. They are also an adolescent, a member of a family (who might or might not be in Australia), someone who is grappling with important questions of identity and aspirations for the future, a person with passions and dislikes ...
  - They are survivors. Many people tend to think of and speak about refugees as 'victims'. This might be good for raising money to support programs but is unfair to those about whom it is said because it overlooks or diminishes the strengths and resilience of young people from refugee backgrounds. Rather than being victims, young people from refugee backgrounds are survivors and their survival has been dependent upon them having a range of skills and strengths.
  - The things young people from refugee backgrounds have lived through are 'exceptional'. It is very hard for anyone for whom these have not been lived experiences to really understand them ... but it is very important that they try. Empathy is a vital attribute when working with this group of young people.
- Allied to the above, those who see young people from refugee backgrounds as 'victims' will often feel sorry for them and want to 'make everything better'. This can lead to a paternalistic approach which both fails to recognise the young person's strengths and does not contribute to building a young person's sense of **agency**.
- Whatever sector you work in, your approach when working with young people from refugee backgrounds should be **strengths based**. The most important task for workers is to build a sense of agency and to support young people to meet their identified goals.

## Multiculturalism and Related Concepts

**Multiculturalism** is an important concept underpinning everything in this unit. Australia's approach to multicultural affairs embraces our shared values and cultural traditions and recognises that Australia's multicultural character gives us a competitive edge in an increasingly globalised world. The approach articulates the rights and responsibilities that are fundamental to living in Australia and supports the rights of all to celebrate, practise and maintain their cultural traditions within the law and free from discrimination.

This approach aims to strengthen social cohesion through promoting belonging, respecting diversity and fostering engagement with Australian values, identity and citizenship, within the framework of Australian law.

**Social Cohesion** is another important concept and loosely refers to the extent to which people living within a country feel connected to that country and to each other as part of a community with shared values, and feel able to participate and contribute as equals within that society. In Australia, social cohesion is closely linked to multiculturalism. Managing Australia's diversity effectively is one of the main challenges to building and maintaining social cohesion.

The key definition of social cohesion in Australia comes from the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* series, which includes the *Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion*.<sup>1</sup> The index measures social cohesion according to five key domains: belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance and rejection, and one's sense of their own worth. National indicators such as this index and international indicators such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's *Better Life Index*<sup>2</sup> suggest Australia has a high level of social cohesion.

A key part of Australia's Multicultural policy is **Australia's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy** seeks to ensure that Australian government programmes and services are accessible, equitable and responsive to the needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse population. In doing so, it aims to remove barriers to participation by culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, including young people.<sup>3</sup>

## Youth Work

This Guide has been developed to be consistent with good youth work practice within the context of working effectively with young people from refugee backgrounds. The accepted

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Andrew Markus: Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation survey's national report: 2012. [www.scanlonfoundation.org.au/research.html](http://www.scanlonfoundation.org.au/research.html).

<sup>2</sup> [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/australia/](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/australia/).

<sup>3</sup> Information on multicultural access and equity, why it is important, and the development of Agency Multicultural Plans for measuring the commitment and performance of departments and agencies can be found at [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/multicultural-access-and-equity-policy-toolkit](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/multicultural-access-and-equity-policy-toolkit).

definition of Youth Work in Australia, developed by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

### YOUTH WORK

Youth Work is a practice that places **young people and their interests first**.

Youth work is a **relational** practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their **context**.

Youth work is an **empowering** practice that **advocates** for and **facilitates** a young person's **independence, participation** in society, **connectedness** and realisation of their **rights**.

## Complementary Units

This unit complements two existing refugee related units:

CHCSW401A: Work Effectively with Forced Migrants

CHCSW402B: Undertake Bicultural Work with Forced Migrants in Australia.

In addition, there are many other units of competency that complement and/or support this unit. If you are interested in finding out more about what these are, ask your trainer.

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<sup>4</sup> The definition was developed, in consultation, by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

## Topic 1: Adolescence

**Topic 1** focuses on core concepts of adolescence and youth work and is intended to act as a base on which subsequent learning about young people from refugee backgrounds can be built. In Topic 1 you will learn about:

- adolescence;
- how to support adolescents;
- human rights;
- youth work principles;
- codes of conduct;
- working with children checks.

### Adolescence

Adolescence is a critical phase of emotional, social and physical growth and development. Emotional, social and physical growth and development, including brain development during which young people are also negotiating difficult social and cultural transitions as they move from childhood into adulthood. Opinions about the duration of adolescence vary. Some talk about it as being the period from 12 to 20 years of age. Others take it up to 25. In reality, it is hard to generalise about an exact beginning and end point because it is different for each individual.

Adolescence is a period of time that is characterised by significant change in a number of areas:

#### Physical Development

Young person grows and develops adult physical characteristics

#### Social Development

increasing reliance on support and guidance from peers and beginning to seek out intimate relationships

#### Emotional Development

Experiencing new and sometimes volatile emotions. Over time, the capacity to manage emotions strengthens. Also shift from being self-centred to being more empathic and conscious of others' perspectives

#### Cognitive Development

Ability to apply complex abstract thinking e.g. planning, prioritising, organising thoughts, suppressing impulses and problem solving

#### Psychological Development

Emergence of autonomy and an independent sense of identity

Adolescence can also be the time during which the first manifestations of mental health problems occur. This occurs in about 20% of adolescents and can have significant impact on the development of a young person if left untreated.

Getting the right help at the right time can help young people achieve and stay connected, engaged and participating in their communities. It is important that supports are available and accessible for all young people.

Young people and the issues they experience cannot be considered in a vacuum. It is important to view the development of issues along the life course to take into account what precedes adolescence in early childhood and what longer term issues may emerge in adulthood. This last point is of particular relevance for young people from refugee backgrounds as their earlier experiences, or those of their parents and care-givers, can add layers of complexity and challenge to this time of transition.

## **Cultural and Temporal Dimensions**

It is important to recognise that attitudes to adolescence have changed over time and are different across different cultural groups.

The developmental stage of adolescence is often criticised as being a Western construct, with little relevance or application to non-Western cultures. What we can say is that all human beings transition from children to adults through a significant developmental stage regardless of cultural context, however, the concept of and tasks associated with it, vary across cultures, influenced by culture, ethnicity, religion, etc.

In contemporary Australian society, adolescents are typically given a great deal of freedom. Many are supported while they continue their studies, thereby delaying the need to become financially self-sufficient. These young people can be quite mobile and have many choices when it comes to how they use their time and with whom they associate.

Contemporary Australian society is not, however, homogeneous. There are many variations to the way adolescents are perceived and/or treated, with subgroups, such as overseas-born communities and those with strong faith connections who think of the time between the ages of 12 and 25 in very different ways.

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, including those from refugee backgrounds, also face additional challenges when it comes to defining their identity. Are they part of the culture from which they come or do they take on the dominant culture? Or is there a middle ground? Many young people describe this as 'juggling' multiple cultures – i.e. negotiating complex notions of identity influenced by culture, religion, ethnicity, migration experience, etc, alongside navigating family and cultural expectations.

As will be explored in Topic 3, the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds mean that they are not 'typical' adolescents but this does not mean that they are immune from all of the transitions of adolescence; or from the family and cultural expectations to which they are exposed. One of the challenges confronting those working with these

young people is to unpack their responses and behaviour to try to understand whether these are derived from the fact that they are an adolescent or linked to the trauma they have experienced in the past/associated with the challenges they are facing adapting to life in Australia.

## Supporting Adolescents

As discussed, adolescence is all about change. The passage from childhood to adulthood will take a young person on a journey during which they will undergo major physical, cognitive, social and moral changes. Each person's journey will be different. Different things will occur at different times and affect young people in different ways. Some will thrive; others will struggle to come to terms with the changes.

In the lives of young people there will be times when their vulnerabilities are magnified. These often occur at times when the world around them is changing. For some this might occur at the point when they make the transition from one school to another or from school to university (or college or the workforce). For others it might be when they enter into (or break up from) their first serious relationship; or when there are changes at home (such as separation or remarriage of parents/carers or the arrival of a new sibling); or when other things in their world change around them.

The transition to adulthood involves the evolution of the young person's sense of:

**Belonging:** building a connection to one's history and establishing meaningful relationships

**Mastery:** finding out what they are good at and having these skills acknowledged

**Responsibility:** being able to make good decisions and recognising the responsibilities that comes with being a decision-maker

**Altruism:** being mindful of the needs of others as well as one's own.



Much has been written about supporting adolescents through the natural transitions of adolescence and through the points at which major changes occur in their life during this period (see references). In this context it is not possible to go into this in detail but it is worth emphasising some key strategies:

- **Communicate:** when working with a young person it is very important to connect with them regularly. Building up a habit of 'touching base' will make it easier to connect at times of vulnerability without it being unnaturally intrusive.

- **Facilitate planning:** know when young people are likely to be more vulnerable and actively engage with them about it. If, for instance, a significant change in their life is occurring, talk to them about it, ask them how they are feeling, acknowledge their unease and work with them to develop plans and strategies for managing the change. The young people should be active participants in the planning process, not passive recipients of advice.
- **Build on strengths:** when supporting young people, focus on their strengths and encourage them to think about how these can be best employed to help them deal with the changes in their lives. **Self-determination** and **resilience** should be your goals.
- **Provide support:** be there for the young person. Be prepared to listen attentively and provide reassurance, or to help them reformulate their plan when things are not going as they had hoped.
- **Don't judge:** it is inappropriate to make judgements about the young person's choices; after all, making mistakes is part of the learning process. The young person needs to feel comfortable about coming to you when they realise they have made a mistake and know that you will not make them feel embarrassed or be judgemental. Your role is to support them and let them know you will be there for them.
- **Complement:** you are not the only person in the young person's life. What ever you say and do with the young person must factor in the relationships the young person has with others, be they parents/carers, other family members, teachers, other support workers etc. Don't work in isolation. Ensure that what you are saying/doing is complementary and not cutting across what others are trying to do.
- **Be clear about your role and know your limits:** if you are working with a young person and you either feel you do not have the necessary skills to assist them, or you are not connecting with them as you feel you need to in order to be able to assist, don't let it lie. Find someone who does have the right skill set and facilitate the connection.

## Human Rights

Human rights are the foundation for good youth work practice. It is important that those working with young people from refugee backgrounds know what human rights are, clearly understand the role they can play in protecting people and how they can be used to provide guidance to workers.

Out of the horrors of the Second World War grew a commitment by governments around the world to find to try to forge new ways of collaborating and develop agreements that would clearly articulate the rights of individuals and the obligations of States. The United Nations was established in 1945 to maintain world peace and security and to promote economic, social and cultural cooperation among nations. Very early in its life, the

members of the United Nations General Assembly agreed to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**<sup>5</sup> (UDHR), the instrument that underpins human rights law.

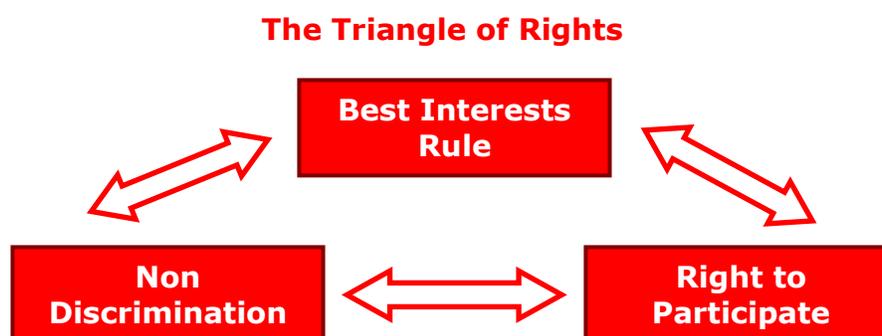
Following the adoption of the UDHR in 1948, its core principles were incorporated into two treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Following this, a number of thematic human rights treaties were drafted addressing issues such as racial discrimination, torture, women, children and disabilities. These treaties and the other human rights treaties contain principles derived from robust debate (often lasting many years) that were determined to be fundamental and inalienable (unchallengeable) and which are considered to be universal (applicable everywhere) and egalitarian (applicable to everyone).

International treaties set out obligations on States as to how they should treat people within their country, irrespective of whether they are citizens of that country. It is fair to say that many of these treaties make little explicit reference to children and young people. This does not, however, mean that they are not applicable to young people; it's just that they cover ALL people, irrespective of age. The one treaty explicitly written with children and young people in mind is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>6</sup>

While the CRC covers almost every aspect of the life of a person under the age of 18, there are three rights that are considered to be so fundamental that they are often said to underlie the entire CRC. These are often referred to as the '**triangle of rights**' because they reinforce each other to reach the overarching objective: 'the survival and development' of children and young people:



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<sup>5</sup> The full text of UDHR is at [www.unhchr.org/udhr](http://www.unhchr.org/udhr) .

<sup>6</sup> For the full text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and for further information about Human Rights go to the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

The **Best Interests Rule** has two main applications:

- in **government policy making**: Article 3 obliges States to analyse how each course of action might affect children;
- in **decisions made about children on an individual basis**: in such cases the child's best interests must be, at a minimum, 'a primary consideration'.

**Non-discrimination**: every child (irrespective of their immigration status, ethnicity or other defining characteristic) is entitled to enjoy the same rights.

The **Right to Participate** is a theme that runs through much of the CRC and includes, amongst other things: the right to hold and express opinions and have these opinions taken into account; the right to participate in family life; and the right to participate in the life of the community.

## Youth Work Principles

While there are some commonalities across all areas of people-centred work, it is important to recognise that youth work is a recognised discipline with its own technical language, practice principles and approaches.

At the core of youth work is the nature of the relationship between the worker and the young person. A widely accepted definition of youth work is that presented in the 'About the Topic Notes' section, i.e. that of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition. As previously mentioned, AYAC defines youth work as a relational practice which:

- places young people and their interests first;
- operates alongside the young person understanding that young people are social beings whose lives are shaped by the social context in which they are living;
- works with young people holistically, separating problems from the person and not viewing young people merely through diagnosis, pathology and labels.<sup>7</sup>

When working with young people, it is necessary to approach this work using a 'youth lens' and ask a number of key questions about the program or intervention:

**Does it serve the best interests of the young person?**

**Does it address their immediate needs?**

**Does it reflect their current circumstances?**

**Is it culturally and religiously appropriate?**



**Is it consistent with their age, gender, sexual orientation and developmental stage?**

**Does it respect their rights?**

**Is it consistent with the Code of Ethical Practice for youth work in the state or territory that you are working within?**

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<sup>7</sup> [www.ayac.org.au/uploads/131219%20Youth%20Work%20Definition%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.ayac.org.au/uploads/131219%20Youth%20Work%20Definition%20FINAL.pdf)

Underpinning these questions is a range of principles that underpin effective youth work. Those contained within the Victorian Code for Ethical Practice are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

### **Youth Work Principles**

Youth workers will work towards enabling and ensuring:

1. The empowerment of all young people
2. Young people's participation
3. Social justice for young people
4. The safety of young people
5. Respect for young people's human dignity and worth
6. Young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community
7. Positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people
8. The positive transitions and healthy development of young people.

In addition to these principles of youth work, the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice advocates a view that to work ethically with young people, youth workers will adopt the following practice responsibilities:<sup>9</sup>

#### **Recognition of Indigenous Peoples**

Youth workers recognise that we live on the traditional lands and waters of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. They will be respectful of Indigenous culture recognising that culture and connection to land is a right of Indigenous young people. Youth workers will recognise the importance of culture to Indigenous young people's self-esteem and sense of identity.

#### **Young People as the Primary Consideration**

The primary consideration and key responsibility of the youth worker is the young people with whom they engage

#### **Duty of Care**

Youth Workers will act in the best interests of young people, avoid exposing them to physical, psychological or emotional harm or injury, and always uphold the principle of 'do no harm'.

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<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed later, there is, as yet, no national code of practice for youth work. The following is derived from the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice which is well regarded, not least because it is based on human rights principles and reflects the obligations contained within the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>9</sup> From the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice: [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au).

### **Transparency, Honesty and Integrity**

Youth workers will be open and honest with young people, enabling them to access information to make choices and decisions in their lives and in relation to their participation in youth work activities. Youth workers will act with integrity, adhering to the principles and practice responsibilities of their profession.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Youth workers respect young people's rights to privacy and confidentiality.

### **Boundaries**

The youth work relationship is strictly professional. Professional boundaries intentionally protect both the young person and the worker. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits.

### **Social Context**

Youth workers will recognise the impact of social and structural forces on young people, so that their practice is responsive to young people's experiences and needs and to break down barriers that restrict young people's life opportunities.

### **Anti-Opressive Practice: Non-Discrimination, Equity and Self-Awareness**

Youth workers will ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted and will enable and encourage young people to respect and celebrate their own and others' cultural backgrounds, identities and choices.

### **Cooperation and Collaboration**

Youth workers will cooperate and collaborate with others, including families, in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.

### **Knowledge, Skills and Self-Care**

Youth workers will keep abreast of the information, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.

Each of these Youth Work Principles will be addressed in the context of working with young people from refugee backgrounds throughout the rest of this unit.

## Codes of Conduct

The profession you are in or want to enter will, in all likelihood, have its own code of conduct.

Codes of conduct perform two equally important functions:

- They protect clients (or students or patients) by setting out standards for those working with them.
- They protect workers by providing a clear set of standards to which they know they must adhere in their work.

The following are likely to be relevant codes of conduct:

### Youth Work:

There is currently no national code of ethics for youth work in Australia. Use a search engine such as Google to find the applicable standard for your state or territory.

### Community Work

The Code of Ethics developed by the Australian Community Workers Association is at [www.acwa.org.au/about/code-of-ethics](http://www.acwa.org.au/about/code-of-ethics).

### Social Work

The Australian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics can be found at [www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/740](http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/740)

### Mental Health Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers has also developed a separate code for social workers in the mental health field: [www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/17](http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/17)

### Nursing

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's code of professional conduct for nurses in Australia is at [www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx](http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx).

### Teaching

Each state and territory has their own code. For example, for that for Victoria go to [www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au) and for South Australia go to [www.trb.sa.edu.au](http://www.trb.sa.edu.au). Use a search engine such as Google to find the applicable standard for your state or territory.

## Working with Children Checks

It is relevant to note that it is **mandatory** in most states and territories of Australia that any adult whose work involves them having contact with children undergo some form of working with children check to establish that they are not known to pose a risk to children.

There is no single national framework setting out the requirements for obtaining Working with Children Checks or Police Checks. Each state and territory has their own procedures and it is necessary to fulfil the requirements in the jurisdiction(s) in which you are working.

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs13/rs13.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs13/rs13.html) provides information about working with children checks and outlines procedures for each state and territory.

## References

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. *Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector*. [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. (drafted by T Corney and L Hoiles). *Victorian Youth Sector Code of Ethical Practice*. 2007. [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

Michael Carr Gregg. Various articles and publications: [www.michaelcarr-gregg.com.au](http://www.michaelcarr-gregg.com.au).

James Dobson. *Bringing Up Boys*. Tyndale 2001.

James Dobson. *Bringing Up Girls*. Tyndale. 2005.

## Self-Directed Activities

1. If you come from another country or are from a CALD community, think about how the concept of 'adolescence' is viewed in your culture. If you are not sure, ask someone who you think might know. If you were raised within the mainstream Australian culture, ask someone you know from a CALD community to describe how the transition to adulthood is viewed in their culture.
2. If you did not do so in class, read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Explore the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org), looking in particular at the material on 'What are Human Rights'.
4. Download the Code of Conduct for the sector in which you are working or plan to work. Think carefully about what it requires of you and how you can ensure you comply.
5. Find out about the requirements for a Working with Children Check or police check in your state or territory.

## Topic 2: The Refugee Experience

**Topic 2** focuses on the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds **BEFORE** they come to Australia. In Topic 2 you will learn about:

- the definition of a refugee;
- the international protection regime;
- common experiences of young refugees;
- the rights of young refugees;
- the impact of the refugee experience on young people;
- how to source information.

### Refugees

The term 'refugee' is defined in the **1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** (the **Refugee Convention**) which is the key international treaty on refugees. The same definition is used in Australian law (in the 1958 Migration Act).

**By definition, refugees MUST:**

- **be outside their country of nationality;**
- **have a well-founded fear of persecution;**
- **be targeted for persecution because of one or more of the following; their:**
  - **race**
  - **religion**
  - **nationality**
  - **political opinion, and/or**
  - **membership of a social group;**
- **be unwilling or unable to receive effective protection from the government of their country of nationality or habitual residence.**

Most refugees flee first to a country neighbouring their own. Some will go to a refugee camp whereas the majority will gravitate to urban centres where they will try to eke out a living, often in precarious circumstances without any rights or protections in that country.

The majority of refugees will remain in the country of first asylum until they are able to return to their country of nationality. For the lucky ones, this might be within a few months. For most it will be years or even decades after their initial flight.

A minority of refugees will leave their own region. There are two ways this happens:

- through an organised resettlement program;
- by travelling to another (usually western) country to seek asylum.

As will be explained in Topic 3, refugees come to Australia through both these routes.

Before moving on, it is important to emphasise that there are many significant differences between refugees and migrants. These are summarised in the following table:

Migrants	Refugees
Have chosen to leave	Are not able to remain
Can sell assets and pack belongings	Often have to leave in a hurry and cannot take assets or belongings
Can learn what they need to know about their new country	Often do not know where they are going or will end up so they cannot prepare themselves
Can say goodbye to family and friends	Sometimes have to leave in secret and cannot say farewell
Can choose how and when they leave	Do not know their final destination
Choose their destination based on employment prospects or the presence of family	Cannot return to their former country if things do not go well
Can return for visits	

## The International Protection Regime

As previously mentioned, there is an international treaty specifically dealing with refugees: the **1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** (sometimes called the **Refugee Convention**). To update the Convention, a protocol (the **1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees**) was drafted and adopted. There is general agreement that *both* treaties are central to the international refugee protection regime.

In addition to defining the term 'refugee', the Convention and Protocol set minimum standards for the treatment of refugees and defines States' obligations towards refugees. The office of the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** (UNHCR) is the agency with the prime responsibility for the protection and welfare of refugees. As its name suggests, it falls within the United Nations system and receives its mandate from the United Nations General Assembly. UNHCR's headquarters are in Geneva and it has over 4,000 staff in 120 countries.

Go to [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org) to learn more about UNHCR and to see the texts of the Refugee Convention and Protocol. As will be discussed later, the UNHCR website is a valuable source of accurate information about refugees and their experiences in various parts of the world.

## Young Refugees

Typically, about 50% of the approximately 45.2 million refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR<sup>10</sup> are under the age of 18. Many more are young adults, under the age of 25.

The reasons for their vulnerability and flight vary:

- In some cases they are members of a family group in which one or both of their parents is the target of persecution. There are many possible scenarios here but it could be that their parent is involved in political activity of some kind.
- Sometimes they share the same characteristics as others targeted for persecution. This might be because of their religion, ethnicity or some other defining characteristic.
- There are also circumstances in which young people are specifically targeted for persecution. Here too the reasons vary from place to place but might include instances where young people are at risk of being:
  - conscripted as child soldiers;
  - forced to work as porters or in other ways to support combatants;
  - captured and held to ransom;
  - forced into slavery or some other form of abusive work-conditions;
  - subjected to traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation;
  - forced into prostitution and/or otherwise subjected to gender-based violence;
  - forced into under-age marriages; and/or
  - abused in other ways contrary to their rights (see later).

Young refugees either flee with their family, alone or with other groups of young people. There are many, often complex, reasons why young refugees are not with their families. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Their parents might be dead, having died in their country of nationality or en route to a safe country.
- They might have become separated from their parents during a time of conflict or during their escape and don't know whether they are alive.
- Their parents might have sent them out of the country or ahead in the journey in order to protect or save them from danger.

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<sup>10</sup> Figure at the end of 2012. This includes 15.4 million refugees, 937,000 asylum seekers and 28.8 million people forced to flee but still within the borders of their own country.

Fleeing from persecution is difficult and dangerous for all refugees. In many instances, refugees are forced to rely on smugglers to get them to a place of (often only relative) safety. Irrespective of whether they are fleeing with their family or alone, young people are particularly vulnerable during their escape for many reasons, not least their:

- lack of understanding of the circumstances in which they find themselves;
- lack of experience in identifying and/or dealing with dangerous situations;
- vulnerability to exploitation and abuse;
- physical weakness: especially those who are younger, less fit and/or lacking in skills (eg the ability to swim);
- gender: young girls, in particular, are very vulnerable to sexual violence.

## Young Refugees Have Rights

In addition to the rights enshrined in relevant human rights treaties, including those in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, young refugees have rights linked to their status as refugees. These are set out in the previously mentioned **1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** (the **Refugee Convention**) and its **1967 Protocol**.

The core right afforded to refugees is that of **non-refoulement**. The principle of *non-refoulement* is thus the right not to be sent back against your will to a country in which you would face persecution. All States are obliged to comply with this, irrespective of whether they are signatories to the Refugee Convention or not. Sadly, however, many States ignore this obligation and, all around the world, there are cases where those facing persecution are either turned back at borders or forced out.

The Refugee Convention also sets out a range of other rights for refugees – or to flip this concept around - a range of obligations that countries have towards refugees resident in their territory. These rights include (but are not limited to) rights to:

- education;
- health care;
- welfare support; and
- freedom of movement.

## Impact of the Refugee Experience on Young People

Every refugee has his/her own story to tell and, by extension, will have individual and specific needs resulting from the things they experienced and the way these affected them. This being said, it is possible to identify a number of characteristics of the refugee experience that commonly have an impact on the lives of young people and which can separately or collectively leave the young person traumatised:

- **Persecution:** persecution is the common element of all refugee experiences as it is central to defining a person as a refugee. Persecution can take many forms. At its most extreme, it involves severe violence and even torture. At lesser levels, it can mean

exclusion, discrimination and/or fear. What it almost always brings about is a realisation that there is something about 'you' that is not acceptable to 'others'.

- **Exposure to violence:** many young refugees are exposed to violence in their country of origin, during their initial flight, in the country of first asylum and/or when seeking protection further afield. In the case of girls or young women (and even sometimes for young men), this might include sexual violence. Often the perpetrators are police or member of the military. This can have a profound impact on a young person's attitudes to the police, military or anyone in uniforms. It also clouds attitudes to anyone associated with 'the government'.



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- **Watching family members or significant others attacked/abused/debased:** many young refugees see their parents or other people to whom they are close being attacked. Others watch on as their parents are forced to submit or are publicly humiliated, or experience their parents' fear and indecision in the face of unfolding events. They see their parents both being helpless and feeling helpless which can, in turn affect the young person's sense of safety and how they view their parents.
- **Breakdown of social mores:** allied to the above is the fact that some young refugees grow up in an environment where the ethical and moral standards that applied in their home culture have been eroded by scarcity, competition and lack of agency. This can lead to young refugees being unclear about constructive ways of relating to others and achieving their goals.
- **Loss:** loss is a big part of every refugee's story - loss of home, loss of country, loss of family and friends, loss of culture, loss of future, loss of identity. Many young refugees have also lost the experience of a carefree childhood.
- **Grief:** grief is a profound and invasive sadness about everyone and everything that has been lost or for all that will never be. This is an emotion that some people carry with them for long periods and which, if not resolved, can affect their relationships and the way they engage with the world.

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<sup>11</sup> Drawings by young refugees from Southern Africa from *Through the Eyes of a Child*. Joan Allison. UNHCR. 2007

- **Guilt:** guilt is part of the grieving process. Young refugees might feel guilty that they are alive and others are not; or because they have had to do things to stay alive that they consider shameful. This too can affect future relationships and undermine a person's sense of self-worth.
- **Trust:** with everything that has happened in their short lives, young refugees often find it hard to know who to trust. Sometimes they put their trust in the hands of people unworthy of it. Sometimes they don't trust the people who have the capacity to help them.
- **Lack of security or safety:** whereas many adult refugees will have known a time prior to conflict or persecution, young refugees have often not known what it is like to live in an environment of safety, predictability or security. Their life experiences are often of fear, deprivation and uncertainty.
- **Protracted periods in limbo:** most refugees flee from their country to a country of first or second asylum and then begin a period of waiting for a chance to go home or for selection for resettlement or for some other development. This is a time of limbo. It is impossible to plan and it is dangerous to dream about your future because you have so little control over what might happen. Young people might never have had the opportunity to develop skills in planning/decision making or to have aspirations.
- **Exclusion from rights of passage:** in many cultures there are formal ceremonies or acts that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. In the chaos of exile, these rights of passage and the acceptance derived from them are often absent, particularly for young refugees without family. This has an impact on how the young people see themselves and how they are viewed by others within their community.
- **Lack of formal education:** while the situation varies from country to country, many young refugees will have had disrupted education (at best) and no formal education (at worst). The lack of 'school learning' does not mean, however, that they have not acquired many (survival) skills along the way but these skills do not necessarily make up for the lost formal education when they have an opportunity to seek employment either when they return to their home country or find a permanent solution elsewhere.
- **Impaired literacy:** linked to the above, many young refugees will speak several languages but might not necessarily be functionally literate in any. This too has an impact on their longer term prospects.
- **Poor health care:** few young refugees have had access to quality health care at any stage during their lives. Many will have missed key immunisations and common childhood ailments will have gone untreated, often resulting in ongoing health issues.
- **Injury:** the world from which young refugees come is frequently a dangerous one. Some are injured, either because they have participated in protests or armed conflict or because they happened to have been in the wrong place at the wrong time and became that which is euphemistically called 'collateral damage'. Further, the journey to asylum is frequently dangerous, involving long treks through arid terrain or across mountain ranges or crossing rivers or oceans. Each stage of the journey presents risks and can leave lasting injuries.

- **Taking on high levels of responsibility:** even when they are part of a family group, it is typical for young refugees to assume levels of responsibility (for parents, siblings and others) way beyond their years. When a young refugee is orphaned (as was Bayisa) or separated from his/her parents, the level of responsibility is even greater. They are required to fend for themselves (and sometimes others) in an alien setting.

There are a variety of ways in which the above experiences might influence the lives of young refugees including but not limited to the following:

**Ethnic and/or religious identity:**

often the cause of persecution a person or community experienced was their ethnicity or religion. Sometimes this strengthens a young person's connection to this identity; in other cases it can erode their ability to connect to and derive strength from the things which typically shape one's identity.

**Age:** the 'age' of the young person does not necessarily correlate to their chronological age.



**Brain development:** a positive environment with good nutrition, good health and a nourishing and stimulating environment is required for optimal cognitive-social-emotional development. Most young refugees lack this.

**Learned behaviour patterns:** survival strategies such as withholding information that helped them in the past are not easily discarded. Other survival strategies such as resourcefulness, flexibility and persistence can be much more beneficial if channelled wisely.

**Resilience:** as adolescence is a time during which self-image is moulded, it would be easy to conclude from the above that young refugees might define themselves as victims and lack a sense of agency. Young refugees are frequently extremely resilient and very optimistic about the future. This sense of optimism should be encouraged by those who work with these young people, while also ensuring that the appropriate supports are provided to assist in achieving their goals and navigating any of the challenges that may arise throughout their adolescence.

## References

*Framework for the Protection of Children.* UNHCR. 2012. [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

*UNHCR's Engagement with Displaced Youth – a Global Overview.* UNHCR. 2013. [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

*Refugee Children: Guidelines for Protection and Care.* UNHCR. 1994. [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

*Refugee Realities.* Project undertaken by Oxfam Australia in 2010 and captured on a series of You Tube videos: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC380A9A22E2AB271](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC380A9A22E2AB271)

J Menadue, A Keski-Nummi and K Gauthier. *Refugee Facts.* [www.refugeefacts.cpd.org.au](http://www.refugeefacts.cpd.org.au)

*Taking Action - Human Rights and Refugee Issues Teaching Resource.* Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Trauma. 2005  
[www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications\\_and\\_resources.htm](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications_and_resources.htm)

*Understanding the Effects of Malnutrition on Brain Development.* Child Welfare Information

### Useful websites:

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)
- Human Rights Watch: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)
- Amnesty International: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)
- US Committee for Refugees: [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)
- Australian Human Rights Commission: [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)
- Australian Human Rights Information Centre: [www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/ahric](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/ahric)

## Self-Directed Activities

1. If you have not already done so, explore the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)). Look in particular for information about refugee children and youth and for details of current refugee situations.
2. In addition to International Human Rights Law, there is another area of international law that has relevance to refugees. This is International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Do some research to find out about IHL. How is it relevant for refugees?

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3. Reflect on what you have learnt about the impact of the refugee experience on young people. What are three key lessons you have learnt?

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4. How do you think their experiences of having been a refugee will influence the life of young people in Australia?

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5. Various novels and autobiographies have been written about the lives and/or journeys of young refugees and those caught up in conflict. These include:

- Dave Eggers: *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*. 2006
- Anh Do: *The Happiest Refugee: A Memoir*. 2010
- Khaled Hosseini: *The Kite Runner*. 2003
- Khaled Hosseini: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. 2007
- Alwyn Evans: *Walk in My Shoes*. 2004 \*
- Zlata Filipovic: *Zlata's Diary*. 1993 \*
- Joseph Vondra: *No-Name Bird*. 2000 \*
- Suzanne Fisher-Staples: *Under the Persimmon Tree*. 2005
- China Keitetsi: *Child Soldier*. 2004
- Zoya Phan and Damien Lewis: *Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West*. 2009.
- Shelley Davidow: *The Red Shadow*. 1998

- Morris Gleitzman: *Boy Overboard*. 2002 \*
- Elizabeth Laird: *Kiss the Dust*. 1991
- Deborah Ellis: *Children of War: Iraqi Refugees Speak*. 2009

Read one or more of these books to give you insights into the world of young people affected by war and displacement.

Those marked with an asterisk were written for children or young adults and thus are easy to read but no less insightful.

6. During the remainder of the time you are participating in this course, make a scrap-book of stories in the press about refugees (especially young refugees). As you are doing this, reflect on how the portrayals reflect or contrast with public perceptions. And think too about whether there are differences in the way refugee children and youth are portrayed in comparison to how adult refugees or refugees in general are portrayed.

## Topic 3: Entry Pathways

**Topic 3** focuses on the way young people from refugee backgrounds come to Australia. In Topic 3 you will learn about:

- entry pathways and visa subclasses
- size and composition of the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program;
- cultural orientation;
- family reunification;
- the importance of keeping up to date.

### How do Young Refugees Come to Australia?

Broadly speaking, young people from refugee backgrounds have entered Australia:

- either as part of the offshore or onshore humanitarian program;
- either with their parent(s) (or other relative) or alone.

#### Offshore and Onshore Entrants

In this context, **offshore entrants** are people who have been granted a permanent humanitarian visa while they are still outside the country, often through the resettlement program of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Offering resettlement places to refugees identified as being particularly vulnerable is an important contribution Australia makes to assisting UNHCR's work.

**Onshore entrants** are people who have come to Australia, either by plane or boat, and after arrival apply for a protection visa. They will then go through a complex assessment process to determine whether they are a refugee or someone to whom Australia owes protection on other grounds. If this is the case and they pass the character test (see below), they are allowed to remain in Australia. If they do not have protection needs, they are required to return to their country of nationality or previous residence.

Prior to being granted a visa, both offshore and onshore entrants are required to satisfy certain health requirements and are assessed to determine whether they pose a character or security threat to Australia.

The migration program for both groups is called the **Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program**. There are various visa subclasses within this program, each granted for particular reasons to particular groups of people. The visa subclass a person holds can provide useful information about their background and circumstances.

Visa Subclass #	Visa Name
200	Refugee
201	In Country Special Humanitarian
202	Special Humanitarian Program
203  <sup>12</sup>	Emergency Rescue
204 	Women at Risk
866	Permanent Protection (onshore)
785	Temporary Protection - TPV (onshore)
790	Safe Have Enterprise – SHEV (onshore)
449 and 786	Humanitarian Stay (temporary) and Temporary Humanitarian Concern (THC)
<p>A full explanation of eligibility requirements for each of these visa subclasses can be found on the DHA website at <a href="http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au">www.homeaffairs.gov.au</a>.</p>	

Each year the Minister for Home Affairs determines the composition and size of the annual Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program after consulting with relevant government, UN and community-based agencies.

In the offshore resettlement program, it is a requirement that those being resettled have no viable options other than resettlement. Within this group, priority is given to refugees for whom UNHCR has determined a resettlement need, in particular those who:

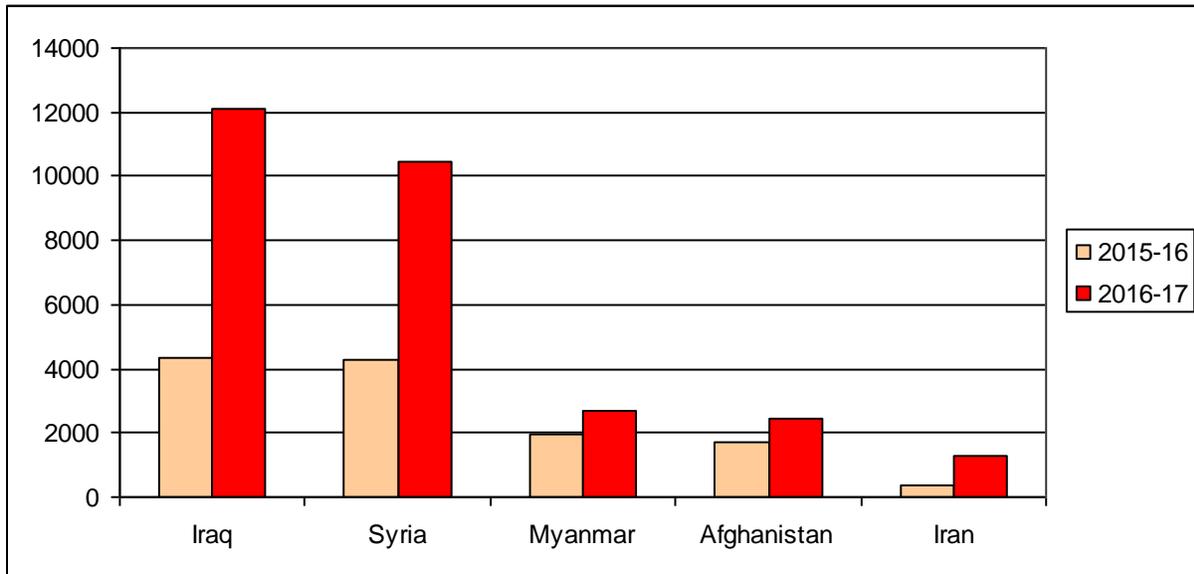
- are in especially vulnerable situations in their current location;
- are part of a community or group that is facing forced return or experiencing severe abuse of their rights.

The top 5 countries of origin of those granted offshore visas in 2015-16 and 2016-17 are shown below. Updated information about the program composition and details of current visa subclasses can be found on the website of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA):<sup>13</sup> [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media).

<sup>12</sup>  The red flag signals visa subclasses where it can be presumed that holders will have experienced high levels of trauma and will have complex settlement needs.

<sup>13</sup> Before December 2017 DHA was known as the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and before that, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

**2015-16 and 2016-17 Offshore Humanitarian Visa Grants  
Top 5 Countries**



The following table shows the shifts in both the size and internal composition of the humanitarian program.

<b>Humanitarian Program Grants by Category: 2011-12 to 2016-17</b>						
<b>Category</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Refugee	5,992	12,012	6,501	6,002	6,730	6,642
Special Humanitarian	714	503	4,515	5,007	5,032	5,407
Onshore Protection	7,038	7,504	2,750	2,747	2,003	1,711
Other <sup>14</sup>	9	-	2	-	-	-
Special allocation <sup>15</sup>					3,790	8,208
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,744</b>	<b>20,019</b>	<b>13,768</b>	<b>13,756</b>	<b>17,555</b>	<b>21,968</b>

<sup>14</sup> This includes visas granted for a range of reasons such as for medical treatment or to enable resolution of status.

<sup>15</sup> The additional commitment of 12,000 places refugees from Syria and Iraq was delivered over 2 program years.

## Accompanied and Unaccompanied Youth Arrivals

There are significant differences in the profile of the offshore and onshore programs when it comes to young people.

In relation to the **offshore program**:

- the majority of young entrants, especially those under 18 years of age, arrive in Australia as part of a family group;
- it is usual that approximately 50% of the offshore arrivals are under 18 years old;
- those arriving alone are typically in the 18 to 25 age group as for many years, Australia has had a policy of not resettling unaccompanied minors unless they are being reunited with family members. At the time of writing, this policy is under review;
- some entrants in the 18 to 25 age group are themselves married, sometimes with children of their own;
- some young people enter Australia with a visa subclass 204 (Women at Risk) which typically signifies a very vulnerable case. In some instances they are the children of a woman granted this visa. Some young women are the primary recipients of this visa. In either case, a young person holding a visa subclass 204 should be flagged as someone with potentially complex needs.

When it comes to the **onshore program**:

- in recent years there has been a significant increase in onshore visa grants to unaccompanied minors (i.e. those under the age of 18 travelling alone or with a sibling under the age of 21);<sup>16</sup>
- young men aged 18 to 25 travelling alone or in groups of friends are also well represented amongst those to whom onshore visas have been granted.

In both the offshore and onshore programs, age is often a complex issue. There are a range of reasons for incorrect age or a lack of clarity regarding age. Some asylum seekers indicate that they are younger or older than their actual age believing that this might benefit them in some way. Other asylum seekers genuinely don't know their age as it is not something of significance in the culture from which they came. When the age of a person is not known, the Department of Home Affairs assigns a date of birth (namely 31<sup>st</sup> December in the year that would make them their claimed age). This can further contribute to complexity around age. The important lesson for workers is that they have

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that according to the policy at the time of writing, asylum seekers who arrived by boat after 19<sup>th</sup> July 2013 are subject to a policy that involves their being sent to Papua New Guinea or Nauru and not settled in Australia if they are determined to be refugees.

to be very careful about making judgements about age and about applying 'age' in any social context.

## Family Reunification

A typical part of the refugee experience is that family members become separated from each other. Sometimes this occurs accidentally, such as in the chaos of flight; sometimes family members set off or are sent alone because they are in particular danger and/or they want to find ways to help or protect the rest of the family. Whatever the cause of the separation, it is very painful and stressful for those involved.

The intersection between family reunification and the humanitarian program has traditionally been a complex and much debated area of policy in Australia. At the time of writing, the opportunities for refugees who came by boat to reunite with their immediate family members are minimal.

## Keeping Up to Date

The one thing that is certain about Australia's humanitarian program is that it is always changing. In the 1980s, the main entrant groups were from Indochina and Latin America. In the 1990s, large numbers of people from the Former Yugoslavia came to Australia. The early years of the 2000s were dominated by Africans and more recently, the program has included more refugees from SE and South Asia, as well as many from the Middle East. This reflects national and regional conflicts and political unrest that have led to increasing numbers of people within these regions fleeing their countries.

Each new entrant group is different and it is important to find out as much as you can about the background and characteristics of each new group before you begin working with them. How to do this will be covered in Topic 7. It is also necessary to stay up to date with trends and policy. The best places to do this are on the websites of the Department of Home Affairs ([www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)) and the Refugee Council of Australia ([www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)).

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*Australia's Humanitarian Program: 2013-14 and beyond*. DIAC (now DHA). December 2012. [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/humanitarian-program-information-paper-2013-14.pdf](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/humanitarian-program-information-paper-2013-14.pdf)

*Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community views on current challenges and future directions*. Refugee Council of Australia. Produced annually. [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

*Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Program Handbook*. DIAC (now DHA). [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/pdf/ausco\\_adult\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/pdf/ausco_adult_handbook.pdf)<sup>17</sup>

*One Step at a Time*. (then) DIAC and Inception Strategies. AUSCO student resource for young people. <http://www.inceptionstrategies.com/os.htm>

J Menadue, A Keski-Nummi and K Gauthier. *Refugee Facts*. [www.refugeefacts.cpd.org.au](http://www.refugeefacts.cpd.org.au)

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*Australian Research Group. Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals*. 2011. Available on the DSS website: [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/settlement-outcomes-of-new-arrivals](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/settlement-outcomes-of-new-arrivals).

Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers. August 2012. [www.expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/report](http://www.expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/report)

Making Multicultural Australia. [www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au)

*Immigration Timeline*. Melbourne Immigration Museum. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/websites-mini/immigration-timeline/>

The Migration Museum. [www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/about.htm](http://www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/about.htm)

*Does Age Really Matter?* Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2007. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

## **Websites:**

UNHCR: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

DHA: [www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)

DSS: [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)

BBC World: [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)

Human Rights Watch: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

Amnesty International: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

US Committee for Refugees: [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

Refugee Council of Australia: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

## **DSS Community Profiles:**

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<sup>17</sup> It is probable that this resource will be moved onto the DSS website but this had not occurred at the time of writing. If the link does not work, check the DSS website.

DSS makes available Community Profiles to assist service providers to gain a better understanding of the backgrounds and needs of Humanitarian Program arrivals. The Profiles contain information on key settlement locations, demographic characteristics of recent arrivals, likely settlement needs and cultural and country backgrounds. Go to [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/community-profiles](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/community-profiles).

**YouTube:**

DHA and DSS have their own channels on the popular video sharing website YouTube which feature stories and reports about various aspects of the immigration story. Go to [www.youtube.com/ImmiTV](http://www.youtube.com/ImmiTV) and [www.youtube.com/user/fahcsia](http://www.youtube.com/user/fahcsia).

## Self-Directed Activities

1. Go to the DHA website. Locate and bookmark the section of the site where you can find updated statistics about the humanitarian program.
2. Download and read at least three of the DHA Community Profiles. Select countries you know little about.
3. After reading a DHA Community Profile, go to the BBC World website to learn more about that country and to the relevant country information on the UNHCR website to learn more about the impact on refugees.
4. Find out what countries other than Australia resettle refugees. How many do they take each year? How does this compare with the number being resettled in Australia?

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5. If, during the course of your work, you encountered a young person with a subclass 866 visa, what can you deduce about this person?

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6. If, during the course of your work, you encountered a young person with a subclass 204 visa, what can you deduce about this person?

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7. Download and read *One Step at a Time* (see reference list). Reflect on the information it contains. What do you think the three most important lessons it contains are for young refugees preparing to come to Australia? Why have you selected these?

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8. List three or more reasons why you think family reunion is important for young people from refugee backgrounds.

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9. Do a straw poll with your friends. Ask them what words they associate with the word 'refugee'. Make a list of these words and group them according to whether they are 'positive' or 'negative'.

<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>

10. Look at the words you have gathered (from activity 9). Based on what you have learnt, reflect on how accurate these descriptions of refugees are. What do you think might be influencing public perceptions? Consider the role of the media in this.

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## Topic 4: Settlement

**Topic 4** focuses on settlement from the perspective of a young person from a refugee background. In Topic 4 you will learn about:

- what 'settlement' is;
- how young people view settlement;
- stages of settlement;
- transitions; settlement services;
- the role of schools in settlement.

### What is 'Settlement'?

When considering how young people from refugee backgrounds view the concept of 'settlement', it is appropriate to begin by examining the use of the term in a generic context. It is a curious thing that despite us having hosted large numbers of refugees for decades, in Australia there is still quite a bit of confusion about exactly what the term means.

The **Department of Social Services (DSS)**<sup>18</sup> defines settlement as:

*...the process of adjustment you experience as you become established and independent in Australia.*<sup>19</sup>

Further insight into DSS's perceptions of settlement can be drawn from the following diagram<sup>20</sup> that provides a conceptual framework for understanding settlement outcomes. The diagram includes both:

- **systemic indicators**, which are considered important for the design and targeting of government policies and programs; and
- **life outcome indicators** that are used to identify the issues that need to be addressed overall to achieve effective settlement outcomes.

These key settlement dimensions are interrelated and should not be considered in isolation in the achievement of successful settlement.

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<sup>18</sup> Prior to September 2013, settlement services came under the portfolio of the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Following the election of the Abbott Government, they were moved to the newly created Department of Social Services.

<sup>19</sup> At [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/settling/](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/settling/).

<sup>20</sup> The Settlement Journey: strengthening Australia through migration. (Then) DIAC. See references.

OUTCOME:	SETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA				
SETTLEMENT DIMENSIONS:	Social Participation	Economic Well-Being	Personal Well-Being	Independence	Life Satisfaction and being Connected to the Community
KEY SETTLEMENT INDICATORS:	English proficiency Participation in education and training Participation in community life (e.g. school, sports) Citizenship	Employment circumstances Level of income Level of debt Job satisfaction Satisfaction with accommodation	Physical health Mental health Self-esteem Relationships	Access to transport Access and use of community and government services Source of income Ability to make life choices Gender equality	Sense of belonging in Australia Sense of being treated well by the local community Level of discrimination and cultural and religious expression
<b>Demographic Attributes</b> Country of birth, gender, age, marital status, family status, location, years of schooling, work experience, length of time in Australia					

These dimensions of settlement had their genesis in the work of Khoo and McDonald (2001).<sup>21</sup> Their study proposed a framework exploring settlement indicators across four dimensions – social participation, economic participation, economic well-being and physical well-being. The fifth dimension was added in response to the release of Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals (SONA).<sup>22</sup> This study posited that the key indices that best predict the level of comfort felt by humanitarian entrants:

- How happy a person feels about him/herself.
- Confidence about making choices about living in Australia.
- Being treated well by the local community since coming to Australia.
- Ease of finding a place to live in Australia.

One thing about which there is widespread agreement is that the emphasis has to be on empowering entrants and ensuring they become self-reliant. There is a strong view that the welfare model (which focused on doing things for the client) is a thing of the past and that there needs to be a model that builds on continuous settlement achievements through the promotion of independence.

<sup>21</sup> S Khoo and P McDonald. *Indicators of immigrant settlement for Australia*. Australian Centre for Population Research, Australian National University. 2001.

<sup>22</sup> *Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals: report of findings: Study for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship*. Australian Survey Research. April 2011.

In seeking to grapple with the question of what constitutes 'settlement', the Refugee Council of Australia<sup>23</sup> note that while it is agreed that tangible factors such as income support, housing, employment, education, health care and family reunion are essential, it is the less tangible factors which play a vital role in the settlement process, including:

- being able to feel safe and secure;
- restoring a sense of self-worth;
- restoring a sense of dignity;
- regaining a sense of control over one's life;
- resolving guilt; and
- processing grief about the loss of self and country.

One thing about which there appears to be very little doubt is that the emphasis has to be on **empowering entrants** and ensuring they become **self-reliant**. There is a strong view that the welfare model is a thing of the past and that there needs to be a model that builds on continuous settlement achievements through the promotion of independence.

## How Young People View Settlement

In the past, the notion of settlement has typically been seen in a 'one size fits all' way. Services have been designed around the needs of adults or family groups, with no recognition that young people have particular needs (distinct from young children and adults) and experience settlement differently.

Increasingly there has been a realisation that young people from refugee backgrounds don't necessarily view the world in the same way as adults and they have different hopes and aspirations for their new life in Australia. They have their whole lives ahead of them and if appropriately supported, they have the potential to become productive, contributory members of the Australian community.

Comparatively little work has been done over the years to try to understand what settlement means from a youth perspective. An exception was the Centre for Multicultural Youth's 2006 study, *Settling In*<sup>24</sup> which outlined broad categories that it suggested can be used to define 'good settlement' for young people. These were:

- material conditions;
- educational and occupational needs;
- broader environmental factors, e.g. safety, wellbeing and social connectedness;
- empowerment and agency.

The study concluded, however, that there were gaps in existing policy that meant that the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds were not being met and they were not receiving adequate or targeted support to facilitate good settlement outcomes.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/settlement/services.php](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/settlement/services.php).

<sup>24</sup> *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*. Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2006.

In the intervening years there has been a major shift in thinking, with greater recognition of the importance of targeting services to young people from refugee backgrounds. In an effort to advance knowledge about how young people from refugee backgrounds view settlement, a collaborative project involving researchers, policy analysts and practitioners<sup>25</sup> set out to explore with young people from a range of refugee backgrounds what the concept means to them and what they considered to be the things that assisted and hindered settlement.

**In summary, the research found that young people from refugee backgrounds:**

- **define 'settlement' in terms of how they feel (safe, secure, connected and empowered) rather than what they have (e.g. house or income);**
- **see 'successful settlement' as a multidimensional construct which combines having the basic necessities and being able to engage confidently with the wider community;**
- **define 'unsuccessful settlement' in terms of isolation, inability to meet basic needs; lack of security, lack of agency and unresolved trauma.**

The lesson from this is that support programs must recognise the importance of complementing their focus on addressing practical and material needs with an equal focus on ensuring that young people from refugee backgrounds feel safe and confident and have the skills to engage in a range of activities and with a wide variety of people.

The examination of the things that young people saw as settlement facilitators and barriers led to the conclusion that support programs for young people from refugee backgrounds should include the following:

Opportunities to practice speaking **English** – school, social, recreational ...

Opportunities to **socialise** with young people – especially those from wider community

Recognition of differences and ensuring **individual needs** are identified and met

Recognition that their past experiences are not all that define the young people - they **share the desires and aspirations of all young people**



Support to enable young person to identify and achieve **realistic goals**

Consideration of the **impact of their past experiences** and current circumstances when assessing their needs

Recognition of the **stigma** that some young people attach to the word 'refugee'

Support for young people to **respond in an informed way**, understanding their rights, when they encounter racism and exclusion

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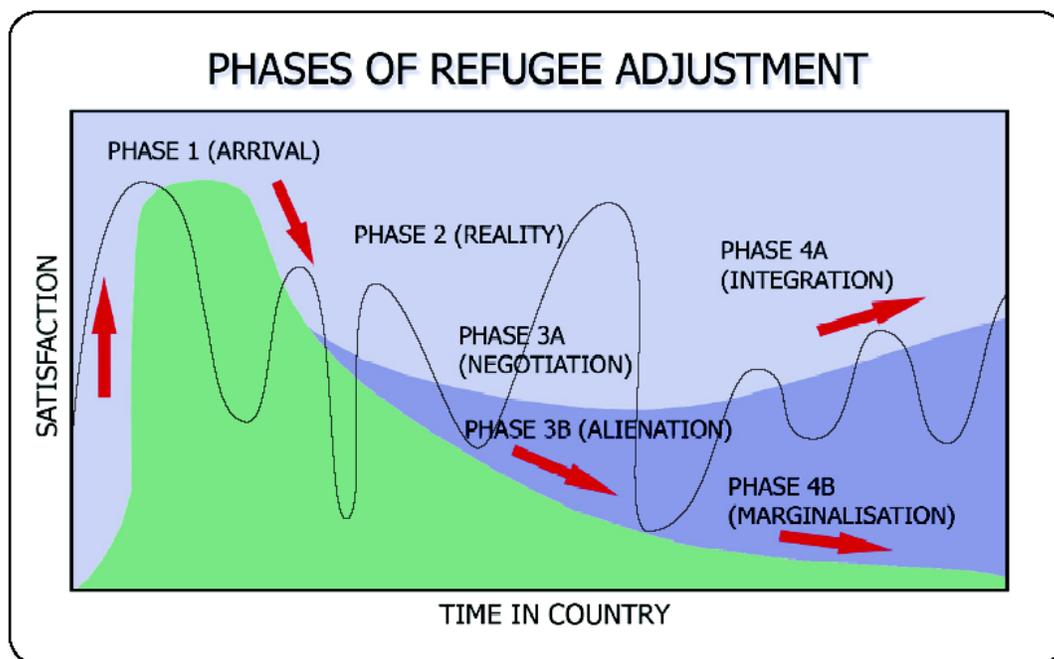
<sup>25</sup> *Perspectives of Settlement: Views of young people from refugee backgrounds.* University of Sydney, Multicultural Development Association and Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2013.

Further, the young people who participated in the study stressed their desire to be an active player in their settlement journey, not just a passive recipient of services. This requires those working with young people from refugee backgrounds to give them the confidence to engage, to recognise and draw on their strengths and to empower them to meet the challenges they will inevitably face.

## Stages of Settlement

There is general agreement that adjustment to life in Australia is a process that involves various stages. The Centre for Multicultural Youth<sup>26</sup> presents the stages/phases of adjustment in a graphical form. This graph highlights three important aspects of the adjustment process:

- There are broad trends in the way entrants feel about their new life and these change over time.
- The emotional journey of an entrant (as depicted by the wavy line) is much more like a roller coaster than a steady progression.
- If entrants receive appropriate support in a timely manner, they will move towards integration into their new community. If they are not supported, there is a chance that they will end up being marginalised.



<sup>26</sup> Graph from Centre for Multicultural Youth: Information Sheet No. 14. 2006; as sourced from National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health, IRSA, San Francisco, September 1998. Courtesy of Dr. Dennis Hunt, Centre for Multicultural Human Services, Falls Church, VA.

The question of how long the process takes is a vexed one. Answers will depend on who you ask. Some people from refugee backgrounds will contend it is a journey that lasts a lifetime; others will say they feel 'settled' after being in Australia for just a few years.

The Department of Social Services operates within two time frames:

- 6 to 12 months after arrival for initial settlement support – delivered in large part through the Humanitarian Settlement Service program (see below);
- 5 years for targeted settlement services, for example those provided through the Settlement Grants Program (see below).

This does not mean that they consider every former refugee to have become 'settled' at the five year mark but rather it is a time after which the principal needs of the individual should be able to be met by mainstream services. In saying this, sometimes things happen many years down the track (such as a death or other trauma in the family) that can undermine the independence a person and/or family has gained and leave them in need of specialist support. This is recognised in the specialist support framework.

Another relevant issue in relation to the time it takes to 'settle' is that for many people from refugee backgrounds, especially unaccompanied minors, the process does not really commence until they have left school and/or left their carers. Until then they are 'cocooned' in a relatively safe, predictable environment. When they set out on their own, they have to begin making major life decisions. As will be discussed below, times of transition are very significant for young people and are times when they might need additional support, irrespective of how long they have been in Australia.

## Transitions

As is apparent from the graph in the previous section, the settlement journey is more like a roller-coaster than a gentle progression. While some of the troughs are linked to the vagaries of life (such as breaking up with a boy/girlfriend), others are more predictable. These are the periods of vulnerability that often occur at points where the young person's life is going through significant change, for example when the young person:

- moves from an intensive English program into a mainstream class;
- moves from one school to another;
- leaves school;
- enters the workforce for the first time;
- begins at TAFE or university;
- has significant changes to his/her family such as when rejoined by an absent parent;
- turns 18 and is required to leave a group home or foster parent(s); etc.

Each of these is a time when the young person is likely to need additional support from those working with them and their supporters have a responsibility to:

- work collaboratively with supporters in their new environment;
- empower the young person to move on rather than not 'letting go'.

## Settlement Services

For important background information look at DSS Fact Sheet 98:  
[www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/fact-sheet-98-settlement-services-for-refugees](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/fact-sheet-98-settlement-services-for-refugees)

When discussing 'settlement services' there is a tendency to think only of specialist services targeting newly arrived refugees and migrants but these are just a subset of the services required to support new entrants. There are in fact two types of services that provide complementary and equally important support in the settlement context:

- **specialist settlement services** that are set up to address the particular needs of people from refugee backgrounds within the first 5 years of living in Australia;
- **mainstream services** that provide a range of support to anyone living in Australia and for which humanitarian entrants are entitled as they are permanent residents.

And within both of these service types there are services that are generic and those that specifically target young people.

### DSS-Funded Services

The Department of Social Services funds a number of programs that support young people from refugee backgrounds:

#### i. Humanitarian Settlement Program

The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)<sup>27</sup> provides settlement support to newly arrived offshore Humanitarian program entrants through a coordinated case management approach.

Each member of a family group, or each individual entrant, is assessed to determine their settlement needs. For young people this focuses on identifying their specific needs and goals, including educational and/or employment, recreational, social, sporting and orientation needs/goals. It is expected that the service provider will then work with the young person to develop strategies to achieve these goals.

#### ***Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS)***

The Specialised and Intensive Services program is integrated within the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) and targets clients whose needs extend beyond the scope of

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<sup>27</sup> For further information about the general Humanitarian Settlement Program go to [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au).

core settlement services. It is designed to work in partnership with settlement and mainstream services in a flexible, responsive manner. Though not a youth program as such, SIS provides a valuable safety-net for youth at risk.

Clients are eligible for services for up to five years after their arrival in Australia. Flexibility may be shown to this criterion in exceptional circumstances.

Anyone can refer a client for SIS assessment including community and health organisations and volunteer groups. Self-referral is also an option.<sup>28</sup>

## **ii. Settlement Grants (Youth Focus)**

Settlement Grants from the Department of Social Services provide funding to community organisations to help new arrivals, including refugee youth, to settle in Australia, complementing the HSP program outlined above. One of the target areas is currently 'youth settlement'.

Settlement Grants youth service examples include:<sup>29</sup>

- programs for newly arrived young humanitarian entrants that explore orientation to life in Australia including information on accessing education, employment and health services, and their rights and responsibilities under Australian law;
- specialist casework services, including assessment, development of case plans and group work activities;
- providing a brokerage role for government agencies by helping them to connect with refugee and migrant young people and their families;
- fostering, supporting and promoting community development activities that link refugee youth to existing youth services and help facilitate a sense of belonging in the local community;
- working in partnership with new arrival and refugee youth to develop programs that build their capabilities in leadership, and social skills and maintain links with their local communities;
- developing innovative approaches to engage young refugees and migrants;
- homework support groups.

## **iii. Australian Cultural Orientation Program**

AUSCO provides practical advice to refugee and humanitarian visa holders who are preparing to settle in Australia before they embark. The orientation and training is delivered by the International Organization for Migration to people granted humanitarian visas offshore. Within AUSCO there are courses specially tailored for children and youth.

Further information can be found on the AUSCO fact sheet: [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/fact-sheet-67-the-australian-cultural-orientation-ausco-program](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/fact-sheet-67-the-australian-cultural-orientation-ausco-program).

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<sup>28</sup> See [http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/documents/11\\_2017/hsp\\_sis\\_referral\\_form](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/documents/11_2017/hsp_sis_referral_form)

<sup>29</sup> Examples from DSS - Settlement Grants:  
[www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06\\_2014/servicetypeoverview](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2014/servicetypeoverview)

## Other Targeted Services

There are two key settlement-related programs with components specifically for young people from refugee backgrounds. They are:

### **i. Adult Migrant English Program**

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is funded by the Department of Industry. As the name suggests, this program focuses on helping refugees and eligible migrants gain a basic level of English language skills to help them to participate fully in Australian society. In theory, AMEP provides English tuition to humanitarian entrants over the age of 18 and responsibility for English language tuition for people under 18 lies with the states/territories and the federal Department of Education. In reality, there is a small cohort of 15 to 18 year olds who, for one reason or another, cannot be placed in school-based English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and are thus enrolled in AMEP. The current AMEP contracts for service providers include provision for:

- access to the AMEP for recently arrived eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants aged 15 to 17;
- 'youth only' classes for AMEP clients aged 15 to 24;
- an additional 400 hours of tuition offered through the Special Preparatory Program (SPP) for humanitarian entrants under the age of 25. This recognises the special needs of humanitarian entrants with limited education and/or difficult pre-migration experiences such as torture or trauma;
- eligible migrant youth to access a further 200 AMEP hours in the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment Training (a combination of English tuition and work experience placements); and
- AMEP counsellors to liaise closely with schools, employers, the community and migrant youth to ensure they are fully aware of all training options and to maintain learning continuity.

These were introduced to address risks facing migrant youth who do not participate in education, recognising that many of these young people are not job ready and are at particular risk of long term social exclusion.

### **ii. The Translating and Interpreting Service<sup>30</sup>**

The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is one of a number of user-pays interpreting services provider for people who do not speak English and for the English speakers who need to communicate with them. TIS National has access to over 2,400 contracted interpreters across Australia, speaking more than 160 languages and dialects.

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<sup>30</sup> For details of other interpreting services, go to the website of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI): [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au).

Its service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any person or organisation in Australia requiring interpreting services on a user-pays basis.

**Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)**

**Phone 131 450**

[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

TIS National assigns interpreting tasks to contracted interpreters based on their accreditation standard, geographical location and availability. Priority is given to interpreters with National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) professional accreditation or recognition when allocating assignments. Requests can be made for male and female interpreters in sensitive or gender-specific interpreting assignments.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) funds a Free Interpreting Service (delivered through TIS National) for non-English speaking permanent residents and Australian citizens communicating with various approved groups and individuals such as:

- non-profit, non-government, community-based organisations for case work and emergency services where the organisation does not receive funding to provide these services.<sup>31</sup>
- private medical practitioners providing Medicare-rebateable services and their reception staff to arrange appointments and provide results of medical tests.<sup>32</sup>

If it is not possible to find a suitable accredited interpreter in the client's first language, you can often use an interpreter in the entrant's second language (e.g. many African entrants speak French, Arabic or Swahili as a second language) or other people with the required language skills, such as bilingual workers or volunteers. Where matters relate to legal, medical, torture and trauma or other mental health issues, a professional interpreter with NAATI accreditation should be used. Alternative arrangements should only be made where all options for professional interpreting services (including telephone interpreting) have been exhausted.

DSS also funds a free document translation service for people settling permanently in Australia. The service is provided to enable permanent residents and Australian citizens to participate in the community by having personal documents translated free of charge into English during their initial two-year settlement period.

The *Multicultural Language Service Guidelines for Australian Government Agencies* provides helpful tips on working with interpreters and translators. This can be found at: [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/multicultural-language-services-guidelines-for-australian-government-agencies](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/multicultural-language-services-guidelines-for-australian-government-agencies).

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<sup>31</sup> Organisations can apply for a fee exemption for calls through TIS National.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that in addition to TIS, states and territories have their own general and specialised (e.g. medical) interpreting services.

## Other Settlement Services

In addition to the above-mentioned services, there is a range of services funded by other government agencies which are important for young people from refugee backgrounds. Some of the key services are presented in the following table:

Settlement Need	Program	Description	Funding Body
Education	English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Programs	These programs provide language tuition and support to non-English speakers within a classroom setting	State Departments of Education
	Intensive English Centres (IECs) and Intensive English High Schools (IEHCs)	Typically for older students, these program provide intensive language tuition complemented by orientation and settlement information, and aim to make students ready to enter mainstream classes/schools	State Departments of Education
Health	Refugee Health Services	Targeted health services including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>initial health assessments, including public health screening and catch-up vaccination</li> <li>coordination of short term health management</li> <li>supported referral to existing services for continuing care</li> </ul>	State Health Departments
	Medicare Benefits Scheme Line Item	MBS health assessment for refugees and other humanitarian entrants	Department of Health
Torture and Trauma	Program of Assistance for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT)	Provides specialised support services to people who are experiencing psychological or psychosocial difficulties associated with surviving torture and trauma before coming to Australia. Services include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>direct counselling</li> <li>education and training to mainstream health and related service providers</li> <li>community development and capacity building activities</li> </ul>	Federal and state Departments of Health
Mental Health	Transcultural Mental Health Centres	Promotes access to mental health services for people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	State Health Departments

Youth/ Homelessness	Reconnect Newly Arrived Youth Specialists	Provide multi-function service to newly arrived young people between the ages of 12 and 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Department of Social Services
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## Mainstream services

When you look at the long list of programs outlined above, it would be easy to conclude that young people from refugee backgrounds are well-supported by these specialist services, however the specialist services are primarily targeting needs directly related to their refugee experiences and/or the challenges of settlement and do not address their core needs as residents of this country.

As previously mentioned, young people from refugee backgrounds who are permanent residents have the same entitlements to mainstream services as any other permanent resident or citizen. There are many services relevant to these young people, including but not limited to those summarised in the following table.

Settlement Need	Program	Description	Funding Body(ies)
Income Support	Centrelink	Provides income support, including Youth Allowance and Family Payments	Department of Human Services
Employment	jobactive	Designed to assist job seekers prepare for and obtain employment	Department of Jobs and Small Business
Education	Schools	Provide primary and secondary education	State Education Departments
	TAFEs	Provide vocational education and training	State Education Departments
	Universities	Deliver undergraduate and post-graduate programs	Department of Education and Training
Basic workplace skills	Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL)	Designed to assist workplace training in situations where language, literacy or numeracy support is needed. Through the program, employers can access government funding for the delivery of accredited training	Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
	Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE)	Addresses deficits in language, literacy and numeracy to increase chances of securing employment	Department of Industry, Innovation and Science

Education to Employment Transitions	Youth Connections	Supports 15 to 19 year olds who have not completed or are at risk of not completing Year 12 or equivalent and who have barriers that make it difficult to participate in education, training and employment to make the transition to further education or employment	Department of Education and Training
	Partnership Brokers	Involves building partnerships between education and training providers, business and industry, parents and families and community groups to help young people to achieve Year 12 or equivalent qualifications and reach their full potential	Department of Education and Training
Health	Hospital and clinics	Primary, emergency and elective health care	State Health Departments
Youth Mental Health	Headspace	<p>Headspace is the name of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. It assists 12 to 25 year olds to get health advice, support and information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General health</li> <li>• Mental health and counselling</li> <li>• Education, employment and other services</li> <li>• Drug and alcohol services</li> </ul>	Department of Health
	The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Assessment and treatment for children and young people under 18 years who are experiencing mental health problems	State Health Departments
Family Relationships	Family Support Program	Focuses on early intervention and prevention support for children and families	Department of Social Services
Housing/ Homelessness	Reconnect	Community-based early intervention targeting young people aged 12 to 18 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It assists young people to stabilise their living situation and improve their level of engagement with family, school, work and their local community	Department of Social Services
	Specialist Homelessness Services	Crisis accommodation, transitional support, telephone information and referral services and homeless persons support centres	Department of Social Services and State Departments

Recreation	Various	Range of sporting and recreation activities	State and Local Government
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Before moving on, it is relevant to make the distinction between eligibility and access. Some mainstream services are still hesitant to take on clients from refugee backgrounds, believing (inaccurately) that specialist settlement services are funded to cater for all their needs. It is therefore often the case that specialist workers will need to advocate with or for young people from refugee backgrounds to ensure that they get access to the mainstream services to which they are entitled. Topic 11 will explore how this can be done.

## Local Services

Knowing the service types outlined above is very important but it does not equip you to work in a local area. Each locality will (or maybe won't) have its own set of specialist and mainstream services. Some will be funded by government and fall into the categories listed above. Others will (ideally) complement these, sometimes funded by not for profit agencies, religious bodies, foundations or corporations.

**It is essential that anyone working with young people from refugee backgrounds inform themselves about:**

- **what other services are available in the local area;**
- **the nature of services they deliver (including their eligibility criteria);**
- **referral pathways;**
- **local coordinating mechanisms and interagency meetings.**

## Sectoral Coordination and Development

In recent years considerable attention has been given to promoting cooperation between the various sectors (e.g. youth, settlement, education and health) working with young people from refugee backgrounds. Leading the way in this is the **Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)**<sup>33</sup> which was established in 2005 to meet the identified need for a national advisory and advocacy network on multicultural youth issues. The MYAN is the national policy and advocacy body on multicultural youth issues and has affiliate networks/agencies in each of Australia's states and territories. These networks bring together a range of organisations across the youth and settlement, education and health sectors.

In addition there are various youth and settlement specific interagencies in local areas.

<sup>33</sup> Further information about the MYAN can be found at [www.myan.org.au](http://www.myan.org.au).

## Settlement Services Principles

Here is a set of principles (the Humanitarian Settlement Program Principles) to which the Department of Social Services requires all Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) providers to comply.

### HUMANITARIAN SETTLEMENT PROGRAM PRINCIPLES<sup>34</sup>

Some of the key principles guiding the delivery of the HSP are as follows:

- Service Providers work collaboratively with community service providers and professionals to ensure the best possible settlement outcomes for each Client.
- Service Provider personnel are skilled to work appropriately with Clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and are respectful of the cultural and religious values of Clients.
- Service Providers deliver services innovatively to maximise Client outcomes and effective use of resources.
- Clients are active participants in the case management process. Outcome goals and activities are developed in collaboration with the Client and are tailored to each Client's needs and personal circumstances.
- Clients are individuals who have the inherent right of respect for their human worth and dignity.
- Service delivery draws upon Client strengths, with the aim of assisting Clients to participate fully and independently in the Australian economy and society.
- Each Client has one case manager who is the central point of contact and assumes overall responsibility for identifying and addressing changing needs.
- Services focus on achieving sustainable Client outcomes by developing skills and competency, supporting realistic expectations and transitioning Clients to independence, other settlement services and/or mainstream service systems.

It is relevant to note that there is general acceptance that these principles can and should have broader application than just HSP providers.

## Understanding of the Word 'Services'

When you work in a particular area, there are lots of words that are used so often that their meaning seems so obvious to you that it is hard to envisage that other people (including clients) won't necessarily know what you are talking about. 'Service' is one of these words.

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<sup>34</sup> For the full set of Principles see the DSS website: [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)

It is probable that some native English speakers might be a little vague about exactly what the word means in the context of 'settlement services'. It is even more likely that many humanitarian entrants will also be confused or challenged by the word. There are various reasons why this might be the case including the fact that some entrants:

- come from countries in which there is no tradition of welfare or government sponsored support so it is hard for them to comprehend that this might exist;
- associate anything to do with 'government' as something to be feared because they were persecuted by the government in their country of origin;
- come from collective cultures (where they are supported by their extended family or clan and thus find it hard to understand why it is necessary for the government to play a role.

You need to recognise that cultural differences and pre-arrival experiences might have an impact on your clients' capacity (and that of their parents or carers) to conceptualise the support you can provide or services you offer.

## Access to Services

When working with young people from refugee backgrounds, one thing that you need to keep in mind is access. These young people from refugee backgrounds face a range of barriers in accessing and remaining engaged with services. These include:

- language and cultural factors;
- inability to drive (too young or because having a car is prohibitively expensive);
- not having parents able to drive them to appointments or activities, either because they don't have a car or they are working;
- lack of understanding of what services/programs might offer;
- caring/family responsibilities.

In many areas, especially in rural and regional centres, poor public transport can further complicate things.

Further, youth-specific services or programs are often designed around the needs of Australian-born young people and overlook the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds. Similarly, some settlement services are designed around the needs of adults or family groups and overlook the needs of young people in the settlement context. It is important that all agencies ensure that their services or programs are inclusive of all young people – and sometimes this requires reflection on program design and inclusive practice.

### **Services targeting young people from refugee backgrounds should ideally:**

- **be located close to public transport routes with regular services;**
- **offer services at times that facilitate access;**
- **incorporate non-appointment based services/drop-in service model;**
- **be free of charge or minimal cost;**

- **allow (younger) siblings to attend;**
- **be sensitive to issues of gender and sexual orientation;**
- **consider setting up outposts of services in locations easily accessible to young people and/or co-located with other youth-services;**
- **provide transport so that young people can participate in activities and/or outings.**

## Asylum Seekers

Before moving on it is necessary to make the point that all of the above services are targeted at people who have permanent residence. As previously mentioned, there are also young people from refugee backgrounds within the community who are either part of a family seeking refugee status (asylum) in Australia or are doing so in the own right.

Service eligibility for asylum seekers is very complex. Entitlements differ according to how they arrived (either by boat or plane), when they arrived, with whom they arrived, their assessed level of vulnerability and the state or territory in which they reside. Further, support arrangements for asylum seekers have typically been very fluid, changing in response to evolving government policy.

It is therefore unwise to present anything definitive when it comes to services for asylum seekers. Rather, the following points should be noted:

- By virtue of the fact that asylum seekers are not permanent residents, they do not have the same entitlements as former refugees with visas that afford permanent residence.
- There are, however, a number of specialist and mainstream services for which they are eligible.
- There are also services specifically for asylum seekers.
- Information about service entitlements in your location can be obtained from the Department of Home Affairs website: [www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au).

## The Role of Schools

As previously mentioned, the young people from refugee backgrounds who participated in the recent research into settlement<sup>35</sup> consistently identified three things as being key facilitators of successful settlement:

- proficiency in English;
- access to education;

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<sup>35</sup> *Perspectives of Settlement: Views of young people from refugee backgrounds.* University of Sydney, Multicultural Development Association and Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2013.

- being able to socialise with other young people (including but not only those from their own background).

The one place where all three of these key settlement facilitations converge is at school. It is therefore relevant to understand and acknowledge the vital role that schools can play in the settlement of young people from refugee backgrounds – both in terms of meeting immediate needs and also in relation to forging pathways to the future (be this further education or employment).

Why are these three elements so essential?

**Proficiency in English** is the key that unlocks all other components of settlement. These are some key points to remember:

- English is a particularly difficult language to learn because of its lack of consistency (e.g. for almost every grammatical rule there are exceptions and many letters/letter combinations are pronounced in a variety of ways).
- It is easier to develop proficiency in spoken English than in written English. Just because a young person speaks confidently does not necessarily mean that he/she has developed a similar capacity in written English.
- The ease with which a person learns English is affected by a number of factors, not least:
  - the person's age;
  - their intellectual capacity;
  - whether they have had any past exposure to English;
  - whether their first language uses different script;
  - their opportunities to speak English away from the classroom;
  - the impact of trauma on their ability to absorb new information;
  - how secure they feel in their new environment;
  - the strength of their desire to learn.
- Each state and territory has different support programs for non-English speakers and other newly arrived students entering schools. There are also variations between the programs available in primary and secondary schools and in the programs available in different areas/regions. It is therefore important to familiarise yourself with the programs available in the local area, not just those in government schools but also in the Catholic education system which, in many places, facilitates the entry of newly-arrived children and young people from refugee backgrounds.
- In theory, younger entrants will be enrolled in school and those over the age of 17 or 18 will be linked to English classes within the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). In reality, it is not as clear cut as this for a number of reasons that might be linked to the availability of services, eligibility guidelines and the assessed needs of the entrant. In some states it is possible for older students to attend schools, especially if this is what they want to do. It is also possible for young people 15 and older to register with AMEP if this is seen as the best option for them.

In relation to **education**:

- Academic achievement is important not only for practical reasons but also for psychological health.
- Young people from refugee backgrounds arrive with a myriad of challenges including a history of interrupted or little formal education, limited literacy skills, past trauma, gaps in understanding about the school environment and expectations in Australia and parents/carers with a limited capacity to help with school and homework.
- Students often arrive far behind their age peers in relation to English-language proficiency and familiarity with the Australian school system and, without the proper support structures, can fall further and further behind. This is why it is crucial for schools to put in place systems specifically designed for students who have suffered trauma, to have proper structures to support newcomers and to ensure that teachers are trained to meet diverse learning needs.
- Where newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds should be placed within mainstream schools is a contentious issue. There are two schools of thought: in some cases young people are placed with their age peers (where they are likely to struggle to cope academically having missed out on so much schooling) and in others with those of the same ability level (where they are with people much younger than themselves and thus are unable to make social connections). There are no simple answers. The former is most often used but it requires that there be support programs in place to help the young person to overcome the academic deficits.
- Homework Clubs (places where young people can go after school and be assisted to do their homework and to discuss issues covered in school that day) are seen as a very valuable support for young people from refugee backgrounds.
- The provision of clear guidance about post-school options and how to pursue these is essential. While this is important for all young people, it is even more important for young people from refugee backgrounds for various reasons, including the fact that neither they (nor their parents/carers) are familiar with the opportunities available for tertiary or vocational education, their aspirations might not match their capacity and, in some cases, they have to contend with unrealistic parental expectations.
- Despite the many barriers they face, a great many young people from refugee backgrounds take to education 'like a duck to water' and achieve remarkable things in an extraordinarily short space of time.
- It is vital that those who are struggling academically (or socially) at school be given special attention to ensure they stay connected and engaged – often by finding things they are good at or interested in and by carefully nurturing these. They may also require assistance in other aspects of their lives (e.g. material aid, housing, income support) in order to remain engaged in education. Failure to provide the support they need can result in ongoing disengagement from education/training and employment pathways.

In relation to **socialisation**:

- Being able to connect to people 'like them' (i.e. people to whom they don't have to explain themselves and who have shared experiences/backgrounds) provides a level of comfort and safety.
- Many young people from refugee backgrounds are also curious about and keen to fit in with the dominant culture – thus they typically want opportunities to socialise with 'Australian' young people.
- Making connections to other young people is crucial for forging a sense of connection and identity and to a young person feeling like they 'belong' in Australia.
- It can often be a challenge for a newcomer to find their place in social groups, especially if the person is unfamiliar with their language and 'customs'. Young people may also experience racism in this context.
- Orientation programs (often undertaken with language classes) play an important role in at least familiarising young people with some of the 'ground rules' for youth engagement.
- Sport is an avenue through which connections are easily and effectively made. Other avenues (e.g. music, drama, etc.) are also valuable, especially for those not interested in sport.
- Mentoring programs can also be an extremely valuable way of supporting a young person from a refugee background to connect to other young people. Sometimes the mentor is an age peer, sometimes it might be someone a year or two older. In either case, the mentor is someone who can explain how to react, where to go, what to say and how to relate to people of the opposite sex; the mentor is also someone who (ideally) can give the young person confidence and can help them through times when they feel it is all too hard.

Empowerment of the young person should underpin everything in all three of these areas.

## **Schools as Hubs**

Schools are no longer places that focus only on 'reading, writing and arithmetic', nor are they places only for their students. Increasingly there is an awareness of the importance of schools as 'community hubs' – places that can offer a variety of services to the community as a whole. How this plays out varies from school to school and according to the characteristics of the local community. In some places schools offer:

- parenting classes;
- computer access;
- orientation to local services and supports;
- community education classes;
- recreation and sporting activities;
- first aid training; etc.

It is also important to recognise that schools don't just teach. They do many other things including the following:



For the parents/carers of young people from refugee backgrounds, this can provide a place where they can come together with others from their local area, learn relevant skills and develop networks upon which they can draw when needed. It is also an opportunity to 'demystify' schools for the parents/carers, some of whom might have had little exposure to formal education and all of whom would be unfamiliar with the education system in Australia.

When engaging with parents or carers, it is important to recognise that for some, schools can be an intimidating place with which they are reluctant or afraid to engage. While there has been some excellent work done within schools around the country to reach out to parents, especially those from refugee backgrounds, this is not universal and a number of structural impediments remain. Given the significance of education for young people from refugee backgrounds, it is vital that schools find ways to reach out to parents or carers. There are many resources that can provide guidance on this. Some are included in the reference list and others can be found on the websites of the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Foundation House.

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## Self-Directed Activities

1. Go to the DSS website to research the current service entitlements of asylum seekers and those granted a subclass 866 visa. List these.

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2. What is 'Access and Equity'? How is it relevant for young people from refugee backgrounds?

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3. If you were working in a youth drop-in centre, list 3 things that you could do to support access to the centre by young people from refugee backgrounds and three things that would demonstrate equity of outcomes.

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4. Look at the graph that shows phases of adjustment, paying particular attention to the wavy line. List three things that might account for the high points and three that might account for the low points in the life of a young person from a refugee background.

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5. Look at the Humanitarian Settlement Services Principles. Noting that these are not youth-specific, compare them to the principles of youth work (as outlined in Topic 1) and list the similarities and differences.

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6. Why do you think sport is so significant for many young people from refugee backgrounds? Is it just because they like sport or might there be more to it? Explain.

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7. How might schools make themselves more accessible to the parents of young people from refugee backgrounds?

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8. What steps can schools take to ensure that students from refugee backgrounds will feel welcome, supported and included?

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## Topic 5: Family and Community

**Topic 5** will help you to understand the importance of family and community for young people from refugee backgrounds and enable you to learn about how to make good use of these when supporting the young people with whom you are working.

### What is 'Family'?

At first glance, this might seem a very basic question but in the context of young people from refugee backgrounds, the answer is typically complex and multidimensional. The word 'family' can be viewed through many different lenses:

**A cultural lens:** 'family' is defined by very much a culture and time. In contemporary Australian culture 'family' often only includes people to whom one has an immediate relationship. In the past, the Australian notion of family included many more people. In entrant communities, this broader concept of family is much more common.

**A personal lens:** not everyone within a cultural group has the same concept of family. Sometimes things are determined by a person's own experiences. For example, someone from a strong, nurturing family will see 'family' as something positive whereas someone from a family in which there has been violence and discord will view the concept of 'family' in a very different way.

**A refugee lens:** for some people from refugee backgrounds, the word 'family' might be associated with all they have lost, for others it might be intertwined with their dreams for the future (i.e. when the family is reunited). This lens operates at an emotional rather than an intellectual level and can determine a person's capacity to act and engage, especially with the settlement process.

**An expedient lens:** some refugees link the concept of family to achieving practical objectives. For example, a woman with children might marry so that she has someone to protect her, or the orphaned children of a sibling might be incorporated into one's family. Family structures can sometimes be quite complex and difficult to unravel. Just because a family had its genesis in expediency does not mean that the members of the family care any less for each other.

**FAMILY**



## Impact of the Refugee Experience on Families

Every family has different experiences and the way that people within that family respond to their shared experiences will also differ. The following is therefore presented not in the context of saying “this is what will happen to families” but rather as “these are some of the ways in which the refugee experience might affect dynamics within families” – and therefore they are the sorts of things worthy of looking out for when you are working with young people from refugee backgrounds.

While the maintenance of a strong and mutually supportive family unit is very important for successful settlement, it is not all that easy to achieve. There are multiple factors arising from the refugee experience that place enormous strains on families and have an impact on the family construct and their ability to adjust to life in Australia:

- **Demographics:** as previously discussed, a high proportion of current humanitarian entrants are under 25 years of age; relatively few are over 40. There are few ‘elders’ within communities to provide advice and guidance.
- **Lack of experience of ‘normality’:** many entrants have spent prolonged periods in situations of deprivation and/or dependency in communal living situations with little privacy and little opportunity to make choices and plan for the future.
- **Changing gender roles:** most humanitarian entrants come from cultures in which the man’s role is defined as bread-winner and guide. In the early stages of settlement, however, it can be for men to fill these roles. ‘Women’s roles’ on the other hand, are often culturally defined as homemaker and carer. These roles often continue despite the relocation. Complicating the situation within homes is the fact that women sometimes find it easier to get employment so they not only have a better understanding of the environment in which the family is living but they also assume the role of income earner.
- **Changing responsibilities:** young people might have been required to adopt adult roles and responsibilities.
- **Different rates of adjustment:** for a whole range of reasons (age, disposition, past experiences, etc.) members of the one family will vary in their willingness and capacity to embrace their new life in Australia. This can result in tensions within the family.
- **Challenging boundaries:** allied to the above is a common situation that results from young people from refugee backgrounds seeking to adopt the values and behaviours of their peers at school in order ‘to fit in’.
- **Trauma and grief:** these can be profound and affect parents/carers in many ways including but by no means limited to being anxious about the safety of their and/or being distant from their children (having been numbed by the trauma of their experiences).
- **Intergenerational transfer of trauma:** the impact of trauma can be profound and it is not only the person who directly experienced it who can be affected by it.

- **Managing a budget and Centrelink payments:** some men from refugee backgrounds find it very confronting that the women and young people receive money in their own right. Sharing income is also a hard concept for some. Budgeting and finances are the cause of conflict in many homes.
- **Remittances:** most humanitarian entrants have family members and friends overseas to whom they feel obligated to send money.
- **Separation:** in a number of cases, resettlement involves reuniting families that have spent many years apart. Rebuilding a family in an unfamiliar environment is very challenging.
- **Lack of recreational pursuits:** it is hard for newly arrived families to know where to go and what to do in their spare time, especially as they have little disposable income. They often get trapped at home or spend leisure time interacting with a small group of families in similar circumstances. Close proximity and lack of activity can exacerbate tensions.
- **Laws and societal expectations:** in Australia the law prescribes acceptable and unacceptable interactions between family members, in particular in relation to hitting, slapping or other forms of physical contact. There are also societal expectations about how children are disciplined and about how people interact and behave. Many people from refugee backgrounds might not be familiar with disciplinary practices considered acceptable in Australia or with how others might perceive an overt expression of anger/frustration in a public space.

Before moving on it is worth reiterating that it is not a given that all families from refugee backgrounds will succumb to any or all of these but many will, in varying degrees. The impact it will have on families will also differ as a result of the resilience of family members, the core strength of the family unit and the way the various tensions manifest.

## Working with Young People in a Family Context

As previously mentioned, when you work with a young person from a refugee background, more often than not, you are not working with an isolated individual. This person is connected to other people, be this their family (whether in Australia or elsewhere) or other significant people in their lives ('adopted' family, friends, travelling companions, community etc.). These connections have to be taken into consideration in any work you do with them.

When the young person is part of a family, there is merit in employing strategies<sup>36</sup> that will enable you to assist the young person by strengthening the family:

- **Take time** to build open and trusting relationships with key family members, while maintaining your relationship with the young person as the priority. Be patient, spend time listening and use a variety of (flexible) engagement strategies.

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<sup>36</sup> The strategies in this and the following section are adapted from *Refugee Young People: Understanding the Family Context*. CMYI. 2004.

- Use professional **interpreters** wherever possible.
- Observe **family dynamics** closely and identify the decision-making structures.
- Reflect on **your own culture** and actively learn about and celebrate a young person's and their family's cultural background. Be open to difference and let young people and/or their families be your 'cultural teachers'.
- Use a **strengths-based approach**: display respect and compassion for the family's experience, strengths and potential, and identify and seek to address risk factors while promoting protective factors.
- Use a **flexible, outreach model** of service delivery (e.g. meeting where young people and families feel comfortable and meeting outside regular work hours).
- Look for opportunities to **raise and discuss common difficulties** for newly arrived families (i.e. normalising and validating some of the challenges they are facing), as well as reducing shame about discussing family problems with others.
- Support the young person to **explain their feelings to their family** and to reassure them that the path they wish to take is not necessarily disrespectful or dangerous.
- Help the young person to understand that their parents or carers **can change** their views and opinions – especially if they are helped to do this in a safe and non-confrontational way.
- Learn about the **young person's interpretation of 'family'**. Support young people to develop and maintain connections with family and community.
- Identify, encourage and support **positive family time** (e.g. providing brokerage funding for family outings).
- Assist parents/family members to **develop strong connections** with schools to ensure ongoing communication and reduce misunderstandings or confusion about the education system, e.g. support parents/family members to attend meetings with school staff and ensure interpreters are engaged where necessary.
- **Support adults to take an active role** with services rather than rely on their children for language support – this can often be significant in empowering parents/carers and shifting a changed power dynamic between parents/carers and children.
- Provide **practical support** (e.g. assistance with accessing material goods) to enable the family to build a home of which they can feel proud. Sometimes addressing material needs will alleviate a key stress and provide space for exploring other issues or sources of conflict.
- **Mediate** with and **advocate** for young people in the context of family hopes and pressures, particularly when families have been reconfigured and/or spent long periods separated, hold volatile secrets, and include members who have experienced extreme trauma.

- **Sit with the discomfort** of not always having clarity about a young person's family situation. It may take a long time to build trust with a young person in order to have a clear picture of their family circumstances and the pressures they are negotiating.
- **Seek the support you need** (e.g. supervision and training). This can be complex work and it is important to reflect on your own practice and responses.

### **Families in Cultural Transition**

The Families in Cultural Transition (FiCT) program trains bilingual facilitators from refugee communities to assist and support refugee families to maintain a cohesive family unit. The facilitators run a series of workshops in a context where family members feel valued and supported, have fun, and gain access to information and assistance in an interactive and empowering way.

The training includes:

- a one day introduction to working with refugees
- principles of adult learning
- concepts of facilitation and co-facilitation
- group work concepts
- basic explanation of all modules
- trauma and healing
- dealing with difficult scenarios
- self-care and vicarious trauma
- practice running program activities
- child protection
- ongoing supervision and access to professional development activities.

Participants undertake pre- and post-program evaluation to determine whether program objectives were met. The evaluations measure:

- how confident participants are at getting information and help
- changes in families, including the level of awareness of the changing family dynamics and of the effect of trauma and how to deal with its effects
- social connections and satisfaction levels.

FiCT is offered by specialist Torture and Trauma Counselling Services in most states and territories. See Topic 10 for links to these services.

If a young person is uneasy about and/or will not consent to you contacting their family:

- explore with the young person their reasons for this;
- reassure the young person that you will support them in this process and that they are in control of what is discussed, with whom, and where;
- find out as much as you can about relationships and decision-making processes at home and the roles and wishes of family members;
- explain the benefits of your work with family members, describing good outcomes from family contact in the past. It may be only one family member that the young person is comfortable for you to contact initially;

- support the young person to maintain connections with their family in a variety of ways (social outings, phone contact, remembering important occasions etc.);
- don't make contact with parents/family without a young person's consent, even if you can see the value in doing so.

**When addressing complex family situations, it is important to recognise that you are rarely the only person working with the young person. There is great merit in trying to ascertain who else is engaging with them and the family and linking with these workers to establish:**

- **the various roles and responsibilities of the different agencies/workers;**
- **complementary intervention strategies with the young person and the family;**
- **a communication strategy between agencies/workers to enable relevant information to be shared.**

## **Responding to Family Conflict**

Tensions resulting from unfulfilled expectations, difficulties interacting within the new environment, differential rates of adjustment within the family, financial tensions and other stressors can often, if not appropriately addressed in a timely manner, result in family conflict.

Where conflict is identified within the family of a young person from a refugee background with whom you are working, there are a number of approaches you might explore. These include:

- Support the parents' or carers' role in the family while maintaining a human rights framework with the young person as the primary client. You can affirm the parents' or carers' hopes for their children, share observations of the young person's strengths and try to help parents/carers understand the settlement pressures faced by the young person.
- Assist the young person to develop communication strategies that will better convey their hopes and frustrations to family members.
- Show respect for the role of parents/carers and family members and their beliefs while advocating and identifying what is important for the young person.
- Take time to understand everyone's perspective. Ask questions, observe, and validate feelings and experiences of all family members.
- Explore cultural values and religious perspectives. Ask how the family would deal with the situation in their home country and support them to access culturally appropriate services or support.
- Explore strengths the family has drawn on previously to get through difficult times together, particularly prior to their arrival in Australia.

- Encourage family members to listen to one another's perspective and discuss emergent issues, reflecting on patterns of interaction, eliminating blame and shifting the focus to the behaviour rather than the person.
- Acknowledge parents' or carers' fears for their children and consider their motivations in a positive light (e.g. seeking protection from harm).
- Where appropriate, identify how a young person is maintaining their cultural identity and their identity within any subculture (e.g. religious community) of which they are a part.
- Provide practical support and advocacy for the family or seek support services for individual family members. Often conflict cannot be addressed if there are outstanding practical issues that need attention.
- Explore 'shuttle' mediation by being the 'link' between family members and the young person.
- Seek assistance of community leaders in promoting and building trust in your service, as many families may feel a sense of shame about discussing family conflict with someone outside their community.
- Consider referral options. Explore opportunities for joint casework with an appropriate specialist service or ethno-specific worker.
- If the young person is unsafe at home or there is no resolution to protracted intra-family conflict, support the young person to identify alternative accommodation – e.g. within extended family, friendship or community networks first, and then explore whether there is culturally appropriate independent youth housing.

## Mandatory Reporting

If the conflict within the family escalates to violence or any other form of abuse, it is important that workers recognise that in most states and territories they are obliged by law to report their concerns.

Anyone working with young people **must know** the relevant legal obligations in the state and territory in which they are working. If this unit is being taught as part of a course in which mandatory reporting obligations are covered elsewhere, it is possibly enough to remind participants of its relevance in this context. If this unit is being offered as a stand-alone unit, consideration should be given to leaving some time to introduce these obligations and possibly setting a homework assignment based around them.

Mandatory Reporting is the legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect and is considered to be an acknowledgement of the seriousness of child abuse. Mandatory Reporting requirements reinforce the moral responsibility of community members to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect and are intended to overcome the reluctance of some professionals to become involved in suspected cases of child abuse by imposing a public duty to do so.

**Mandatory Reporting Laws** define the *types of situations* that must be reported to child protection services and *who* is obliged to report. All states and territories have mandatory reporting requirements of some description, however, the people who must report and the types of abuse they must report vary across Australian states and territories.<sup>37</sup> These range from a limited number of specified persons in specified contexts (Western Australia, Queensland) through to every adult (Northern Territory).

**Given this context, if you are considering making a report, it is important that you discuss it with your supervisor/manager and be clear about the circumstances.**

**DON'T FORGET:** There are penalties for failing to make a report.

Before leaving this section it is necessary to comment on the cultural tension that surrounds child protection laws in Australia. As previously mentioned, there are various practices, for example leaving young children alone in a house or slapping a child, that are either illegal or seen as unacceptable in Australia but which might be acceptable/normal practice in the entrants' country of origin. The vast majority of humanitarian entrants want to do the right thing in Australia and obey the laws. They don't want to do anything that will get them into trouble or offend the country that gave them sanctuary but it can be very confusing when they don't fully understand the laws relating to child protection. Many struggle with different cultural values and parenting approaches and sometimes this gets confused/embroiled with child protection laws and the prospect that 'the government' might take their children away can be terrifying, especially for people who came from oppressive regimes.

One final word on this issue: **early intervention is critical** to try to stop things getting to the point where a government agency gets involved and also to recognise that if it does get to this point, the family as well and the young person will need support.

## What is a Community?

The word 'community' has a number of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. For the purpose of this unit it is defined as follows:

**Community** = a group of people who share common characteristics and are bound together by interests and common aspirations.

When we are talking about 'community' in the context of young people from refugee backgrounds, it is important to recognise that they are a part of various communities, not least:

- the community of people from their own background;
- the broader Australian community;
- their school community (if still at school);
- their peer group; etc.

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<sup>37</sup> See [www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs3/rs3.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs3/rs3.html).

We have an intuitive understanding of most of these communities, except possibly the first, so it is worthwhile spending a little time examining just what constitutes a community in the context of people from refugee backgrounds. Here we are generally referring to a group who choose to associate with each other because they share one or more of the following characteristics:

- tribal affiliation, ethnicity or nationality;
- religion;
- political opinion;
- country or region of origin;
- time of or reasons for their expulsion from their country of origin;
- location of or experiences during exile;
- common interests or aspirations;
- other factors seen as relevant to the individuals concerned.

It is also relevant to note that not everyone from a refugee background will be keen to meet up with people from their country of origin – or with particular groups of people from their country of origin. Different individuals and groups within a country have different experiences. Sometimes people from one group might be associated with the persecutors; sometimes they might be seen as lacking in courage because they did not stand up in support of the group from which the entrant came. Sometimes there are divisions based on class or educational background. Never make assumptions that a person from one background will automatically get along with others from a seemingly similar background.

Further, one of the common misconceptions in the settlement sector is thinking that all communities of people from refugee backgrounds are alike – or at least similar. When you reflect, however, on the many factors that underpin the formation of communities and the very different backgrounds from which their members have come, it is easy to see that this is not the case. Then when you add individual personalities into the mix, it is easy to see that any discussion about ‘refugee communities’ must, at best, be based on broad generalisations.

## **Role of Communities in Supporting Young People**

Connecting young people from refugee backgrounds to relevant communities can be beneficial in many ways – assuming the right connections are made for the right reasons and only where young people wish to do so.

Linking a young person from a refugee background to a community of people from the same or similar ethnic and/or religious background with whom they are comfortable can:

- help them to maintain a sense of identity, as well as retain culture and language;
- take away the sense of being alone on the other side of the world;
- allow them to be with people who understand their background without needing to have it explained;
- let them relax while doing things that are familiar and speaking a language in which they feel comfortable.

Then there are two other very important benefits that can be derived from linking young people to carefully selected people from a similar background:

- If their own family is struggling or they have no family (or father or mother), they might be able to establish supportive relationships within their community that can compensate in some way for the gaps in their life, for example, by finding an honorary uncle or grandparent.
- They might be able to find a mentor within their community, i.e. someone who is older and has been through what the young person is going through and who can provide advice and support. Mentoring relationships can come in various forms. In some cases the mentor is just a little bit older (for example someone who is at university supporting someone in the later years of high school); in others the mentor might be someone established in the profession the young person is seeking to enter. Sometimes mentoring arrangements are formalised, sometimes they develop of their own accord. In either case, they should be delivered in ways that are consistent with the principles and practices of youth work as contained within relevant Codes of Ethical Practice.

This being said, it is important to note that this is not necessarily a simple issue for many young people. It is linked to complex and often dynamic notions of identity and belonging and finding their place in Australian society and culture. Some young people will wish to maintain connections with their cultural community and others will prefer to limit contact. It is important to respect the young person's opinion in this and support them to navigate this challenging area (which may change from time to time).

Before leaving the topic of refugee communities, it is relevant to mention the role of the elders within these communities. Community elders take on a range of roles including being voices for the community (for example when advocating for support), cultural guides and also role models for younger members of the community. These are challenging roles, especially for people who are usually in the process of settling themselves, as well as holding down a job and raising a family. Workers need to support elders wherever they can through showing respect, providing advice and ensuring they have accurate, relevant information to share with their community.

As beneficial as the community of people from the young person's background might be, it would be wrong to focus only on this. The young person is now a permanent resident of Australia and will most likely spend the rest of their lives here. They have to establish links to the broader community and find groups within it in which they feel comfortable and where their interests can be pursued. These might be sporting clubs, music groups, film societies or any one of a myriad of activities available within society. Newcomers often don't know what's out there. They therefore need guidance, both about options and also about how one goes about 'joining in'. In some cases, a little more support (e.g. going with them on their first day) might be required.

Before leaving the topic of young people and communities, it would be remiss not to mention schools. Schools are primarily thought of as places of learning but they are also communities in their own right ... in fact very important ones for young people from refugee backgrounds. As discussed in Topic 4, schools can be places of stability and safety, places where they learn about how the world operates, places where they make friends, places where they can find help when they need it.

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## Self-Directed Activities

1. Spend some time reflecting about your own family. What do they mean to you? In what ways do your family assist or support you? How would you feel if you were separated from family members? What impact would this have on your way of life, your behaviour and your sense of identity? Would it also influence your ability to plan for the future?

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2. Select two of the challenges faced by newly arrived refugee families. Bearing in mind what you have learnt about working with families, list some strategies you could use to address these challenges.

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3. With whom must your allegiance lie in situations of family conflict? Why is this the case?

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4. The Australian Red Cross provides a tracing service for people who want to trace relatives or friends from whom they have been separated by conflict or natural disasters. Find out more about the tracing service and make a note of how you can make contact with it.

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5. Research the mandatory reporting laws in your state or territory. What are your core obligations?

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6. List two 'communities' to which you belong and write down what belonging to these communities means to you and/or brings to your life.

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7. Why do you think linking to a community in Australia is so important for young people from refugee backgrounds?

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8. For young people from refugee backgrounds does 'community' have to mean the community to which they are ethnically or religiously linked? If not, what other forms of community might be relevant for them?

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9. What forms of support might a young person from a refugee background need to link to a new 'community'? How would these needs differ according to factors such as ethnicity, religion and gender?

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10. Research the *Community Hubs Program*.<sup>38</sup> Why was this program introduced? Why do you think it involves all three levels of government?

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<sup>38</sup> See [www.migrationcouncil.org.au/community-hubs/](http://www.migrationcouncil.org.au/community-hubs/).

## Topic 6: Unaccompanied Minors

**Topic 6** focuses on unaccompanied minors. In Topic 6 you will learn about:

- how unaccompanied minors come to be in Australia;
- the difference between Unaccompanied Minor s Seeking Asylum (UAMs) and Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs);
- challenges faced by unaccompanied minors;
- effective strategies for working with unaccompanied minors.

### Introduction

Unaccompanied minors constitute a particularly vulnerable subset of young people from refugee backgrounds for many reasons, not least because they:

- do not have the support and guidance of their parents;
- have often experienced considerable trauma prior to arriving in Australia;
- have, in many cases, been exposed to the additional trauma of detention after arrival in Australia and the uncertainty of the refugee status determination procedures;
- are typically under considerable pressure from their parents and other family and community members;
- are part of a group whose numbers have increased in recent years;
- come under a complex set of laws and bureaucratic processes.

Anyone working with an unaccompanied minor needs to understand the broader context surrounding this young person in order to be able to support the individual.

### Definitions

There are two groups of unaccompanied minors in Australia, defined according to their immigration status:

- **Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) =**
  - under the age of 18
  - **in the process of seeking asylum**
  - not in the presence of a parent or legal guardian.
- **Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs) =**
  - under the age of 18 years
  - **permanent residents of Australia**

- do not have a parent or relative over the age of 21 in Australia
- either sought protection after arrival in Australia or have been resettled from overseas on an offshore humanitarian visa.

There are quite different sets of legal frameworks and entitlements associated with each of these groups so care must be taken to ensure that, when working with minors, there is clarity about their immigration status.

## Unaccompanied Minors Seeking Asylum (UAMs)

Prior to the introduction of new processing arrivals for asylum seekers who arrived by boat in July 2013,<sup>39</sup> there was an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. The majority of these were Hazara males from Afghanistan aged over 15, together with older male minors from Sri Lanka and Iran. Much smaller numbers were under 15 years of age and/or female.

The procedure in place for these arrivals was that they were first taken to a detention facility (a low security detention facility or an Alternative Place of Detention – often called an APOD) to establish their age, identity and intentions, and to enable preliminary health and character checks to be undertaken.

It was the expectation that after a brief period in an APOD, the minor would be moved into **Community Detention**, an arrangement whereby he (or she) is cared for by a service provider contracted by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

While the policy introduced in July 2013 is likely to mean that there will be no (or fewer) UAMs entering the system, there is a backlog of pre-July 2013 arrivals. This means that their cases will move slowly through the system of refugee status determination and there will still be UAMs in the community until these young people turn 18.

Further, it is relevant to note that there are very small numbers of unaccompanied minors who arrive by plane and then seek asylum. They are not subject to detention.

Under the *Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946* (the IGOC Act), the Minister for Home Affairs is the legal guardian of many UAMs and they are case managed by senior officers within DHA.

The background and circumstances of every UAM is different and often complex. It is important not to make assumptions based on generalisations. This being said, many UAMs have things in common, especially the older males, i.e. those over 15 years of age:

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<sup>39</sup> From July 2013, asylum seekers who arrived by boat are transferred to either Papua New Guinea or Nauru. This policy was in place at the time of writing but like all policies, is subject to change.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their families pooled resources or went (heavily) into debt to pay a smuggler to get their son to 'a safe country'.</li> <li>• In some cases the young people sent down smuggling routes by their families were aware of what is happening, in others they might have had only a very limited concept of what was happening. Sometimes they had some say in the matter; in other cases they had none.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once they embarked on the journey, they frequently had little concept of where they were and where they would end up.</li> <li>• Most UAMs spent some time in Malaysia and/or Indonesia en route to Australia. In both countries there are few protections and limited support services. Further, there are few resettlement options. All of this contributed to the pressure to get onto a boat to come to Australia.</li> <li>• The boat journey was typically very traumatic. Few UAMs have had any experience of being on a boat of any kind, let alone undertaking a dangerous crossing in an overcrowded, ill-provisioned and unseaworthy vessel.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once they were intercepted or reached Christmas Island, those on the boat were taken to a detention facility. This too can be very frightening, especially as they often had limited understanding of what is happening and what might happen.</li> <li>• They then go into Community Detention. This better than being in a detention facility but it is still an 'unnatural' environment. They do not know whether they will be allowed to remain in Australia or will have to return. It is not possible to make plans.</li> <li>• The process of refugee status determination can be very confusing and daunting. It is typically lengthy and while it is going on the young person is haunted by the possibility that he might be forced to go back and thereby face danger and/or the shame of having failed his parents.</li> </ul>

The minority of UAMs are younger boys (15 years old and under) and girls. In some cases they are genuinely unaccompanied often they have arrived with people their parents knew. The younger the UAM, the more complex it is to determine their protection needs and to identify appropriate care arrangements for them in the community.

## Working with UAMs

People who might come into contact with UAMs include people working inside detention facilities (including APODs), caseworkers and casemanagers working for a Community Detention provider, nurses and other health workers, teachers and others working within educational institutions, and youth and recreational workers.

Most UAMs in Community Detention reside in group homes with 24 hour supervision. They attend local schools and are supported to participate in a range of recreational activities. Younger UAMs or those with special needs might be placed into foster care. On the one hand their lives might look 'normal' but on the other, their circumstances are very far from normal. They are dealing with the considerable challenges of being:



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In addition, they are typically under considerable pressure (either overt or self-imposed) from their family to be accepted as a refugee and make a life in Australia. This often manifests as an intense internal conflict between their responsibilities to their family and their desire to be a carefree young person.

When working with young asylum seekers, the same core principles apply as in all youth and settlement work (see Topic 1 and Topics 7-10), with some important additions:

- The principle of *Do No Harm* should encompass an alertness to the necessity to protect the UAM from anything that might interfere with his (or her) claims for protection and/or place family members at home in danger. The level of this risk is both country and case specific but care should be taken when linking UAMs to people

from their country of origin and their name and personal details should only be disclosed where the person has the correct authority to do so.

- As with all young people, being honest and keeping your word is important but it is especially important when working with UAMs. They have experienced a great deal of fear and uncertainty in their lives and probably encountered many people who don't have their best interests at heart. They have to learn to trust again.
- There is no certainty that a UAM will remain in Australia. During the refugee status determination process, it is important to focus on the immediate future and not promise anything long term. This just generates expectations that might be shattered and will make it harder for the young person to come to terms with return.
- Recognise how debilitating and demoralising being in a state of limbo can be. The more engaged the young people are in activities, the less time they have to think and worry.
- You should not comment on or give any advice about the refugee status determination process unless you are a registered migration agent. There are laws that cover this and if you are not a migration agent, giving anything that might constitute migration advice is a criminal offence that occasions a heavy fine and in some cases a custodial sentence.
- UAMs are likely to seem both much older than their actual age and much younger. There are both cultural and experiential dimensions to this. From a cultural perspective, in many countries from which UAMs come, young people take on adult roles much earlier than in Australia. They see themselves as adults yet under our law they are 'children'. In addition, during the journey to Australia, the UAM has typically had to be very resourceful and independent. BUT most of the UAMs have missed out on the 'fun bits' of being a teenager and they know this. Workers therefore have to both understand these seemingly contradictory behaviours and find a way to nurture the positive elements of both.
- UAMs have commonly survived by being resourceful. Often these become critical learnt behaviours that will continue even when a young person is in a place of relative safety/security. Workers need to recognise that these behaviours are survival strategies and work on building the trust of young people so they can support the young people to reshape these skills or develop new skills so that they are better equipped to navigate the challenges they will face in their new environment.

## Changing Goalposts



The one certainty in the area of asylum in Australia is that things will change. Over time there have been a range of policies that have governed refugee status determination and the treatment of asylum seekers and it is possible that the community care arrangements for asylum seekers might change again. That is why this guide has been quite general in what it has said. For specifics at the time you are delivering the course, you should go to [www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au) or contact the Ethnic Liaison Officers within the Department of Home Affairs in your state or territory.

## Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs)

As previously mentioned, Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs) are unaccompanied minors with permanent residence in Australia. There are two kinds of UHMs:

1. **Unaccompanied humanitarian non-wards:** a minor who has a relative over the age of 21 to care for them in Australia. The Minister for Home Affairs is not the guardian of UHM non-wards.
2. **Unaccompanied humanitarian wards:** a minor who does not have a parent or a relative over the age of 21 to care for them in Australia. The Minister for Home Affairs is the guardian of UHM wards.

For further details about the distinctions between wards and non-wards, see *DHA Factsheet Number 69: Caring for Unaccompanied Minors*.

The circumstances of **unaccompanied humanitarian non-wards** can vary dramatically. In most cases, the young person is living with family members who genuinely care for him/her and provide the same opportunities they would for their own child. There have been cases, however, where the relationship between the young person and the carer breaks down or where the UHM has been neglected or abused by the relative or carer. Anyone suspecting that this might be occurring is bound by mandatory reporting arrangements (see Topic 9) to report the case to the relevant state child protection authorities. In all states, UHMs have access to mainstream child welfare and child protection services as per all Australian Permanent Residents.

The circumstances of **unaccompanied humanitarian wards** are much more complicated due to significant variations in both guardianship and care arrangements around the country:

- **Guardianship:** the Minister for Home Affairs is the legal guardian for all UHMs who fall within the scope of the IGOC Act. To help meet the guardianship responsibilities, the Minister delegates most responsibilities to state or territory governments. Delegated guardians have responsibility for ensuring the minor's basic needs – food, housing, health, education and protection from harm – are met.
- **Care arrangements:** the Minister and his delegated guardians are not obliged to personally provide day-to-day care to the minor. Rather, they identify willing and suitable people (such as a kinship carer or community link) or organisations to provide for the minor's day-to-day care.

The Australian Government, state and territory governments and contracted service providers work together to provide complementary settlement and support services to UHMs through the **Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHM) Program**.<sup>40</sup> This program provides for welfare, supervision and settlement support to minors in relation to:

- welfare and wellbeing;

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<sup>40</sup> For further information about the UHM Program, go to [www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au).

- settlement; and
- transition to adulthood.

Around the country, there are variations of the following care arrangements:

- **Residential support:** under this model the young people live collectively in a home in which there is 24 hour care. It is a more structured model for mid-age UHMs and/or those who lack independent living skills.
- **Kinship care:** UHMs identify someone in the community with whom they would like to live and may be placed with them once the suitability of the individual to act as the UHM's carer is determined. The relevant state child welfare authority takes responsibility for assessment, monitoring and case management.<sup>41</sup>
- **Foster care:** in very rare cases, where a UHM has been identified as being particularly vulnerable or having particular child protection needs, a foster care model may be used. This too is managed by the relevant state child welfare agency.
- **Group homes:** this model is typically used for older minors who were assessed as being capable of independent living. Small groups of young people live together and received support and advice from a non-resident caseworker.

Not all of these models are available in each state and territory. The lack of a national approach is seen as concerning from an Access and Equity perspective on two grounds:

- Currently there are cases where a minor who is supported in one state during the refugee status determination process is required to move to another state when their permanent residence is conferred because there are no suitable care arrangements in the state in which they were living. This causes considerable disruption and also dislocation from friends and supporters.
- There are no national standards of care and support for either programs or carers. As a result, there are significant differences from place to place and between providers/carers.

It must be recognised, however, that this is an evolving area. At the time of writing, the Commonwealth and state child welfare agencies were working together to develop a more nationally consistent program for the care of UHMs, a process actively supported by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network.

## Working with UHMs

As a starting point it is important to recognise that unaccompanied humanitarian minors (UHMs) are not a homogeneous group. We need to take into account the many things that define a person, not least their gender, social age, education and class, as well as their individual experiences of migration and their levels of confidence and agency. Some will

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<sup>41</sup> There are, as yet, no national standards for how this assessment is made. The introduction of these standards is seen by industry groups as a critical protection issue.

be very vulnerable while others will demonstrate considerable resilience and substitute the lack of family support by developing close ties to their peer network.

Bearing all this in mind, there are various issues that those working with UHMs need to consider over and above the 'usual issues' relating to settlement:

➤ **Continuity of care – UAM to UHM**

When a permanent protection visa is granted to an unaccompanied minor, it is probable that the young person will be required to move to a new service provider or support framework. As previously mentioned, this might also involve having to move interstate. This can be very disruptive for the young person as it not only means having to adjust to new care arrangements but also changing schools, leaving friends behind and also, significantly, leaving the group of young people with whom he/she has been living (the *de facto* family).

While DHA endeavours to accommodate the young person's wishes, in many cases the young person has little say about where they go. This can be both frightening for the UHM and also the source of considerable anger and resentment.

In addition, the protocols for referral from one agency to another (especially in cases of an interstate transfer) are evolving. In the past, transfers weren't always seamless and some young people had to go through a whole new assessment process, thereby compounding their anger and/or distress at having been moved.

All workers involved in the transition of a young person from being a UAM to a UHM must be mindful of their responsibility to make this as smooth and seamless as possible. Doing this will require establishing links (if not already existing) with relevant agencies and ensuring that case notes and other details are captured in the transition care plan and shared in a timely manner.

➤ **Settlement service delivery**

Depending on the assessed needs and personal circumstances of the UHM, their primary settlement support needs will either be met by an individual carer or custodian, a contracted service provider or by the relevant state child welfare agency. They might also be eligible for some services under the Humanitarian Settlement Program.

It is important for those working with other agencies to recognise that:

- UHMs are eligible for all mainstream services;
- the specialist agencies supporting UHMs have been working under great pressure to accommodate large numbers of referrals. They need mainstream agencies to engage with these young people to complement their work;
- cooperation and coordination between agencies working with UHMs is the key to the provision of effective settlement support.

It is equally important that those acting in the capacity of custodians engage with mainstream agencies and programs to ensure that the young people in their charge have access to available educational, health, recreational and other services.

➤ **Areas of particular vulnerability**

As previously mentioned, unaccompanied humanitarian minors are often very resourceful and capable – but they can also be very vulnerable. The combination of their traumatic past and complex present circumstances can result in unaccompanied minors:

- being at high risk of disengaging from education or training programs. This might be because the education gap is too wide to bridge, they do not receive the support that they need to remain engaged in education and/or they feel they will never fit in and/or because of the pressure they feel to earn money;
- not being able to find employment because they lack qualifications and skills, especially English language skills;
- disengaging from education, training and employment;
- losing or being unable to secure stable accommodation and therefore being at risk of homelessness – often resorting to ‘couch-surfing’;
- feeling disempowered by a range of accompanying emotions (including grief, loss and a sense of failure);
- being deeply affected by developments in their home country and/or news from their family back home;
- experiencing poor mental and physical health, often compounded by the above.

The key to supporting especially vulnerable UHMs involves a range of complementary strategies including (but not limited to):

- **early intervention:** looking out for warning signs and taking steps to address the issues that are presenting;
- **helping the young person to understand and explore their options:** giving information to the UHM about available options and then helping him/her weigh up the pros and cons of each is often empowering and constructive and will assist in building a young person’s sense of agency;
- **building connections:** endeavouring to link the young person to people or into programs that can provide support;
- **finding a mentor:** the next step from the above is to encourage the UHM to participate in a mentoring program in which they will be linked to another (usually young) person (often from their own background) who can act much like a big brother/sister, providing emotional support, advice and companionship;
- **being there:** letting the young person know that there is someone who can be there for them if and when he/she needs advice and support. Equally important is not letting a UHM about whom you have concerns fall off your radar. Connect with

him/her on a regular basis (even if just to say 'hi, how are things going?') and be available to provide support if required;

- **picking up the pieces:** if things do go very wrong, do something. DSS's Complex Case Support program (see Topic 4) is a good place to start.

It is also relevant to note that if the UHM is someone who falls under the Minister's guardianship, there are certain incidents that must be immediately reported to the minor's delegated guardian. These incidents are if the minor absconds, is taken from the custody of their custodian (including being arrested by the police), becomes seriously ill, meets with a serious accident; or dies.

### ➤ **Life skills**

Unaccompanied humanitarian minors are in many ways already able to function independently, having had to develop a range of survival and independent living skills by default due to having had to cope alone during their journey and while waiting for refugee status to be conferred. They have life experiences that are not shared by the majority of young Australians, and have seen and experienced more in their short lives than most of us do in a lifetime. This does not mean to say, however, that they have the specific knowledge and skills necessary for independent living in Australia. These include job skills and career/education counselling, budgeting and personal banking, the ability to navigate public transportation systems, cooking and house-keeping and personal safety.

The term 'dependently independent' has been used to describe these young people.

Those working with them need to identify both their strengths and the gaps in their knowledge and to draw on the former to tackle the latter. Empowerment has to be at the core of any intervention and independence its objective.

### ➤ **Challenging boundaries**

Like all young people, UHMs will want to challenge boundaries and spread their wings, only in their case they are doing so in an environment where the 'rules' are not as ingrained and where their emotions are clouded by past trauma and ongoing grief, loss and all of the other emotions that come with being a young refugee separated from family, friends and culture.

Then there is a range of other factors that will further complicate things, including but not limited to the following:

- The UHMs have all spent a period of time – sometimes a lengthy period – getting themselves to Australia, living by their wits in foreign countries and overcoming a range of complex challenges. Most don't see themselves as 'children' and don't easily adapt to an environment where there are rules and boundaries.
- The Australian interpretation of rights and responsibilities takes time to learn. When young people learn about the former they don't necessarily understand that rights come with responsibilities attached and are not absolute.

- The time spent in a detention setting often has a profound impact on young people – especially young men. When they are released, they can be impatient to make up for lost time and frustrated by anything or anyone that stands in their way.
- The time in community detention can also have an impact. In response to all their energy and drive and to deflect their minds from the uncertainty of the refugee status determination process, community detention providers offer a range of activities to the UAMs. As UHMs, they have to pay for their activities which may have previously been covered under the community detention program and this can be very confusing and confronting for them.
- Social media is often a critical tool for remaining in contact with family overseas, however it can also present an array of issues, especially for those who have not grown up with how it is used in Australia. This issue will be explored in Topic 10.

Patience and persistence are important when working with UHMs and when challenging behaviour is encountered, so it is necessary to:

- **be very precise and consistent in the messages given;**
- **have clearly defined boundaries;**
- **always be honest;**
- **explain why things are the way they are; provide information and explanations in clear, simple language and be willing to do this multiple times;**
- **be clear about your role and any limits to support that might exist;**
- **ask the young person what they want and support them to manage expectations that may be unrealistic;**
- **avoid excusing bad behaviour (on the basis that the young person is a refugee) - clear boundaries and expectations are critical.**

#### ➤ **Impact of trauma**

Unaccompanied minors tend to have higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms than other young people from refugee backgrounds. They sometimes seek medical care for physical symptoms which are often signs of psychological distress, indicating the importance of pro-actively addressing underlying psychological factors through culturally sensitive, trauma-focused mental health services.

Increasing social interactions by developing community and a sense of home for UHMs helps counteract the sense of isolation. Group peer sessions with professional mental health staff, incorporating skills training to assist with adapting to the new environment can also be beneficial. Where symptoms of PTSD (see Topic 10) present, however, the UHM should be linked to a specialised counselling service.

#### ➤ **Age determination**

The issue of age determination is a major challenge for many asylum receiving countries. When an asylum seeker arrives without identity documentation, and where the issue of age is in dispute, DHA undertakes an age determination assessment so that minors are not placed with unrelated adults and vice versa.

Being assessed as a minor carries some perceived benefits including the level of support provided and access to education. However, it also comes with restrictions. Programs for minors typically impose curfews, require residents to comply with house rules, limit movement etc., all of which is consistent with the duty of care the custodian has towards the minor.

If it is considered that the assessment is incorrect, there is a review mechanism in place. Great care has to be taken and each instance should be considered on a case by case basis. If you have grounds to believe that someone designated as a UHM might be over the age of 18, the responsible course of action is to bring this to the attention of a senior person within your agency.

### ➤ **Foster care**

In particular cases where UHMs are placed in foster care, UHMs can also face challenges, especially if they were accustomed to a high level of independence. They might struggle to adapt to having new surrogate parents and to expectations such as having to let their foster parents know their whereabouts or obeying curfews. Both the young person and the foster parents have to navigate these adjustments together with the support of settlement workers.

The adjustment and negotiation process might be further complicated if the foster parents are not of the same cultural background. The foster parents need to be willing to learn as much as they can about the young person's culture and be open to providing opportunities for him/her to connect with people from the same background. Ethnic settlement workers can play an important role in providing this guidance as they combine cultural skills and knowledge about settlement.

### ➤ **Links to their own communities**

It is not just UHMs in foster care for whom connections to community are relevant. The same is the case for all UHMs. After experiencing the loss of their community of origin, opportunities to connect with people of their own culture are important so they can develop a sense of their own identity and a connection to their heritage.

One way in which this connection can be achieved is through a carefully coordinated and screened mentor relationship with a supportive adult in their new community. A positive connection with at least one adult can be a key indicator of successful transition to adulthood. 'Cultural specialists' – people who immigrated years before and have successfully negotiated the cross-cultural context – can also serve as bridges to the new culture while affirming the culture of origin. In addition, small-scale programs with low staff-to-client ratios allow the young people to form strong professional and therapeutic relationships with adults.

This being said, how and whether the young person is linked to their community has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Just because a person comes from the same country, or even the same ethnic or religious background, does not mean that they will be a good match for the young person. There is a range of complex issues to be considered including class and political affiliation. It is therefore essential that you ask the young person what they want and never assume that they will want to be connected to their cultural community.

➤ **Child Protection**

As previously mentioned, there are significant differences between states and territories in the level and type of engagement of the relevant child protection agency in the life of the UHM. It is important that anyone working with UHMs understand the situation in their own state/territory and for anyone in a custodian role to develop a close working relationship with the caseworkers from the relevant agency.

➤ **Exit strategies when the young person turns 18**

When minors turn 18, they are considered adults and technically are no longer entitled to the additional support to which they had access when they were under 18. In reality it is not nearly so neat as this. It's not like flicking a switch that makes someone 'independent' the day after they were 'vulnerable'.

Some of those turning 18 might be eligible for some Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) services. These services are designed to support settlement and independent living. Learning the skills to effectively transition to adulthood forms part of the services delivered under the UHM Program. Individuals will require varying levels of assistance from adult services depending on their specific needs, strengths and characteristics.

Preparing the way for an unaccompanied minor to move out of a custodial arrangement is very important. It should begin well before the young person turns 18 and continue for some time after. A seamless transition (in so much as there can be such a thing) requires that there be an exit strategy that has been developed in consultation with the young person and which involves the custodian and caseworkers from the relevant settlement agency. Continuity of care is central to this and the young person should not be allowed to feel 'abandoned' or 'cast out'.

➤ **Family reunion**

Unaccompanied minors dream of being reunited with their parents and siblings but the reality is that there are often many impediments to this happening and during certain times in Australia's immigration history, it is much harder than others. The time of writing is a case in point. Since August 2012, the opportunities for family reunion have been significantly reduced<sup>42</sup> and there are few opportunities for UHMs to bring their immediate family to Australia.

Lack of family reunion can have significant mental health implications. These commonly manifest about 6 months after the permanent visa is granted, once the young person has moved beyond the excitement of being found to be a refugee and when the reality that he/she is likely to face indefinite separation from family sinks in. Many might become increasingly depressed or anxious, be reluctant to go to school and/or refuse to engage in support programs. This reaction is commonly exacerbated by grief and a profound sense of failure. Here too, support from specialist torture and trauma agencies is required when such reactions present.

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<sup>42</sup> This is as a result of the policies implemented in response to the Expert Panel's Report (see Topic 3).

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*A Guide to Effective Practice for Mentoring Young People*. Department of Human Services. [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/643754/A\\_Guide\\_to\\_Effective\\_Practice\\_for\\_Mentoring\\_Young\\_People\\_Sep06\\_DPCDw.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/643754/A_Guide_to_Effective_Practice_for_Mentoring_Young_People_Sep06_DPCDw.pdf)

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*Does Age Really Matter?* Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2007. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

## Self-Directed Activities

1. Define 'guardian' and 'custodian' in the context of unaccompanied minors.

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2. Explain the difference between a UAM and UHM.

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3. What is the IGO Act? How is it relevant to unaccompanied minors?

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4. Why do you have to avoid giving advice about anything relating to their application for refugee status to a UAM?

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5. Download and read the MYAN publication *Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors in Australia*.
6. Look on the DHA website to see whether there are any significant policy changes since the MYAN guide was published. What are they?

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7. There are frequently articles in the press about unaccompanied minors. Use a search engine to try to find one of these. Does it reflect what you have learnt about unaccompanied minors? What issues is it raising? Is it sympathetic or unsympathetic? Do you think there might be an agenda behind the article and if so what?

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8. Six challenges for UAMs were presented diagrammatically earlier in this section. Explain each of these challenges. Consider the impact they have on each other and the consequences of this interaction.

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9. If you did not discuss this in class, reflect on the the attributes of unaccompanied minors that those working with them have identified: flexibility, creativity, persistence, patience and the capacity to be both non-judgemental and non-discriminatory. Select two of these and explain how you could draw on them in your work with an unaccompanied minor.

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10. Why is knowing the correct age of a young person so important? What might happen if a person under the age of 18 was assessed as being an adult? What might the consequences be if a person over the age of 18 was assessed as being a minor?

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## Topic 7: Good Practice when Working with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

**Topic 7** focuses on three important issues:

- application of youth work principles to working with young people from refugee backgrounds;
- interaction between young people from refugee backgrounds and indigenous Australians;
- how to become and remain well informed.

### Refugee-Specific Application of Youth Work Principles

Young people from refugee backgrounds are first and foremost 'young people' and those who work with them need to view them as such and shape their work accordingly. This being said, the background of these young people requires workers to apply the generic youth work principles and practice responsibilities in a way that takes account of their experiences of trauma and exile, as well as the many challenges associated with settling in a new country. Further, the particularity of the past experiences makes it necessary for workers to apply some additional principles. Let's begin, however, with the core youth work principles and see how they should be applied when working with this target group.

#### **i. Empowerment**

One of the most important tasks for those working with young people from refugee backgrounds is to support them to regain control over their lives or, for some, to be able to exercise it in a way that has hitherto not been possible. Central to this is supporting a young person to build a sense of agency. How one goes about doing this will be discussed in Topics 8 and 11.

#### **ii. Participation**

As discussed in Topic 2, the refugee experience is characterised by loss of control and disempowerment. Typically decisions are made for them (by UNHCR, government, camp management, other refugees) or things happen quite randomly (as is often the case with initial flight). In some instances young people from refugee backgrounds have very little concept of why they are not living in their home country and some have lived all their lives in a state of limbo in exile.

As has been stressed, respect and empowerment are crucial for supporting young people from refugee backgrounds to adjust to life in Australia. Facilitating participation is a way of giving expression to these and is enacted by ensuring that the young people:

- participate in making decisions and are active participants in the 'support relationship';
- are consulted about decisions relevant to them,
- are given a say in the planning and implementation of programs in which they participate, and
- are trained in the skills that will enable them to participate effectively within their family, in the local community and in wider society.

### **iii. Social Justice**

In Topic 1 we learnt that a social justice approach to youth work recognises that young people are economically, socially and politically disadvantaged as a result of their age. Young people from refugee backgrounds typically face additional economic, social and political disadvantage as a result of their past experiences and the challenges they (and their families) confront reestablishing themselves in Australia AND they lack both a clear understating of their entitlements and what to do if they feel they are being disadvantaged in any way. Further, young people from refugee backgrounds often encounter racism.

Topic 10 examines the impact of and responses to racism and Topic 11 examines the issue of advocacy, including how to support young people to be effective advocates themselves and how to advocate on behalf of young people from refugee backgrounds.

### **iv. Safety**

'Safety' is a very important when working with young people from refugee backgrounds. Many will have experienced period in their lives – sometimes prolonged periods – when they were exposed to high levels of violence and/or lived in an environment of ever-present fear and uncertainty.

The challenge for those working these young people is to create a safe environment. The first thing to remember when seeking to do this is to recognise that 'safe' is a subjective concept, i.e. everyone has their own unique set of things that will make them feel safe. Establishing just what these are for each young person requires employing keen observational skills (looking at how they react in particular environments and/or to certain stimuli). It also involves gaining their trust and talking with them (individually or in a group context) about what safety means to them. This need not necessarily be overt but could be done, for example, in the context of a discussion about where and when to meet, a proposed excursion, the layout of a communal area in the youth centre etc.

**v. Respect**

The concept of respect takes on particular importance when working with young people from refugee backgrounds because one of the things the refugee experience does is to challenge one's sense of self and world view.

As will be discussed in Topic 8, one of the objectives of working with young people from refugee backgrounds is to support them in building confidence and skills to make decisions and take on challenges; another is to help them to identify their own strengths. You cannot succeed in doing either if the young person suspects that you don't believe they can do this. Your words and body language have to demonstrate that you value the young person and have confidence in his/her ability to accomplish the goals they have identified and which you are supporting them to achieve.

From the perspective of a young person from a refugee background, respect is not just about how others see them; it is also about how they view themselves. The normal identity issues of adolescence are magnified by the fact that when they first arrive, young people from refugee backgrounds are acutely aware that they don't speak or are not fluent in English, don't understand the nuances of the (youth) culture, don't have friends, don't have fancy clothes, don't have the same 'gadgets' as the other young people and so on. It is very easy for this to undermine a young person's sense of self-respect and their confidence to interact with others. This is why it is so important for programs for young people from refugee backgrounds to include non-threatening opportunities for them to mix with others from similar backgrounds (so they learn that they are not alone) and from other backgrounds to learn about other cultures and break down barriers, fears and prejudices.

**vi. Connectedness**

Young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community, is critical. As discussed in Topics 2 and 5, both 'family' and 'community' can be complex and sometimes painful concepts for young people from refugee backgrounds. Focus must therefore be on strengthening existing supports and building new connections, especially for those young people (such as unaccompanied minors) who have few connections and supports structures within Australia.

**vii. Health and Well-Being**

In Topic 2, reference was made to the impact of the refugee experience on the health and well-being of young people. Their health might have been compromised by (amongst other things) poor nutrition, exposure to diseases/parasites and lack of access to medical/dental care. Some carry injuries. Most will have been traumatised.

In Topic 4, reference was made to the specialised refugee health services available in each state and territory. Further, Topic 10 includes guidance on working with survivors of trauma.

### **viii. Transitions**

Topic 4 highlighted some of the key transition points for young people from refugee backgrounds. It is important for those working with them to recognise the additional stress that these transition points bring and be ready to provide necessary support.

## **Application of Practice Responsibilities**

### **a. Primary Consideration**

This is about genuinely representing and advocating for the young person. It is not about advocating for what you think is best or coercing the young person to do what you think they should do.

Young people from refugee backgrounds have come from an environment in which they had little choice over big things in their lives. They are now in an environment that is alien and where neither they nor their parents (if they have any) are well equipped to negotiate the complex array of services with which they are required to deal and to make informed choices. It is the role of those working with them to support and guide the young people and their parents through this process.

Doing this in a way that ensures the best interests of the young person are at the centre requires many things, not least:

- building a relationship of trust with the young person (see Topic 8);
- understanding the background and experiences of the young person and their family (see later in this Topic);
- being culturally responsive (see Topic 8);
- asking the young person about their opinions and needs and understanding these in the way they have articulated them;
- being mindful of the young person's family circumstances;
- providing the young person with information about available options;
- asking the young person and understanding their views/needs as they articulate them;
- supporting the young person to assess each of the options;
- ensuring the young person is able to express options;
- respecting the opinions proffered;
- being non-judgmental;
- engaging in reflective listening (see Topic 8);
- being clear about the young person's opinions and choices;
- progressing and/or representing these as best you can.

### **b. Duty of Care**

Duty of Care has many dimensions including:

- physical protection (for example not placing them in harm's way by allowing them to engage in activities where there is an unnecessary or unmanaged risk);
- emotional protection (e.g. not creating a rift between parents/carers and the young person through inappropriate disclosure);
- not exposing them to abuse (from staff, other young people or volunteers);

It requires that workers:

- endeavour to learn about what is happening in the life of the young person and how this might affect them;
- carefully assess the risks of any response or intervention;
- manage the response or intervention in such a way that risks are removed or minimised;
- ensure they comply with their organisational or sectoral policies and procedures.

The refugee dimension of this requires that workers do all of the above, while being mindful that:

- having not grown up in Australia, the young people might not be as familiar with the inherent risks of living in Australia (e.g. the dangers involved in water activities, exploring the bush, etc.) or the importance of using those things that are designed to protect people (e.g. bicycle helmets, seat belts, etc.);
- the relationship between young people from refugee backgrounds and their parents/carers is often already strained by the complexities of settlement (as discussed in Topic 5) so it is important to focus on strengthening connection to or within families;
- many young people from refugee backgrounds will experience some form of racism (see Topic 10);
- there will be a myriad of other ways in which the young person's lack of proficiency in English and/or lack of familiarity with Australian culture and lifestyle might place them in situations of risk.

The challenge for workers is to know the young person, be able to identify and assess the risks involved for that particular individual in the context of their interaction with them and work with him/her to minimise these risks.

### **c. Privacy and Confidentiality**

Privacy and confidentiality are essential components of all work in the human services sector but they take on an additional dimension when working with people who come from countries in which there are very serious consequences when personal information falls into the wrong hands. Further, many young people from refugee backgrounds still have family members in these countries and it is not inconceivable that things said to the 'wrong people' in Australia could place those in the home country in danger. Preserving confidentiality is thus essential both for establishing and retaining a relationship of trust with the young person from a refugee background with whom you are working and for ensuring that you do not inadvertently place others' lives at risk. Further, it is important to convey the concept of confidentiality to young people, including its limitations.

**d. Boundaries**

This issue will be also be addressed in Topic 12.

Reference might be made at this stage to the fact that the potential vulnerability of young people from refugee backgrounds makes maintaining a professional relationship particularly important, though good practice with young people might mean accommodating different boundaries than those articulated in traditional support or welfare professions, e.g. sharing a meal with a young person's family.

If the worker is from the same background as the young person, the issue of boundaries can become even more complicated - and important. This is covered in the Trainer's Guide for **CHCSW402B: Bicultural Work with Refugees**.

**d. Transparency, Honesty and Integrity**

Building trust and respect requires openness, honesty and integrity. Young people from refugee backgrounds will all have had times when their hopes have been shattered and when people have hidden things from them (sometimes for their own good). If the young person is to trust you enough to share their story and their fears with you, you need to repay this by being entirely honest and open with them. This involves explaining what you can do, what you can't do (and why) and what you won't do (because you believe it will be detrimental for them if you were to do it).

**e. Social Context**

When considering the social context when working with young people from refugee backgrounds it is necessary to take into account not only the current circumstances of the young person in Australia but also their past experiences and the interplay between these experiences and their current life. Relevant background in relation to this has been covered in Topics 2, 4 and 5 and will be explored further in Topic 11.

**f. Anti-Oppressive Practice**

By definition, the refugee experience is about persecution. People from refugee backgrounds know what it is to be treated differently and to be denied things others take for granted.

Good practice involves ensuring that the young person does not receive any lesser outcomes because of their background. It should also include reinforcing with the young person that they have the right within Australia to receive the same level of support as other young Australians and supporting them to advocate for themselves when they encounter problems with access to services (see Topic 11).

Further, when you are working with people whose background is very different to your own, even greater care has to be taken to ensure that you do not allow stereotypes or prejudices to influence the way you interact with them or respond to their needs. Adherence to the Codes of Practice outlined in Topic 1 (or the equivalent for the sector in which you work) and your organisation's protocol is

essential, as is ensuring that your colleagues and other workers show similar respect for ethical practice.

**g. Cooperation and Collaboration**

As outlined in Topic 4, supporting the settlement of young people from refugee backgrounds is something in which a wide range of services play essential roles. No one agency – or one worker – can or should attempt to meet all of the needs of the young person. Cooperation and collaboration should be seen as core components of anyone’s work and it is valuable for workers to either participate in or ensure they are briefed about sectoral interagency meetings.

**h. Knowledge and Skills**

The composition of the Refugee and Special Humanitarian program is constantly changing. Workers need to know about the background and experiences of each new group of entrants. Similarly, government policies with respect to refugees and their entitlements change on a regular basis and new service types are introduced. Likewise in the community sector, new resources and initiatives are introduced on a regular basis. In order to support their clients, workers need to keep up to date and engage in an ongoing process of professional development.

**i. Self-Awareness and Self-Care**

As explained at the beginning of this section, self-awareness will be examined in more detail in Topic 12. Suffice it to say at this stage that understanding how your own characteristics and values will influence the way they are perceived by the young person is very important when working with young people from refugee backgrounds. This is crucial for the establishment of a relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

Topic 12 will also consider vicarious traumatisation, i.e. the process of transfer of trauma from the young people from refugee backgrounds to those working with them. How it manifests and how to prevent it will be discussed. This work is often complex and self-care is a critical component of good practice.

**j. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples**

See separate section below.

## **Additional Principles and Practice Responsibilities**

As you will see from the above, each of the youth work principles and ways of working has an important and particular application when working with young people from refugee backgrounds.

It can be suggested that the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds also require workers to ensure their work practices focus on some principles and practices that are implicit within the YACVic framework (upon which the previous section was based) but

are worthy of specific emphasis. In class you might have thought of some. They might be the ones listed below. They could be others. It is not suggested that the following is an all-inclusive list – just some additional principles seen as being relevant for those working with young people from refugee backgrounds.

**a. Understanding**

When you are working with people from a background similar to your own, you might not have shared the experiences of your clients but you can envisage what their life might be like. When you are working with young people from very different backgrounds, such as indigenous youth or young people from refugee backgrounds, unless you have shared this experience or have spent time in their communities, you cannot really understand the complexity of their circumstances unless you make a real effort to do so.

Because of the importance of building an understanding of the background and circumstances of the young person, the following section has been devoted to a discussion of how to do this.

**b. Trust**

Trust is linked to and derived from many of the Youth Work Principles set out above. It is subsumed within 'best interests' and reflected in many of the others including 'respect', 'duty of care' and 'confidentiality', but it is so important when working with young people from refugee backgrounds that it needs to be highlighted.

It is probable that young people from refugee backgrounds will have encountered many people who have abused them, lied to them, promised things they have not delivered and/or let them down badly. They also are likely to have lived in countries where governments or government representatives are never to be trusted. When they first come to Australia it is hard for them to come to terms with the fact that things might be different here. They might still be suspicious and reluctant to believe that you are working in their best interests. They also have limited or no understanding of the service system and your role within it.

Trust is something that has to be earned. It will take time and patience – and firm adherence to all of the other Youth Work Principles.

**c. Flexibility**

As will be discussed in Topic 12, anyone working with young people in general – and young people from refugee backgrounds are no exception – has to expect the unexpected and be willing to respond appropriately, genuinely responding to a young person's (often changing) needs. Unless you are able to think on your feet and be prepared to make changes, you will quickly find that it will be very hard to achieve your objectives and you will frequently end up feeling frustrated and thwarted.

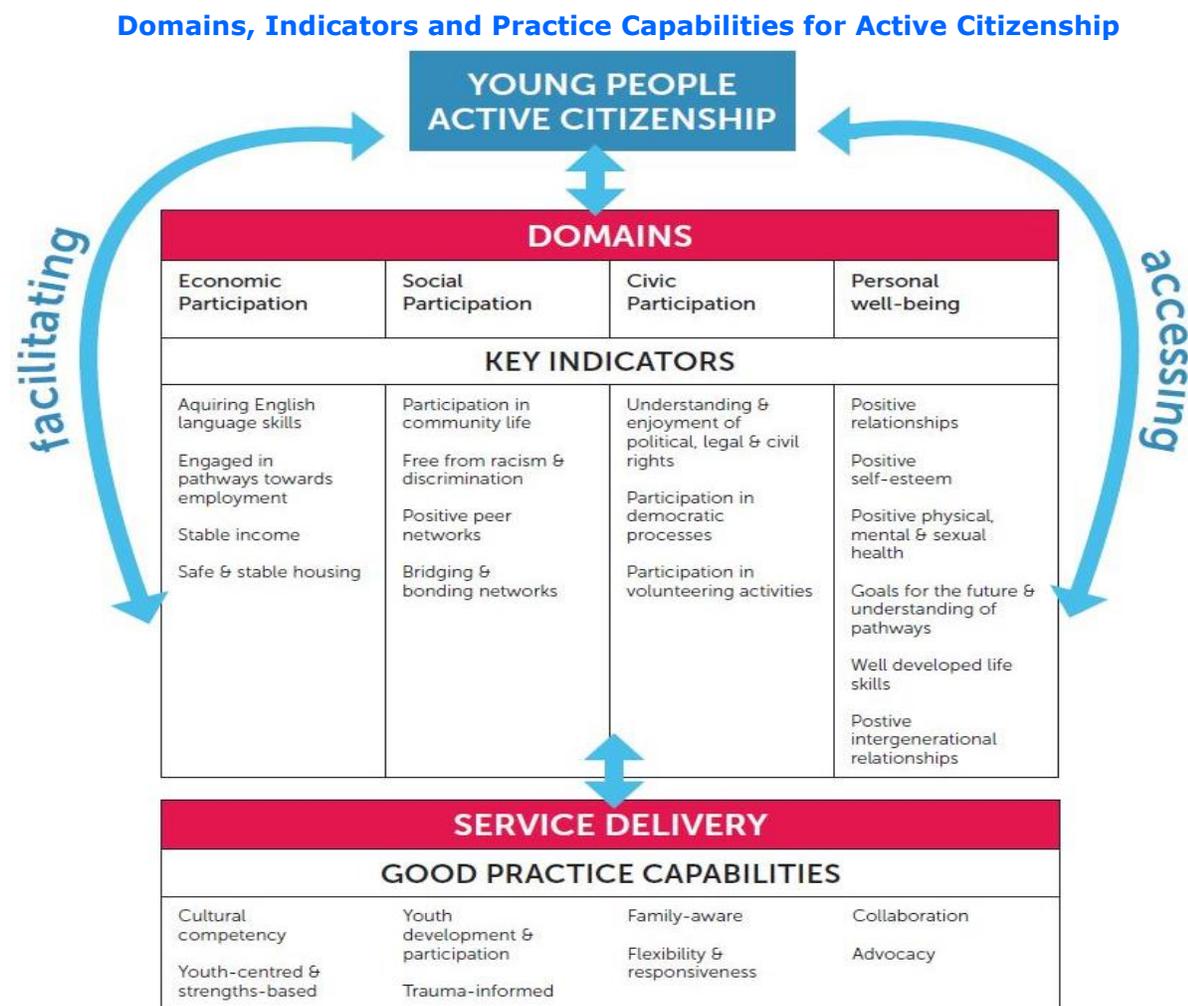
**d. Fun**

Young people like having fun and like doing things that are seen as fun. Young people from refugee backgrounds have often had very little fun in their lives so injecting fun into activities for this group should be seen as especially important.

## National Youth Settlement Framework

To support a targeted approach to addressing the needs of young people in settlement, in May 2016, the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) launched the **National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF)**. A conceptual and practical resource, the NYSF provides an evidence-based approach to good practice in youth settlement. It is designed to inform service planning and delivery across the settlement and youth sectors.

The following table is a schematic representation of the NYSF. For the full version and explanatory notes go to [www.myan.org.au](http://www.myan.org.au).



## Interaction with Indigenous Australians

Before moving on from the discussion about good practice, there is one other important issue to raise. In many parts of the country, in particular in rural and regional areas, people from refugee backgrounds are settling alongside an established community of Aborigines and/or Torres Strait Islanders. In such cases, education of both groups is important to avoid misunderstandings developing. This is best accomplished through a multi-pronged strategy:

- Wherever possible, it is both respectful and valuable for those involved in supporting the settlement of refugees to engage with local indigenous elders to explain who the new arrivals are and what services they will be receiving. This has two important functions. First it acknowledges the role of the indigenous community as custodians of the land. Second it ensures that key people within the indigenous community understand who the people are and their entitlements. This can help to dampen any rumours or scuttlebutt within the indigenous community that the new arrivals are receiving preferential treatment.
- Those working with people from refugee backgrounds, especially younger people, need to be very careful to model respect for indigenous Australians. While the special place Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have in Australia is covered in orientation sessions, new entrants detect community prejudices and some are also slow to shake off the prejudices with which they arrived.
- There is great value in organising activities (sporting, recreational, cultural or social) that enable young people from refugee backgrounds to mix with young indigenous Australians. The best way to address prejudices is for young people to get to know each other and recognise the many things they have in common.

## Informing Yourself

Related to but distinct from the responsibility of workers to participate in professional development is the importance of being informed about the young people with whom you are working. The breadth and depth of the information a worker needs of course varies according to their role. The rule of thumb in this case is **need to know**. If a worker's role does not require them to know personal details, they should not seek them – but it is important that they know about young people from refugee backgrounds in general terms. Those working closely with a young person will need to have a more sophisticated understanding of contextual issues and will also need to know the information about the young person that is relevant to their work with them.

Informing yourself should not be seen as a task that can be done in a few spare minutes or at the last minute before you dash out to meet someone from a group with whom you have not worked before. It is a task that requires time, and the more effort you put into learning about the background and circumstances of the young people with whom you are working, the more effective you will be in connecting with them and being able to support them in a culturally appropriate way.

### **A Cautionary Note**

Gathering information about a young person is often an area of practice where young people's rights are not upheld. Some workers, particularly those supporting other family members, do not uphold confidentiality or follow appropriate referral protocols because they fail to consider the rights of the young person having assumed (often unconsciously) that the rights of the young person are secondary or of lesser concern than those of adults.

There are also some workers (often those new to the field) who wish to gather a lot of information about a young person that is not relevant to the support relationship/their role, e.g. experiences of torture/trauma and/or the journey to Australia and/or the young person's reasons for leaving their country of origin.

When seeking to inform yourself, you need to know:

- where to go to get information;
- what to look for;
- what to do with the information you have found.

## **Where to Get Information**

The first thing most people do when seeking information is to go to a search engine such as Google. This can lead to some very useful information but there are some things about which you should be mindful when selecting which sites you use:

- Some sources of information are far more reputable than others.
- When engaging in web-based research, it is important to think carefully about the source and whether it might be biased.
- Reputable sources of information about country situations, entrant groups and human rights include:
  - ✓ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
  - ✓ Department of Social Services (DSS)<sup>43</sup>
  - ✓ BBC World
  - ✓ Amnesty International
  - ✓ Human Rights Watch
  - ✓ US Committee for Refugees
  - ✓ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

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<sup>43</sup> Of particular value are the DSS Community Profiles listed in the Reference section at the end of this Topic.

- Wikipedia can provide some very useful basic information but it should not be regarded as a reputable source. This is because information can be posted (or altered) by anyone and there are no guarantees of accuracy.
- Information posted by the governments of source and receiving countries can be biased or misleading, as can information posted by some political and advocacy groups.

It is also possible to deduce information about those with whom you are working from their **visa subclass**. As was identified in Topic 3 and will be further explained below, some visa subclass numbers should alert workers to the possibility that entrants might have needs additional to and/or distinct from other humanitarian entrants. Similarly, if you have access to it, you can learn useful information in advance of a person's arrival from DHA's Humanitarian Entrants Management System and the Health Manifest, both of which are provided to the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) agency responsible for assisting newly arrived or visaed humanitarian entrants.

Further, members of the **entrants' communities** are an invaluable source of background information but it is important to keep certain things in your mind when you are gathering information from them. These include:

- whether the people already in Australia are from the same group (religious/ethnic etc.) as the entrants or from another group ... and possibly even from the same group as those who persecuted the new arrivals;
- how representative the people to whom you are speaking are? Are they community leaders (hence probably older men) and might it be possible and/or more informative for you to speak with young people from within the community;
- might the opinions of those to whom you are speaking be biased in any way? Bias can be in favour of the entrants – they might be keen to present an overly rosy picture of the new arrivals, thinking that this will reinforce the good standing of their community. On the other hand, they might be dismissive of the new arrivals, especially if they think their experiences were less severe than their own or they think they might bring their community into disrepute (this is common from communities speaking about those who come by boat seeking asylum);
- how much do they actually know about the experiences of the entrants? Sometimes they will know a great deal because they have been in regular contact with them (maybe some are even family members or close friends) but in other cases, they might not know much at all (having left their country before any of the troubles started), and pride or ignorance will prevent them from disclosing the limitations in their knowledge.

The young people with whom you are working are also invaluable sources of information but you should always do some preliminary research. Once you have an understanding of their background, culturally appropriate ways of interacting with them and the issues about which you need to be particularly sensitive, you can engage with the young people and encourage them to share with you information they feel is relevant for you to know. Over time you might learn more about their story but you need to be careful to allow

them to tell you this in their own time and you should never press them if they seem to be reluctant to divulge certain information.

## **What Information to Look For**

General background reading has its place but there are certain things that are important to look for when you are seeking to find out information about a new group of entrants and/or a new young person with whom you will be working.

In addition to general background information about their country of origin (especially its recent history), you should be looking for information about:

- demographics and culture, including but not limited to:
  - ethnic groups within the country – and how they relate to each other;
  - language(s) and dialects spoken – in particular by different ethnic groups;
  - religion(s) – and the significance of these within the country and/or to the adherents;
  - levels of education and health care - and whether there is a significant urban-rural divide in relation to these;
  - familiarity of groups within the country with western technology/lifestyle;
  - dress standards;
  - diet (in particular preferences and religious/cultural prescriptions);
  - polite forms of address (e.g. should you use some form of honorific e.g. the equivalent of 'miss' or 'mister' when addressing the young person or their parent or an elder within the community);
  - naming conventions (i.e. what part of their name do you use when addressing someone);
  - whether there are any sensitivities around body language (things that are polite or impolite to do);
  - attitudes towards young people, elders and other groups within the culture; etc.
- the refugee experience:
  - the situation in the country of origin that caused people to flee;
  - how long the instability has gone on for;
  - which groups have been targeted, how and why;
  - what the persecuted groups experienced in their country;
  - what is happening in that country now that might have an impact on refugees from that country; etc.
- the experience in exile, e.g:
  - where have refugees fled to;
  - are refugees in that country in camps or living in the community;
  - what is the security situation like for refugees;
  - how are refugees treated by the local population/by police;
  - what has been their level of access to education and health care;
  - are the refugees allowed to work;

- how long have the refugees been in exile;
- which are the particularly vulnerable groups within the refugee population in that country; etc?

It is also a very good idea to learn some simple words in the entrant's language: welcome, good morning/afternoon/evening, please, thank you, hello, goodbye, yes, no, maybe ... Note these should be used in conjunction with what you have learnt about polite ways of interacting, e.g. do you shake hands (or never shake hands), do you look someone in the eye (or avoid doing this)? etc.

When you have built up a generic picture, you can start gathering information about the background of the young person with whom you will be working. Depending on your information needs, you might wish to focus on:

- language(s) spoken;
- level of English;
- ethnicity;
- religion;
- class and status within their society;
- issues pertinent to connecting (or not connecting) them to members of their own community;
- family composition;<sup>44</sup>
- health status and medical needs;
- level of familiarity with western technology and lifestyle;
- level of education;
- other factors of particular relevance to the individual.

Once you begin working with the young person, it is possible to contextualise this information and also to explore those things that help you to get to know the young person as an individual, things such as:

- their roles and responsibilities within their family;
- who makes the decisions within their family;
- their family's expectations of them;
- the extent to which their parents/carers are comfortable with them engaging with the wider community;
- their interests and pastimes;
- their aspirations for the future;
- any other issues of concerns of particular relevance to the individual.

Another potentially valuable and often overlooked source of information is the young person's visa subclass. For example, it is reasonable to begin with the assumption that anyone with a Woman at Risk (visa subclass 204) will either be the child of a woman who has been highly traumatised or, if the entrant is a young woman, someone who herself is highly traumatised. Issues around trust and safety will thus be of particular importance, so too will be medical (possibly gynaecological) assessment. Similarly, one can assume someone holding an Emergency Rescue visa (visa subclass 203) is coming from acute,

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<sup>44</sup> Great sensitivity should be employed around the issue of family composition, especially when engaging with a young person. It is possible, even probable, that some family members might be dead, imprisoned, missing or in very vulnerable circumstances overseas.

recent turmoil, will have had no preparation for travel and will need additional assistance (and sensitive care) upon arrival.

Another important part of the puzzle is the support the young person is currently receiving and what they will may need (although this is best determined through your engagement with the young person). As stressed in previous topics, there might be a variety of people and agencies working with the young person to support their settlement and it is important to negotiate with the young person about the information they are comfortable with you sharing with other agencies/workers. If you are not already familiar with the agencies relevant for the young person, find out as much as you can about them, including referral pathways and protocols. If the young person has special needs, for example some form of disability, ensure you also familiarise yourself with these specialist services.

And yet another part of the puzzle is the policy environment in which you are working. It is essential that you are up to date with relevant policy decisions, in particular those that relate to service eligibility. The websites of the relevant government agencies are the best guide in relation to this.

Not everything, however, comes from documents, websites and colleagues. Once you have collected the contextual information about the young person and have done your homework about their background and the current service environment, you need to engage with the young person as there is a great deal of information only they can tell you. As previously mentioned, however, you need to have earned their trust for them to share important information, such as their hopes and aspirations, with you. And an important point to remember: **never make assumptions**. You might think you know something about the young person, but until you have checked it with him/her, don't treat it as fact.

## What to Do With the Information

It's not enough to know about the background and culture of the young person, you must use this information wisely.

The information you have gathered should, amongst other things:

- guide you in the way you interact with the young person and his/her family;
- help you to select an appropriate interpreter;
- inform your thinking about settlement needs;
- help you to appreciate and find ways to acknowledge the strength and resilience the young person has acquired on their journey;
- assist you to identify whether there are any special needs;
- enable you to determine how you can assist/support the young person, including which needs to prioritise;
- help you to determine the agencies to whom you might need to refer the young person;
- consider how best to complement the work of other agencies/workers;
- enable you to make informed decisions about whether to link the young person to their community and if so, which part of the community;

- consider the recreational or social links you might facilitate; etc.

Something that occasionally happens is that you discover the information you have been given about a young person (e.g. their date of birth, ethnicity or relationship with others) is incorrect. In such cases, you should discuss this with the young person and your manager or supervisor. If deemed necessary to do so, the anomaly should be brought to the attention of a relevant agency once the young person's informed consent has been obtained.

## References

*The Good Practice Principles Guide for Working with Refugee Young People.*

[www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/good-practice-principles-guide-for-working-with-refugee-young-people](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/good-practice-principles-guide-for-working-with-refugee-young-people).

*Youth Work with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds;* plus other Centre for Multicultural Youth Good Practice Guides. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

*Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector.* Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

T Corney and L Hoiles. *Victorian Youth Sector Code of Ethical Practice: Consultation Draft.* Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. 2007. [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

### Useful websites:

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

Human Rights Watch: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

Amnesty International: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

US Committee for Refugees: [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

Refugee Council of Australia: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

BBC World: [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)

Department of Social Services: [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)

Department of Home Affairs: [www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)

### DSS Community Profiles:

As mentioned in Topic 3, DSS makes available Community Profiles to assist service providers to gain a better understanding of the backgrounds and needs of Humanitarian Program arrivals. The Profiles contain information on key settlement locations, demographic characteristics of recent arrivals, likely settlement needs and cultural and country backgrounds. Go to [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/community-profiles](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/community-profiles) to download Word or PDF versions.

**YouTube:**

DHA and DSS have their own channels on the popular video sharing website YouTube which feature stories and reports about various aspects of the immigration story. Go to [www.youtube.com/ImmiTV](http://www.youtube.com/ImmiTV) and [www.youtube.com/user/fahcsia](http://www.youtube.com/user/fahcsia).

**Self-Directed Activities**

1. Compare and contrast the Good Practice Principles outlined in this Topic with the Code of Conduct for the profession in which you work.

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2. Noor is a 19 year old Rohingya young man born in Bangladesh in a refugee camp. Noor had lost his parents in the conflict and arrived in Australia 2 years ago with his uncle and aunt who have adopted him. Select three Good Practice Principles and explain how they might be applied when working with Noor.

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3. Suggest a strategy for building cross-cultural understanding between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island youth and young people from refugee backgrounds.

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4. Select a country from which refugees are coming to Australia that you have not already investigated. Use the framework outlined in the notes for this Topic to find out more about the possible needs of refugees from this country settling in Australia.

5. Approach a local migrant resource centre or other agency that works with migrants and refugees. Ask to meet with a worker who comes from a refugee community. Ask the worker to explain the key issues for people from his/her background, in particular young people.

## Topic 8: Core Skills for Working with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

**Topic 8** explores the core skills required for working with young people from refugee backgrounds. In Topic 6 you will learn about how to:

- make a good first impression;
- create a youth-friendly space;
- communicate with young people from refugee backgrounds; and
- build relationships.

You will also learn about good practice models.

### Making a Good First Impression

There is a lot of truth in the old saying “you only have one chance to make a good first impression”. Your first meeting with a young person from a refugee background will set up the tone for the relationship between you. It is therefore worthwhile thinking carefully about what you say and what you do. Here are some hints:

**Greet in culturally appropriate way – use first language greeting**

**Be ‘present’ for the person – focus on them – avoid distractions**

**Have the humility to appreciate another cultural viewpoint**



**Meet somewhere the young person feels safe**

**Don't rush things – let young person dictate the pace**

**Watch for and respond to verbal and non verbal cues**

It is also very important to be clear from the outset about the **boundaries** of your role. Young people often perceive workers as a typical friend. This can be confusing for the young person when the worker can not fulfil their wishes or the worker doesn't act outside of their role.

**Managing Expectations**  
(a helpful hint from a worker)

One practical way we manage expectations is to sit with the young people from refugee backgrounds when they arrive and talk openly about what we can and can't do. We draw a circle on paper and talk about what's inside the circle (what we can do) and what is outside (what we can't do). Then later when a staff member is asked by a young person to share their personal phone number for example, the staff member says "no, that's outside the circle" and it seems to be a simple explanation that they understand rather than leave them feeling confused as to why or offended. From the start it sets up the limitations as well as the young person's rights in the relationship which helps maintain a healthy working relationship. It has been a very practical tool for us and especially for the bi-lingual workers who are particularly challenged with dealing with the young people's expectations of them.

## Creating a Youth-Friendly Space

It's no accident that the places in which youth programs are run don't look like traditional offices. This is because offices can be very intimidating to young people. They embody a power relationship and are not places to which a young person can easily connect. When you are working with young people from refugee backgrounds, the physical space is no less important than it is for any other type of youth work.

Young people themselves are the best ones to provide advice about what constitutes a youth-friendly space so wherever possible it is good to involve them when planning and decorating the space in which programs for young people from refugee backgrounds are run.



### Typically youth-friendly spaces:

- **are informal and colourful**
- **are decorated with things done by young people**
- **have spaces where people can be quiet/private and other spaces where people can make a noise**
- **display images representing cultural diversity**
- **don't necessarily have to be inside a building**

When working with young people from refugee backgrounds, the issue of 'safety' is also important because of their past experiences. Safety is a subjective concept so there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all 'safe space' but there are some things that can contribute to creating a place in which a person feels safe. These include:

- avoiding situations where you sit between the young person and the door;
- using ways other than a closed door to create a place in which you can speak privately;
- letting the young people know who any unfamiliar adults are who come to the centre;
- unless absolutely necessary, not taking notes or typing while you are with the young person;
- advising the young people when there is likely to be any changes in procedures or routines;
- being mindful about whether there are gender issues to be considered;
- avoiding creating a situation of power imbalance.

Further, the more you get to know the young person, the more you are likely to understand the things that might trigger feelings of unease or anxiety, so building a relationship with the person is key.

## Relationship Building and Communication

At the heart of any form of youth work is the relationship between the worker and the young person – and this is no different when working with young people from refugee backgrounds. There are some key qualities for which you should aim in your relationship with a young person from a refugee background:



Key to doing this is **good communication**. Being a good communicator requires you to be proficient in a number of separate and complementary skills including:

- communicating with young people from refugee backgrounds and their families;
- working with interpreters;
- listening skills;
- complementary communication techniques.

## Communicating with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

One of the challenges of communicating with young people from refugee backgrounds is recognising the necessity of drawing upon three distinct but interrelated sets of communication skills:

- communicating with young people;
- cross-cultural communication;
- communicating with people from refugee backgrounds.

As discussed in Topic 1, adolescence is a time when all young people (including those from refugee backgrounds) are finding their identity. They like to be taken seriously and treated with respect; they have opinions and wish to express them; and they have doubts that older people can either understand 'where they are at' or contribute anything useful. It flows from this that there are some key things to bear in mind when interacting with young people:



**Be available**

**Be interested**

**Reflect on what they are saying**

**Think carefully before you respond**

**Don't be judgemental**

**Use humour**

**Use open questions**

**Emphasise the positive**

**Encourage learning**

**Use simple, clear language**

**Don't assume**

The next skill you need to master is **cross cultural communication**. Young people from refugee backgrounds might – or might not – have adopted the 'culture' of Australian adolescents. It will depend on how long they have been in Australia, how much they mix with young people from other backgrounds and their attitudes towards the cultural mores of their country of origin/former residence.

Cross cultural communication involves both **cultural awareness** and **self-awareness**.

First you need to know:

- the place young people have within society and their family (i.e. are they valued and given a voice or expected to be submissive and obedient?);
- whether there are gender elements to the above;
- verbal and non-verbal communication conventions;

- how these factors are likely to influence the way the young person will engage with a worker undertaking a particular role;
- how you are likely to be perceived by the young person, in particular how your gender, age, ethnicity and other defining characteristics will influence the way they view you. This will be discussed in more depth in Topic 12.

But this is just the beginning. This knowledge should then be used to inform how you apply other relevant communication skills. The following diagram demonstrates this:



The third aspect of the identity of a young person from a refugee background that is relevant to consider is their **refugee background**. The refugee experience is characterised by, amongst other things, fear, uncertainty, rumours, misinformation, distrust and disrespect. Connecting with young people who have spent their formative years in such an environment requires both understanding how things have been for them and a commitment to help them to learn a new way of relating and engaging.

Insight into how to do this can be drawn from the research referred to in Topic 4.<sup>45</sup> In their responses to questions about this, the young people indicated that they wanted those working with young people from refugee backgrounds to:

- be respectful;
- be honest;
- listen carefully to what the young people want and feel;

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<sup>45</sup> *Perspectives of Settlement: Views of young people from refugee backgrounds*. University of Sydney, Multicultural Development Association and Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2013.

- ensure they give the young people enough accurate information so they can make informed decisions;
- keep the young people informed about matters relevant to them;
- take the young person's wishes into consideration;
- ensure they deliver on the promises they make;
- be well informed about the circumstances from which refugees come;
- be knowledgeable about the services and supports available;
- respect confidentiality.

They also indicated that they wanted emotional support as well as practical support, especially during times of transition, with this sometimes being as simple as having someone who is prepared to listen to them.

## Working with Interpreters

Interpreters<sup>46</sup> play an essential role when you are working with someone whose proficiency in English is less than that required for you to communicate that which you need to communicate. In other words:

- if a young person has no English, you will need an interpreter for all interactions;
- if a young person has limited English, you might be able to communicate in a limited way (such as to arrange an appointment) but you will need an interpreter for any substantive matters;
- if a young person had quite good English skills, it can still be valuable to engage an interpreter when discussing complex or sensitive matters where it is essential that the young person accurately understands what you are saying and where it is important that the young person can express what s/he wants to say.

Be sure to ask the young person before you engage an interpreter. Some young people might be resistant to your engaging a professional interpreter. It is important to explore the reasons for this and endeavor to address any concerns. You might want to convey the benefits of doing so and that it is not a reflection on their lack of English language skill.

When working with an interpreter you should:

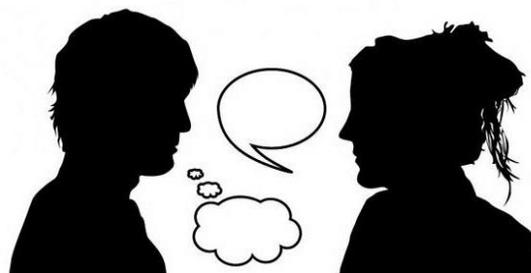
**Select an appropriate interpreter:**

think of gender, ethnicity, religion etc

**Be vigilant** for signs that young person is uncomfortable

**Be "present":** don't get distracted by other things

**Focus on the young person** not the interpreter



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<sup>46</sup> For information on the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's Translating and Interpreting Service go to [www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au).

One of the things a young person from a refugee background is likely to be worried about is whether anything s/he says might get back to their parents or carers. It is therefore advisable to avoid using interpreters from within the young person's community and probably much better to use a telephone (rather than face-to-face) interpreter. If you get the sense that the young person fears disclosure, you might like to suggest to them that they can choose another name for you to use while you are engaging with a telephone interpreter to lessen the likelihood that the young person will be recognised. You should also tell the young person that interpreters are bound by professional confidentiality and explain what this means.

**Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National**  
**Phone 131 450**

## Listening Skills

Communication is as much about listening as it is about speaking and good listening skills need honing. This is especially the case when you are working in a cross-cultural context and even more so when you are working with someone with whom there is a power imbalance.

Effective listening is not just something you do with your ears. It has just as much to do with your eyes and your brain, and it is also about what the interaction 'feels like'. Much has been written about effective listening but it is possible to draw from this some core principles that are relevant when engaging with young people from refugee backgrounds, most particularly when the interaction is about something important. Key things to remember are as follows:

- **Think** carefully about what the young person has said. Ask yourself whether they have been able to express themselves freely. Does what they are saying make sense with other things you know? Do you get the sense that they are holding back? Etc.
- **Watch** how the young person responds to what you are saying. Is their non-verbal response consistent with what you have asked/said? Do they look like they are following the conversation? Etc.
- **Don't assume** the young person has understood what you have said because they have said "yes" in response to a question about whether this is the case. Find a respectful way to ask them to articulate the key messages.
- Do all of the above while being mindful of the possible impact the **young person's culture, family situation and other relevant factors** might have.

## Complementary Communication Strategies

A variety of techniques can be used when language is a barrier to communication. These include but are by no means limited to:

- using diagrams to explain things, e.g. the way to travel from one place to another by public transport;
- using non-verbal cues to make the young person feel welcome and respected;
- using non-verbal cues to assess how the client is feeling or the extent to which s/he has understood what you are saying;
- asking the young person to draw pictures of things about which you need to know, e.g. the people with whom they live, the people important to them, a place they feel safe, things they are frightened of etc.

**Creativity and flexibility** are required to use complementary communication strategies effectively.

## Applying Good Practice Principles

Topic 7 explored Good Practice Principles that should be applied when working with young people from refugee backgrounds. In the following section we will explore some of the ways these principles should be applied.

Core skills for working with young people from refugee backgrounds:



**Identify the young person's strengths and potential**

**Facilitate decision making**

**Build resilience**

**Promote participation**

**Work alongside the young person to build a sense of agency**

## Identifying Strengths and Potential

An important point to begin this discussion is that young people from refugee backgrounds do not necessarily see themselves as victims of the past. Rather, in many cases, they see themselves as active agents working towards their futures.

Recognising a young person's strengths, talents, attributes and skills is more likely to inspire energy for change than focusing on needs and problems. Seeing the glass half-full instead of half-empty does not deny the real problems that they face but it does focus energy on how each young person can participate positively in meeting their settlement needs and charting their personal development.

A good place to start exploring the young person's strengths is by asking them about their hobbies or favourite pastimes. In their answers it is possible to find many strengths and interests. They might love soccer, or be a good cook, or love to sing or paint. They might like working on cars or be good with computers. These are all useful and transferable skills that can be built upon. Further, they give an insight into how you might connect the young person to the broader community, what suggestions you might make in terms of future study etc.



It is often useful to help young people from refugee backgrounds to build an inventory of their assets and encourage them to see value in resources that would otherwise have been unrealised, or dismissed. Remind them that 'assets' can also include relationships among people through social and informal networks, as well as more formal structures such as community-based organisations. These relationships can be very valuable to having skills and knowledge recognised and utilised.

## Facilitating Decision Making

Many young people from refugee backgrounds grow up in an environment where their voice is not heard. Their cultural context might dictate that they must obey their parents, carers or elders within the community. Other young people might not be culturally restrained but have grown up in a place where their external environment (a refugee camp or urban slum) limited the choices available to them. For both groups it can be difficult for them to express opinions and make choices; they have had no experience of exercising free will.

The other challenge that many newly arrived young people face is that they don't know what they want and/or what opportunities there are for them.

Facilitating choice therefore involves three separate but complementary processes:

- Helping young people from refugee backgrounds to understand both that they have a **right to make decisions** (choices) about their future and that it is in their best interests to do this.
- Teaching them **how to make decisions**.
- **Providing relevant information** so they can make informed decisions.

The first step requires that a level of trust and respect has been established between the worker and the young person from a refugee background. The young person has to be confident that what the worker is suggesting is safe and permissible. For those lacking in agency, it is best to begin with easy choices with controlled outcomes and gradually build up to confronting issues of greater significance. And positive reinforcement is important after each step taken.

Next comes the 'how'. Decision making involves the following steps:

- Identifying the issue requiring a decision.
- Identifying the available options.
- Weighing up the pros and cons of each option.
- Choosing an option.

It is important that young people are supported to understand their own needs and make their own decisions. Those working with young people from refugee backgrounds have an important role to play in this:

- **Identifying the issue** about which a decision needs to be made is something that many workers consider to be their domain but this is not the case. It is important that young people are supported to understand their own needs.
- Identifying the **options** is a process the worker should guide and contribute to but never take control over. The young person needs to be encouraged to think laterally and undertake relevant research. The role of the worker is to support the young person to do this by sourcing or providing information and, where appropriate, communicating with family members.
- Weighing up the **pros and cons** of the various options will probably require guidance from the worker and possibly the injection of some local or professional knowledge. Workers also have a role to play in helping young people identify how their decisions might affect others and also helping them to build up a sense of what they can have control over in their lives and what they cannot.
- The actual decision should **rest with the young person**. It might not be the decision the worker would choose but the worker needs to support the young person in their choice. The only exception to this would be if the worker firmly believed the choice made would result in the young person (or someone else) coming to harm.

Another dimension to consider in this context is the young person's family. It is important to try to help young people to make decisions in a way that is not threatening to their parents/carers, especially if their parents/carers are feeling uncertain in the new country. Failure to do this can create a breach of trust between worker and parents/carers (though in saying this, it is essential not to overlook the fact that the worker's primary responsibility is to the young person). The best way to deal with this issue is to recognise

that parents/carers want the best for their children and work with them to help them understand the importance of young people taking responsibility for decision making if they are to get ahead and achieve.

## **Building Resilience**

On the one hand it seems strange to talk about building resilience in the context of young people from refugee backgrounds because they have already survived so much and in many ways, are exceptionally resilient. On the other hand, however, these young people are newly arrived in Australia, facing the combined challenges of being an adolescent/young adult (as discussed in Topic 1), coming to terms with their past experiences (as addressed in Topic 2) and adapting to life in a new country (as discussed in Topic 3). Any one of these is significant in itself so having to deal with all three at once takes considerable fortitude.

The extent to which a young person copes with these combined challenges varies from individual to individual. It can be linked to a variety of factors including but not limited to:

- their level of inherent anxiety;
- their willingness to embrace new experiences;
- how gregarious and outgoing they are;
- the ease and speed with which they acquire English skills;
- how much their education was interrupted;
- the degree of stability in the early years of their lives;
- the nature of their experiences as a refugee;
- whether they are part of an intact family;
- the extent to which their family is coping in their new environment;
- the presence or otherwise of strong role models and/or mentors; etc.

Supporting young people from refugee backgrounds to become more resilient involves a range of strategies including:

- identifying and building on their strengths (see above);
- supporting them to make decisions (also above);
- helping them to identify and reach achievable goals;
- leading them gradually towards independence;
- being there to celebrate successes;
- helping them to dissect and learn from failures;
- building their skills to deal with obstacles and/or when they encounter negativity, discrimination or racism;
- building their understanding of the Australian service system and (often bureaucratic) processes;
- supporting them to manage their expectations when they are faced with disappointments or feel impatient for action;
- providing positive reinforcement;
- guiding by example;
- linking them to positive role models or mentors;
- treating them with respect and courtesy and helping them to understand that they should expect no less.

## Promoting Participation

The more a young person connects to and participates in a range of activities, the easier it will be for him/her to learn English, make friends, build confidence, learn about Australian life and feel connected to this country. Further, participation can fulfil a very important objective of any young person – having fun.

Supporting young people from refugee backgrounds to connect to activities of interest to them is a very important part of the settlement process. The type of activity is immaterial as long as it involves interaction with others, ideally young people from the broader community. This being said, sport and music are very popular options.

The nature of the support required will of course vary from case to case. On rare occasions it might be as simple as giving a young person the contact details for a local sporting club but it usually involves a much greater level of involvement. The nature of this involvement is also dependent on the circumstances but it might require the worker to broker or facilitate participation through:

- accompanying the young person the first time s/he attends;
- negotiating concession fees;
- briefing the activity leader about the background and needs of the young person (noting issues around privacy and confidentiality);
- organising special clothing or footwear;
- finding transport options;
- explaining to the young person's parents or carers what is involved in participating in the activity;
- providing advice to the young person about 'how to fit in';
- being available to debrief the young person after they have participated in the activity;
- doing anything else that is necessary to pave the way for the young person to engage happily and inclusively in the activity.

There is another important dimension of participation that should not be overlooked.

In a youth work context, youth participation does not simply mean 'taking part' or 'being involved in activities', rather it describes a planned process for young people to have influence over decisions and actions and the provision of opportunities for community engagement and skills development.

Young people's meaningful participation in service delivery and planning processes and specifically young people having a say in the decisions that *impact on them* is one of the most effective ways to ensure that youth programs and interventions are sensitive to the needs of the young people, achieve their stated goals and also work to develop the strength and capacity of the young people.

## Building Agency

The desirable culmination of work in each of the above areas is that young people will have 'agency', i.e. the knowledge, skills and confidence to take control over their lives. Those working with young people from refugee backgrounds should therefore see their role walking alongside the young people until such a time as they can walk alone.

The recommendations of the research study, *Social Networks, Belonging and Active Citizenship among Migrant Youth in Australia*,<sup>47</sup> provide useful guidance about the ways to give young people agency. These include:

- Giving voice to young people
- Encouraging young people to engage in diverse activities
- Providing opportunities for young people to present positive images in the media
- Promoting volunteering experiences
- Cultivating leadership qualities
- Finding ways to strengthen belonging and engagement
- Building trust and social cohesion
- Supporting social inclusion and active citizenship.

Each of these areas is further explained in the above-mentioned report.

## Good Practice Models

Thus far in this topic the focus has been on skills. Before moving on, it is relevant to consider the context within which these skills are applied.

As discussed in Topic 4, there are numerous funded programs specifically targeting young people from refugee backgrounds. These programs are delivered by a diverse range of agencies and in slightly different ways. This being said, there is a level of agreement about what constitutes good practice.

When asked to identify the common elements of effective programs for young people from refugee backgrounds, workers in the sector suggested the following. These programs:

- ensure young people have opportunities to have input into the planning and delivery of effective and appropriate services;
- have a very specific outcome that the young person can see. In other words, they need to be goal oriented so progress can be easily identified;
- have been explained to parents or carers so that they can feel comfortable about them and encourage the young people to participate;
- allow for participation of family members where appropriate;

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<sup>47</sup> *Social Networks, Belonging and Active Citizenship among Migrant Youth in Australia*,<sup>47</sup> ARC Linkage Research Project undertaken by the Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation (CCG), Deakin University and Monash University, in partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and the Australian Red Cross. 2013. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

- strengthen the people on whom the young people rely;
- connect young people with their families and communities;
- affirm their cultural identity and assist their health and wellbeing in their communities and the broader Australian community;
- are as flexible as their funding models allow;
- are age appropriate;
- recognise that some young people have a tough time at home so provide alternatives: a safe place, role models, fun etc.;
- do not adopt a 'one size does not fit all' approach but recognise the unique needs of the individual;
- use a holistic approach in assisting each young person with their social, economic and physical needs;
- develop culturally appropriate and integrated intervention strategies to respond to the young person's needs, including with case management, counseling, family intervention, information and referral;
- involve links to the wider community. This is linked to identity formation: "who am I?" It breaks down identification as 'outsider' and 'refugee', making the young people from refugee backgrounds feel like they are part of the community;
- tap into young people's interests eg soccer/dance/camping ... or ensure that young people are referred to things that are linked to their interests;
- include choice;
- include culturally competent mentors – either from the same background or from the broader community. The most important thing in the selection of a mentor is cultural competency, i.e. the mentor has to understand and value the young person's cultural background and way of thinking;
- ensure workers are appropriately trained and supported;
- lead the young people gradually towards independence.

## References

The Centre for Multicultural Youth has a series of Good Practice Guides on working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. These can be downloaded from [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au).

The Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture has a range of resources available at [www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications\\_and\\_resources.htm](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications_and_resources.htm), including:

- *A guide to working with young people who are refugees*. 1996 and 2000.
- *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*. 1998.
- *School's In for Refugees: A whole-school approach to supporting students of refugee background*. 2011.

*The Good Practice Principles Guide for Working with Refugee Young People*.

[www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/good-practice-principles-guide-for-working-with-refugee-young-people](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/good-practice-principles-guide-for-working-with-refugee-young-people).

Anne-Marie Taylor and David Keegan. *Keeping their Hopes Alive: A good practice guide to case management with young people from refugee backgrounds*. Settlement Services International. 2012.

*Social Networks, Belonging and Active Citizenship among Migrant Youth in Australia*,<sup>1</sup> ARC Linkage Research Project undertaken by the Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation (CCG), Deakin University and Monash University, in partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and the Australian Red Cross. 2013. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

*Increasing the resilience of young people at risk: A literature review*. The Children's Hospital at Westmead, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health UNSW, Centre for Clinical Governance Research. 2009. [www.caah.chw.edu.au](http://www.caah.chw.edu.au)

*Youth Participation Guide Index*. Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/pub?key=0AuEJHTkDzSqUdHMzbnBhLUtZd01TTI9TNHBBX2cyUFE&single=true&gid=0&output=html>

*Communicating with Adolescents*. Catholic Care. 2011. Available for download from [www.parentline.org.au/files/files/FS/PL/Parent%20articles/Adolescents%20-%20Communication.pdf](http://www.parentline.org.au/files/files/FS/PL/Parent%20articles/Adolescents%20-%20Communication.pdf).

*Playing for the Future: the role of sport and recreation in supporting refugee young people to settle well in Australia*. Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2007. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au).

*One Step at a Time – an Australian Cultural Orientation Program Student Resource*. (Then) Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

S Gifford, I Correa-Velez and R Sampson: *Good Starts for refugee youth: Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne, Australia* Melbourne, La Trobe Refugee Research Centre, La Trobe University. 2009.

Coventry, C Guerra, D MacKenzie and S Pinkney: *Wealth of All Nations – Identification of strategies to assist refugee young people in transition to independence – a report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme*. Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies. 2002.

*Life-saving Tips: special skills and knowledge from young Australians*. Dulwich Centre Foundation. 2011. [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/life-saving-tips.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/life-saving-tips.html)

## Self-Directed Activities

1. Speak to people you know who come from another cultural background. Ask them how you would greet someone in their language and in a culturally appropriate manner.
2. If you come from a CALD background, compare and contrast polite greetings in your culture with those typically used in Australia.
3. Visit a local youth service. Use the framework outlined in this topic to reflect on how 'youth friendly' the space is.

4. Give at least three reasons why is it important to use humour when communicating with young people from refugee backgrounds.

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5. What are some topics where it would be best to avoid using humour?

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6. What are some aspects of 'Australian humour' that it might be best to avoid (or be cautious about) using with newly arrived young people?

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7. Why are cultural awareness and self-awareness at the core of cross-cultural communication? What aspects of this do you (might you) find most challenging?

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8. Explain why confidentiality is so important to young people from refugee backgrounds in the context of using interpreters.

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9. Explain how you would work with a young person who is uncertain about whether to continue studying or look for a job.

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10. Look at the list of characteristics of agencies employing good practice that workers have identified. Select four of those and link each to youth work practices.

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## Topic 9: Vulnerability

- **Topic 9** focuses on areas of particular vulnerability for young people from refugee backgrounds. It examines many of these areas and enables you to explore intervention strategies.

### 1. All Young People (aged 10 to 25 years)

Vulnerability managed through family, recreation, social and cultural support

The majority of Victoria's young people cope well with the vulnerabilities that arise during adolescence

**Risk factors:**

Traumatic life events such as the death of a family member or peer

Difficulty with peers

### 2. Young People Experiencing Additional Problems

Some young people experience additional problems that require an early service intervention.

Community-based interventions at this level reduce the escalation of problems

**Risk Factors:**

- Low level truancy
- First contact with police
- Emerging mental health issues
- Experimental alcohol or other drug use
- Family conflict
- Unstable peer group
- Isolated from community
- Pregnant/teenage parent

### 3. Highly Vulnerable

Requires comprehensive, coordinated interventions

Highly vulnerable young people require comprehensive and coordinated interventions from a range of support services

**Risk factors:**

- Left home / homeless
- Disengaged from family
- Significant alcohol or other drug use
- Not working or enrolled in education
- Mental illness
- Frequent truancy
- Family violence
- Sexual abuse

### 4. High Risk

Young people who are at high risk require intensive interventions.

Although relatively small in number, young people experiencing vulnerability at this level require intensive support services.

**Risk factors:**

- Co-occurring chronic problems (such as alcohol or other drug use and mental illness)
- Criminal orders from Children's or adult Court
- Placement in out-of-home care
- Engaging in multiple high risk behaviours

The above table provides a useful framework for determining the level of vulnerability in young people and the type of support required.<sup>48</sup>

When considering this table it is important to note that:

- vulnerability occurs across a continuum and can only be understood when a young person is considered holistically within their social and personal context;
- the table looks at vulnerability in a generic sense, in other words, it can apply to all young people – and this includes young people from refugee backgrounds.

This being said, there are some particularities about this group of young people that those working with them need to understand so it is important to delve deeper than a generic framework.

## Causes of Vulnerability

The refugee experience, in and of itself, presents many challenges to young people. Some young people from refugee backgrounds might also confront additional layers of complexity in their lives. Some (like their sexuality) are immutable, others (like forced marriage) are imposed upon them, others are the result of circumstances, others result from choices that the young person makes, some are shaped by structural factors and in some cases, the vulnerability results from a combination of these. Often there is a complex mix of factors that lead to increased vulnerability for young people from refugee backgrounds, and many will be negotiating multiple vulnerabilities.

Before considering some of the things that can make young people from refugee backgrounds vulnerable, however, it is important to reiterate the importance of separating the refugee experience from other things that have an impact on a young person's life and/or the formation of their identity. Not everything about them is linked to their having once been a refugee.

There are a number of factors that are seen as increasing the vulnerability of young people from refugee backgrounds. Some of these are listed below. It should be noted that this is not an all-inclusive list.

### Trauma

On the one hand it would be remiss not to mention trauma survivors in this topic but on the other, the reality is that the majority of young people from refugee backgrounds are trauma survivors so it is misleading to point to it as a 'particular vulnerability'.

Because trauma is fundamental to the refugee experience, ways to identify the impact of trauma and strategies for responding to those affected by it will be covered in Topic 10.

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<sup>48</sup> Table from *Positive Pathways for Victoria's Vulnerable Young People*.  
[www.cyf.vic.gov.au/youth-services/vulnerable-youth-framework](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/youth-services/vulnerable-youth-framework).

## **Detention**

Research<sup>49</sup> has shown that the detention experience can profoundly affect the physical and mental health and wellbeing of young people in many ways and that those who have been detained are prone to exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Topic 10) and other trauma related to or exacerbated by their detention experience.

## **Sexual or Gender-Based Violence**

In many parts of the world, rape is used as a weapon of war. Females, especially girls and young women, are more vulnerable but boys and young men are also targeted. Rape in war is not about sex; it is about power and is used to degrade and humiliate 'the other'.

Those who have been exposed to sexual violence are likely to have complex psychological (especially in terms of trust, self-image and safety) and physiological health (including but not only gynaecological) needs. In some cases they might also experience ostracism by their family and community, having been blamed for the events that befell them.

The Centre for Refugee Research at the University of NSW has done considerable research into this issue. See [www.crr.unsw.edu.au](http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au) for additional information and resources.

## **Domestic Violence**

The issue of domestic and family violence was covered in Topic 5 and will not be revisited here, save to note the relevance of including it in a list of vulnerabilities.

## **Experience as a Child Soldier**

In some countries from which young people from refugee backgrounds come, teenagers and even young children are forcibly conscripted. More often than not this is by a rebel group such as the 'Lord's Resistance Army' that terrorised large areas of Uganda but sometimes (as is in Burma) it might have been by the army.

Once a young person is captured, it is typical that he (or in some cases 'she') is often forced to commit an act of violence against his family or community. This is done to sever all bonds that he has with his past life. That which he has done is so terrible that he will not be accepted back. The militia are his new family and his loyalties must be to them.

Child soldiers grow up in an environment of violence and intimidation. Their adult role models are those who orchestrate terror and commit atrocities against innocent people, often people from the same ethnic or religious group as the child. The impact of this on a young person's moral and emotional development can be profound.

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<sup>49</sup> There are many studies that document the impact of detention on children and young people, including those by Louise Newman, Derek Silove and Zachary Steel, and also reports from the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Refugee Council of Australia and other agencies.

In addition to forcing children to bear arms, some militias use captured children and teenagers for other purposes. This might be as porters, or runners (bringing information or ammunition to the front line), or to carry the wounded from the battlefield, or to walk ahead of troops in case there are landmines. Girls (and sometimes boys) are also held and used as sex slaves by combatants.

Such experiences can have a profound impact on a young person's view of the world and their place in it – including, the capacity to engage in trusting relationships. The conceptual shift to living in Australia is huge. Rarely can it be achieved without expert assistance, though experience has shown that with the support of specialist torture and trauma support agencies (see later), these young people can adjust well. Linking these young people to such support agencies is therefore vital.

## **Young Carers**

It is not only young people who bear lasting scars of past events. This happens to adults too and sometimes they are debilitated by the effects of trauma. There are also situations where the parent(s) is unable to fulfil their duties in the home because of illness, the requirement to work away from home or any one of a range of other reasons. In such circumstances, it can often fall to one or more of their children to assume more responsibility. This can mean managing the home, earning income (see below) and/or caring for younger (or male) siblings over and above the (sometimes considerable) responsibilities that might be linked to cultural expectations. School work suffers and they effectively lose the opportunity to be carefree, play sport, socialise and have fun.

Schools, health professionals and social workers should be vigilant for signs of young people from refugee backgrounds being required to assume roles beyond their years and plan intervention and support strategies.

While there are commonly family/cultural expectations that influence young people taking on caring responsibilities, schools, health professionals and support workers should be vigilant for signs of young people from refugee backgrounds being required to take on high levels of caring responsibility. It is important to discuss these concerns with the young person in the first instance and, if permission is given to contact family members, sensitively explore intervention and/or support strategies for the whole family – ideally working towards balancing the needs of the family with those of the young person. It may be important to promote with parents/family members the importance of participation in social/recreation activities and engagement in school.

## **Disengagement**

There is often a complex mix of factors that result in some young people from refugee backgrounds will become disengaged from:

- family;
- school or other place of learning;
- friends;
- ethnic community;
- faith community.

This group of young people are juggling a range of pressures that settlement presents - navigating individual, family and community expectations, learning/adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language and navigating Australia's complex education and training system, negotiating new peer groups and managing the developmental tasks of adolescence – all of this alongside pre-arrival trauma. The stressors of settlement in a new country can be enormous and some young people struggle to navigate the service system and receive the support that they had needed prior to becoming disengaged. Additionally, many young people struggle to overcome structural or systemic barriers that they are presented with, e.g. racism or discrimination in seeking employment or in the private rental market, or access and equity in the service system.

School should be a place where young people feel nurtured and supported and where they can achieve academically and socially. For some young people from refugee backgrounds, however, the school they attend fails to respond adequately to the complex educational and psychological needs that were discussed in Topic 4. If they feel they cannot bridge the educational gap or if their emotional scars prevent them from being able to concentrate, learn and/or connect with fellow students, school can be seen as too hard and too painful and dropping out can seem the only solution.

Many young people will benefit from working alongside a skilled professional who can assist them to engage positively with the education system and their family and community but it is important to note that disengagement in and of itself does not necessarily make a young person vulnerable. In some cases it results from an informed decision and removes the young person from an untenable situation. Where it does lead to vulnerability is where the young person is left isolated and without a viable support network.

## **Homelessness**

Obtaining safe and secure housing is seen as critical to the settlement process. Poor settlement increases the risk of becoming homeless and inadequate housing in turn contributes to poor settlement. In this context it is important to recognise that the relationship between poor settlement and homelessness is not linear; rather it can be a vicious circle.

The exact rate of homelessness among young people from refugee backgrounds is not known but it is recognised that this is a particularly vulnerable group. Young people from refugee backgrounds are well represented amongst those seeking accommodation in youth refuges. Others will sleep rough or 'couch surf' – moving from place to place, staying with friends until they are forced to move on, looking for somewhere else to stay.

Young people might leave their family because they cannot confront the possibility that they might have failed to live up to their family's expectations and/or they do not want to bring shame on their family. Other young people might leave the family home because of the pressure their family is placing on them to do well at school or act in a certain way. As discussed in Topic 5, many families are uncomfortable about young people adopting 'Australian ways'.

In other cases, young people leave home because their home has become dysfunctional or dangerous. Their parent(s) and/or siblings might be struggling to deal with their own issues and as a result, their home becomes a place of violence and/or neglect. Or it might be a case of the relatives with whom they came abusing or exploiting them in some way. Sometimes too it can simply be a case of changed circumstances within the home.

Homelessness and disengagement from school frequently go hand in hand – with either one precipitating the other. And if a young person leaves school early and is also homeless, they will face many challenges. They will then need intensive support and assistance to be able to successfully re-engage with their education or to enter the workforce. Early intervention is the key. If things have moved beyond this, referral to specially targeted intervention programs should be considered.

## **Risk Taking Behaviour**

As explored in Topic 1, all young people including those from refugee backgrounds, are experiencing on-going physiological changes and brain development and might not yet fully appreciate the consequences of their actions. This is one of the reasons why some young people engage in risk-taking behaviours such as driving too fast, drinking too much, participating in unsafe sexual activities and experimenting with drugs. Young people from refugee backgrounds are not immune from this and, in some cases, their past experiences and present challenges might increase the likelihood of them engaging in risk-taking behaviour.

Risk-taking behaviour can take many forms in a young person's life depending on their individual circumstances. As always any behaviour should be considered from the young person's perspective and any assessment/interventions should be developed in partnership with the young person and in accordance with the principles of good youth work practice as described in Topics 1 and 7.

Finally, it is important to note that while some young people's risk-taking behaviour is motivated by things such as a desire to fit in and feel good. In other cases, it may be underpinned by low self-esteem, depression or other mental health issues. If a young person is experiencing these issues and a worker is concerned that they may be at potential risk of harming themselves then the young person should be referred to mental health practitioners that have experience working with young people from refugee backgrounds. See sections below on suicide and self-harm.

## **Criminal Justice**

This is a complex and multidimensional issue.

For a start, a young person or group of young people might not be aware that some activities or behaviours they engage in are illegal in Australia, e.g. driving without insurance. The laws in Australia are often very different to those with which young people are familiar and while they may have had cultural orientation, there will always be things that weren't covered or that were not made clear to them. Australia is also quite different to some other countries in that the laws that exist are enforced and there are consequences for non-compliance.

Another significant issue is that in many parts of the world from which refugees come, the police are people to be feared. Simply telling people from refugee backgrounds that in Australia police are here to help you does not wipe away the distrust of the police and the anxiety associated with any dealings with them. Unless police are sensitive to this, minor incidents can become inflamed and lead to further conflict.

Young people who have become dislocated from their family and their community can sometimes be seen as vulnerable to recruitment by people engaged in organised crime. These young people may be offered things that others have and they want or lured by perceived status and a sense of belonging and they may have a limited understanding of the consequences of their actions and/or the association.

Once young people enter the juvenile justice system it can significantly increase their risk of further interactions with the criminal justice system and is considered to be a serious risk factor for the young person. Any young person in this situation is likely to need intensive support and assistance and for young people from refugee backgrounds it is essential that any interventions are sensitive and responsive to their cultural background and their specific experiences as a young person from a refugee background. The justice system is not well known for sensitive rehabilitation, especially when it comes to young offenders. The lack of knowledge within the system about the circumstances of young people from refugee backgrounds increases the need for workers to advocate for systemic changes in this area as well as for the individual young person they are working with at that time (see Topic 11).

## **Racial Stereotyping**

When exploring the issue of young people from refugee backgrounds and the criminal justice system it is important to make reference to racial stereotyping. This is a significant issue in the context of criminal justice and policing issues.

Young people from refugee backgrounds are often more 'visible' than other young people, particularly those from African backgrounds. Their actions are noticed and commented upon. The local police might be disposed to 'keep an eye on them' because of erroneous perceptions that they are more likely to engage in crime. Young people from refugee backgrounds may find themselves 'in trouble' with the police as compared to other young people engaging in the same behaviours.

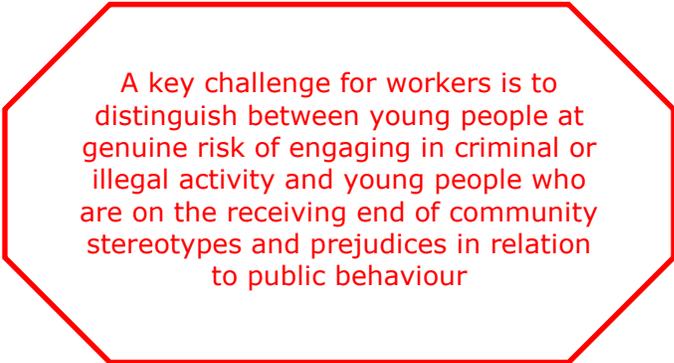
The issue of what is sometimes referred to as 'antisocial behaviour' in relation to young people from refugee backgrounds is a vexed one. For a start, youth workers avoid the use of the term 'antisocial behaviour' as it does not acknowledge the complex interplay of individual and societal issues that usually contribute to criminal or high risk behaviour by young people. Further, some people, not least the media, are quick to label anything to do with groups of young people from migrant or refugee backgrounds as 'gang-related'.

When confronted with commentary, be this in the media or in the community, about the behaviour of young people from refugee backgrounds there are many things to consider, including but not limited to the following:

- Just as in the mainstream community, there are some young people who experience challenges throughout their adolescence and for those from refugee backgrounds, the stressors that can lead to this happening are considerable.

- There can be a natural tendency for people to form communities with other people with whom they share a cultural background. This can be even more the case if people are feeling excluded or ostracised by the mainstream community. What outsiders might label as 'ghettos' and 'gangs' can sometimes be nothing more than people interacting and socialising with others with whom they feel comfortable and with whom they can express their cultural identity. In fact, connection to community throughout the settlement process is known to be a key protective factor during a time of increased vulnerability.
- Sensational media stories and negative stereotyping of young people from refugee backgrounds are potentially very damaging. Not only do they falsely influence public perceptions but they also have an impact on how the young people view themselves.

There is only a fine dividing line between racial stereotyping and racism. As will be explored in Topic 10, racism is something that has a negative impact on the lives of a significant number of people in Australia. At times when issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers feature heavily in the press, those to whom these labels are appended (irrespective of whether they are in fact refugees or asylum seekers) are likely to be impacted. They might feel less secure and less connected to this country and in some, it might trigger memories of past experiences.



A key challenge for workers is to distinguish between young people at genuine risk of engaging in criminal or illegal activity and young people who are on the receiving end of community stereotypes and prejudices in relation to public behaviour

## Health Issues and/or Disabilities

Previous reference has been made to the fact that their refugee background is just one part of these young people's identities, and it is just as relevant here. Young people from refugee backgrounds are as prone to illnesses and/or disabilities as any other young people.

Young people from refugee backgrounds with health issues and disabilities form a vulnerable group for various reasons including but not limited to the following:

- In some countries, having a disability or deformity is seen as something shameful and the person must be hidden from view and this attitude can persist when people from these countries come to Australia.

- In many countries mental illness is little understood. Sometimes it is associated with possession by spirits or a punishment for some form of past wrong-doing by the person or someone in the family. For these reasons, families will often be reluctant to disclose that one of the members is behaving 'strangely' and/or a young person might be hesitant about mentioning concerns about a parent or other family member.
- Many people from refugee backgrounds come from countries in which there are no programs or other supports for people with disabilities or mental illness. The notion that such programs exist in Australia might not occur to some people.
- In some cultures it is considered the family's responsibility to 'care for their own'. Any suggestion that they might need outside help can be met with resistance or taken as a criticism of the family.
- The notion that people with disabilities have rights and that they can participate in a meaningful way within society is an unfamiliar concept to some people.
- While initial health screening and health checks are undertaken both pre- and post-visa grant, the busyness and stress of the early years after arrival can mean that signs of ill-health are not necessarily taken as seriously as they should be.

It is also important to recognise that the refugee experience is such that it can result in a variety of ongoing health issues, especially for young people who have often spent much or all of their formative years in situations of deprivation. Lack of adequate nutritious food and poor dental hygiene all have an impact on development and can lead to a variety of conditions that require intervention. Post-arrival health checks are now commonplace and as discussed in Topic 4, there is a national network of specialist refugee health services, but this does not mean that people cannot fall through cracks. Significantly too, adequately addressing dental health needs is still difficult in many parts of the country because of the dearth of free or subsidised dental clinics.

For some, it was not just the deprivation of their time as a refugee that left a lasting impact. Some bear the scars of war and/or torture including amputated limbs, embedded shrapnel and bullets and chronic pain.

## **Mental Health**

When considering health issues, it is important not to focus only on physical health. Mental health is also relevant. Like all young people, those from refugee backgrounds can experience mental illness, with risk factors being exacerbated by trauma and their past experiences or, for young people who have arrived in Australia as asylum seekers, their experiences in detention while awaiting resolution of their immigration status.

Refugee Health Nurses can play an important role in brokering access to culturally appropriate support and there is a network of state-based Transcultural Mental Health Services that offer services, referrals and training.

## Suicide and Suicidal Ideation

**Suicide and suicidal ideation** (i.e. thoughts of suicide) are associated with a variety of biological, social and psychological factors, including traumatic life events and/or mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, and borderline personality disorder.

### Youth Suicide Risk Factors

Mental illness  
Indigenous status  
Rural and remote  
Previous suicide attempt  
GLBTI-identified  
Socio-economic disadvantage  
History of self-harm  
Childhood adversities  
Detention, contact with juvenile justice  
Substance or alcohol abuse  
Family dysfunction  
Access to means of suicide  
Physical ill-health  
Restricted help-seeking  
Homelessness  
Male gender  
Unemployment  
Friends or family displaying suicidality

The above list of risk factors is not specific to young people from refugee backgrounds but, with the exception of indigenous status, any one of the other risks can apply and for this group, the probability of some of these risks (not least childhood adversities and family dysfunction) being present is high.

Responding to young people from refugee backgrounds who are (or you suspect might be) contemplating suicide is difficult, not least because most mainstream mental health services are not adequately addressing the needs of young people in general and are even less equipped to deal with young people from refugee backgrounds. Knowing how to contact a specialist torture and trauma counselling services (see Topic 10) is therefore of vital importance.

Depending on the nature of your work with the young person, there are also a number of things you can do to minimise the risk. The key is to focus on building resilience, self-esteem, connectedness and belonging and creating a supportive environment and positive life events as these can be valuable safeguards against the effects of trauma.

### **Protective Factors**

Good coping skills  
Family connectedness and support  
Access to appropriate services  
Personal resilience  
Positive school environment  
Economic security  
Problem-solving skills  
Social and community inclusion  
Non-discriminatory environments  
Optimism  
Protection from adverse life events  
Housing  
Social and emotional wellbeing  
Ability and desire to seek help if necessary

## **Self Harm**

Self harm is defined as a deliberate self-injury without intent of death. Research suggests that between 7% and 14% of adolescents will engage in some form of self-harm, with females over two times more likely to self-harm than males.

While self-harming behaviours generally do not involve suicidal intent, there is strong evidence to suggest that people who engage in self-harming behaviours have a much higher risk of suicide than those who do not.

Young people who are engaging in self harm will require support and referral to specialist services (preferably these would be services that have experience working with young people from refugee backgrounds).

## **Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a cultural practice that is neither related to the refugee experience nor unique amongst refugee communities but which is practised by some groups and about which it is important that workers be aware. FGM comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

FGM is recognised internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women and reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes. It is nearly always carried out on minors. The practice violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.

About 140 million girls and women worldwide are living with the consequences of FGM. In Africa, about 101 million girls over the age of 10 are estimated to have undergone FGM. The practice is most common in the western, eastern, and north-eastern regions of Africa, in some countries in Asia and the Middle East, and among migrants from these areas.

State and Territory laws make it an offence to perform female genital mutilation in Australia and in most jurisdictions it is an offence to remove a person from Australia for that purpose. It is important to recognise, however, that there are young women in Australia, some of whom from refugee backgrounds, who were subjected to FGM prior to their arrival. Responding to these women with sensitivity and from an informed perspective is crucial.

Prior to coming to Australia, refugees from countries in which FGM is practised are given information about the illegality of the practice in Australia and links to support services for victims of FGM. This is supplemented through the Onshore Orientation Program and through information in DIAC publications including *Beginning a Life in Australia* and *Getting Settled: Women Refugees in Australia*, both of which can be found on the DHA website at [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/).

This site also links to up to date information about FGM health services. Further guidance can be found from women's and refugee health services in each state and territory.

## **Early Marriage / Young Parents**

Settlement workers and teachers identify the issue of young people willingly entering into or being coerced into an early marriage as a significant issue within communities of former refugees, placing those involved (usually young girls) at risk. This is a highly complex issue, interwoven as it is to culture and religion, and responding requires great sensitivity.

In some cultures, being married brings esteem. It is a sign of being an adult and being accepted by the community. The idea that a young person has a choice and might wish to pursue a career before marriage can be quite foreign. Within some communities there can be a lot of parental and community pressure for young people to marry very early and it can be very hard for a young person to resist.

In some communities, parents are eager for their daughters to marry as they see this as a way of removing them from 'temptation' (i.e. sexual exploration). They don't necessarily understand or approve of popular teen culture and are concerned that their daughter(s) will be corrupted by it. Marriage at an early age is seen as a way to 'save' their daughter and ensure her respectability in the eyes of their community.

Arranged marriages are common in a number of cultures from which former refugees come. These vary considerably. At one extreme is the practice whereby young people deemed compatible are introduced and then given an opportunity to get to know each other and decide for themselves whether they wish to marry. At the other extreme are cultures in which the bride and groom will not have met or have only met briefly prior to the wedding and neither party, especially the bride, has any say in the matter. While the former is much more common in Australia, the latter exists.

Early parenthood is another area where the views within communities of former refugees differ from those of the dominant culture. The prevailing attitude in many parts of the Australian culture is that teenage pregnancy is something to be avoided because it will curtail life choices and opportunities and become a burden; in other cultures being a (married) parent brings status and acceptance.

However young people come to be in a situation of early marriage and/or parenthood, in some instances there can be lasting impacts on young women. There are young women of refugee backgrounds who, by the age of 25, have been married and/or had one or more children and are alone with no qualifications and little prospect of securing employment.

Prevention is the key to tackling this issue and, in this, schools and youth programs have an important role to play. It is important that young women are educated about their rights and shown not only what their options are but how they can go about achieving these. As was discussed in Topic 5, every effort should be made to do this in a way that does not alienate the parents/family but rather helps them to recognise the benefits of education (be it academic or vocational) for their children.

## **Young Workers**

In many other countries it is common for children to be sent out to work to supplement the family's income. The notion that this is not considered acceptable, or that there might be laws that restrict this, might not have occurred to some newly arrived refugees. In Australia, on the other hand, we take for granted that there are laws about the age at which a young person can be employed, how long they can work and under what conditions.

While some young people may be pressured into working under inappropriate conditions, it is also the case that some young people will work at a young but legal age as part of an informed choice to help support themselves or their families. This is a complex issue and time prevents a full discussion in this trainers guide, therefore it would be useful to bring to the participants' attention a useful resource: 'Young Worker Toolkit' that contains information about young workers' rights and responsibilities and can be found at: <http://youngworkertoolkit.youth.gov.au/>.

It is important to note too the important role that schools can play, especially in situations where there are frequent unexplained absences or a young person is regularly coming to school exhausted. In such circumstances, a sensitive investigation that works with the young person to explore circumstances and options is warranted.

## **Sexual Orientation or Identity**

Young people from refugee backgrounds can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) in the same way that anyone else can. In some cases their sexual orientation or identity is incidental to their refugee background, in others it might have been the reason they were persecuted.

The situation of LGBTI young people from refugee backgrounds can differ significantly depending on circumstances but it is fair to say that, like any member of the LGBTI community, they can be exposed to prejudice from the broader community and also from people from their own ethnic and/or religious background who might consider that identifying as LGBTI is culturally unacceptable or even shameful. This lack of support within their own cultural community (often the source of connection, belonging and support) can often make this group of young people particularly vulnerable.

LGBTI young people from refugee backgrounds might be:

- conflicted about their own identity;
- subjected to bullying and acts of violence;
- ostracised from their own community;
- finding it difficult to form relationships;
- wary about trusting anyone;
- deeply fearful of 'their secret' being exposed.

And on the basis of the above, young people who identify as LGBTI or who are exploring their sexual identity are sometimes very reluctant to seek help. These young people need safe and supportive spaces in which to explore their identities and freedom to define themselves as they see fit. For workers with refugee young people this means role-modelling acceptance of diversity and the application of non-judgmental behaviour towards all young people regardless of their sexual orientation.

When working with LGBTI young people from refugee backgrounds you may experience discriminatory attitudes and/or behaviours in the community. These attitudes and behaviours may even be widely shared by many in particular cultural groups but it is important to note that discriminatory attitudes and/or behaviours towards people who identify as LGBTI are not an acceptable part of cultural practice but are in fact acts of discrimination and not lawful in Australia. Anti-discrimination laws in each state and territory make specific reference to sexual orientation and gender identity.

## **Customary Adoption**

In some cultures, particularly those from Africa, customary adoption is quite common. There are various forms and motivations for this. Sometimes these adoptions occur because one or both of the child's parents has died so the child's uncle, aunt or other relative will take over responsibility for raising the child. Sometimes it is a case of a child being 'gifted' to another couple, either because this couple cannot have children of their own or because it is believed the other couple can provide for the child better than the natural parents can.

The fact that a young person is not the biological child of his or her parents does not in and of itself make the child/young person vulnerable. There are, however, cases where young people are abused or mistreated by their adoptive parents. This is another area where schools have an important role in identifying vulnerability, either through non-attendance of the abused child (usually a girl) or from comments made by the young person, their siblings or their friends.

All children have the fundamental right to be loved, nurtured and to receive the benefit of a caring, parental relationship, including equally from their customarily adoptive parents. Organisations providing support and care to such families however, may encounter sensitivities or challenges which can arise by virtue of the make-up of these families units.

For instance, such families may experience a relationship breakdown and use issues such as legitimacy of identity, birth or cultural similarity as a tool to mistreat or hurt each other, including against adoptive children. Alternatively, as young people move into their teenage years, they may seek to explore their identity or nationality, including better understanding their background and parentage, which can place them at odds with their culturally adoptive parents. Others again, if adopted at a young age, may not be aware of their biological parentage. In such cases, government departments, organisations or the culturally adoptive parents themselves may be considering whether to be proactive in informing the child of their identity and subsequent consequences that action may have on the young person and the broader family unit.

In these instances, the best interests of the young person should be a primary consideration for all concerned in how to best manage such families. Specifically, some of the issues that should be considered when weighing up the young person's interests with the family's needs include:

- the psychological impact on the young person;
- the reason/s for wanting to take a particular action;
- the views of the young person's primary carers;
- the young person's views; and
- the consequences that may result for the young person.

## Non-Humanitarian Visas

There are circumstances where someone from a refugee background enters Australia on a non-humanitarian visa. The fact that this happens is a function of the fact that someone who is a refugee has other 'identities', i.e. they are a member of a family, someone with skills etc. and when it happens it can obscure any needs they have that are derived from their experience as a refugee. Relevant visas include the following:

Visa Type	Subclass Number	Description
<b>Partner</b>	100	Partner Permanent Visa
	309	Partner Temporary Visa
	801	Partner Visa Permanent
	820	Partner Temporary Visa

<b>Fiancé</b>	300	Prospective Marriage Visa
<b>Child</b>	101	Child Visa
	802	Child Visa
	102	Adoption Visa
	117	Orphan Relative (Offshore)
	837	Orphan Relative (Onshore)
<b>Remaining Relative</b>	115	Remaining Relative (Offshore)
	835	Remaining Relative (Onshore)
<b>Carer</b>	116	Carer (Offshore)
	836	Carer (Onshore)
<b>Work</b>	186	Employer Nomination Scheme
	187	Regional Sponsored Migration
	189	Skilled (Independent)
	190	Skilled (Nominated)
<b>Witness Protection</b>	852	Witness Protection (Trafficking)

As you can see, this is a long list of visa subclasses – and it should be noted it is not all-inclusive.

Young people from refugee backgrounds might be the primary holders of one of these visas or the dependants of someone who is as all of the visas allow for a person’s family members to be included in the application as secondary applicants. Members of the family unit are usually the spouse and dependent children but might also include other dependent relatives who are not married and who reside with the primary applicant.

There are various entitlements and restrictions attached to each of the visa subclasses. Details of these can be found on the DHA website at [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migrants](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migrants).

One of the key issues with any of the non-humanitarian visas is that the holders are not eligible for most of the specialist humanitarian settlement services (as outlined in Topic 4). In addition, some of the visa subclasses limit access to Centrelink, tertiary education and settlement services. The absence of these important supports can leave young people from refugee backgrounds who hold one of these visas isolated and highly vulnerable and make it harder for them to achieve their potential in Australia.

The important lessons for workers are:

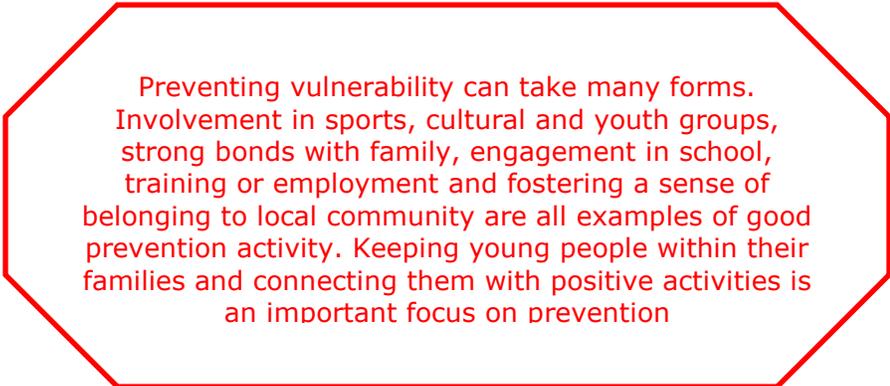
- do not assume that the fact that a person has a non-humanitarian visa means that they have not come from a refugee background;
- it is important to assess the circumstances of the individual;
- it is necessary to know the entitlements associated with each visa subclass so you might need to seek clarification from DHA;
- creative thinking might be required to find ways to overcome some eligibility restrictions (e.g. finding free community-run English classes for those ineligible for AMEP or negotiating assisted entry with tertiary institutions).

Before moving on, it is relevant to note that there is another category of young people who might be classified as vulnerable. As part of the response to the Expert Panel's Report on Asylum Seekers (see Topic 3), restrictions were placed on family reunion for people granted refugee status in Australia. At the time of writing there was no clarity about what status and entitlements any family members of protection visa holders would have after entry. Updates on this issue can be found on the DHA website: [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media/](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/media/).

## **Prevention, Assessment and Intervention**

It is important to state from the outset that the information presented in this section complements the principles and strategies outlined in Topics 7 and 8 and should not be seen as separate or distinct from these.

To quote the old saying, "prevention is better than cure" and thus it is in this context. It is far more effective to focus on preventing young people from becoming vulnerable than to respond once their life has become more complicated.



Preventing vulnerability can take many forms. Involvement in sports, cultural and youth groups, strong bonds with family, engagement in school, training or employment and fostering a sense of belonging to local community are all examples of good prevention activity. Keeping young people within their families and connecting them with positive activities is an important focus on prevention

Young people often draw upon a combination of personal strength and resilience, family and peer support to assist them in managing the transition to adulthood. Young people's positive experiences at school, within their community groups, and through participation

in recreational, cultural or faith-based activities also develop young people's capacity to successfully navigate the changes and development that occur during adolescence. Some young people, however, face a combination of personal, family and community circumstances that significantly increase the risk to the young person during adolescence, which itself is a time of increased vulnerability. Research<sup>50</sup> tells us that prevention and/or early intervention provides better life outcomes for young people. A key goal for all youth workers is to work on increasing opportunities for young people to receive support before the issues they face during their adolescence can become long term barriers to participation and/or wellbeing. This being said, it is also true that some young people will face particular challenges and may need intensive and targeted supports throughout this time.

When this occurs, the first step is to identify the vulnerability. In some cases this is hard because the young person is unwilling or unable to disclose how they are feeling or that they need help. In other cases, this is because the young person is hidden from view by their family or carers, or by virtue of the fact that he/she has severed contact with traditional supports. Being hard, however, does not make it impossible. It just means that workers have to be clever and skilful. Amongst other things they have to:

- **be knowledgeable** about additional vulnerabilities that young people from refugee backgrounds might experience;
- **be vigilant** and alert to signs of something that 'does not add up' in the way a young person is behaving or in what they are saying (or not saying);
- **look beyond the obvious** for reasons why things are happening (or not happening);
- focus on gaining the young person's **trust** and creating an environment in which the young person feels **safe and respected**;
- **ask** the young person about their circumstances – do so sensitively and in a variety of ways, noting that it may take some time before a young person discloses sensitive issues or issues of concern;
- **be patient** and let the young person disclose in their own time.

When working with vulnerable young people it is necessary to ensure that interventions are consistent with Youth Work Principles and that the worker:

- consider the young person **in entirety**, not just as someone from a refugee background;
- ask the young person to **identify their needs** and work alongside them to address these – they can often be best placed to identify solutions to the challenges or issues they face;

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<sup>50</sup> Ellen Fish: The Benefits of Early Intervention, in *Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin No. 2 Spring/Summer 2002 pp.8-11*. [www.aifs.gov.au/sf/pubs/bull2/ef.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/sf/pubs/bull2/ef.html)

- place the **young person's needs at the centre** and ensure interventions are **strengths based**;
- receive **specialist training** commensurate with their role, for example in responding to critical incidents;
- be **well informed** about support services and referral pathways to these;
- **facilitate links** to other young people who have had the same experiences;
- where relevant, and with permission, get to know the family and **work with the family** to address issues;
- **build a network** of people (experienced colleagues, supervisors, etc.) to whom they can talk and from whom they can get advice when they encounter a client/student/patient with complex needs;
- **seek specialist advice and support.**

Further, it is essential not to forget that while these young people might be vulnerable, they also have strengths on which you can draw to find solutions to the issues they face. While each young person is different, the life experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds typically result in them being:

- resilient,
- adaptable and resourceful,
- motivated to achieve,
- positive and hopeful,
- cross-culturally aware, and
- multilingual.

Finally, in all of these interventions it is essential to be mindful of the following:



**It is critical to recognise that young people:**

- **are experts in their own lives**
- **are active members of the community**
- **have their rights protected**
- **have their strengths celebrated and built upon**

## **Mandatory Reporting**

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NOTE: Mandatory reporting requirements (see Topic 5) are relevant in the context of several of the issues raised in this topic.

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## Self-Directed Activities

1. Select one or more of the vulnerable groups listed in this Topic. Undertake research to find out more about this issue.
2. Identify an agency (or agencies) in your local area that can provide support to a young person with the vulnerability you have researched.
3. The case study included in this Topic about Sam explains what was done to assist him but only gives a small insight into how it was done. Select one of the areas in which Sam was supported and explain how it could be done in a way that is consistent with the intervention strategies outlined.

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4. Refer back to Topic 4 to complete the following table of programs and services available to meet the needs of vulnerable young people from refugee backgrounds;

<b>Vulnerability</b>	<b>Specialist Youth Programs and Services</b>	<b>Mainstream Programs and Services</b>
Trauma Survivors		
Former Detainees		
Survivors of Sexual or Gender Based Violence		
Those Exposed to Domestic Violence		
Former Child Soldiers		
Young Carers		

Young People who Become Disengaged		
Homeless Young People		
Those Engaging in 'Anti-Social Behaviour'		
Those Engaging in High Risk Behaviours		
Young People with Health Issues and/or Disabilities		
Those Subjected to FGM		
Early Marriage / Young Parents		
Young Workers		
LGBTI		
Young People in Situations of Customary Adoption		
Young People with Non-Humanitarian Visas		

5. In which areas does it appear that there is a service gap?

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6. What might the reasons be for this?

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7. What do you think some of the consequences might be of not having specialist services?

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8. What are the implications of placing vulnerable young people from refugee backgrounds in smaller regional centres?

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## Topic 10: Other Significant Issues

**Topic 10** explores a range of other issues that are important to know about when you are working with young people from refugee backgrounds:

- the impact of trauma;
- racism;
- social media;
- sexuality and sexual health;
- police and the law;
- financial literacy.

This topic examines some of the issues those working with young people from refugee backgrounds are likely to confront during the course of their work:

- Working with Traumatized Young People
- Racism
- Social Media
- Sexuality and Sexual Health
- Police and the Law
- Financial Literacy.

These are not the only issues young people and those who work with them encounter – just some of the more common ones.

### Working with Traumatized Young People

Topic 2 examined the sorts of things young people from refugee backgrounds experienced prior to coming to Australia. Many, if not most, will have been exposed to persecution, disruption and deprivation. Many have been exposed to high levels of violence. All have lost their home, homeland and dreams for the future.

The impact of these experiences can be exacerbated by the considerable challenges that young people face:

- during adolescence (as discussed in Topic 1); and
- when adjusting to life in a new country (as examined in Topic 4).

It should come as no surprise that the cumulative affect of these experiences can have a profound impact on most young people's sense of identity and self-worth and the way they view the world.

**Trauma** is the term used to describe the deep distress, intense anxiety, psychological pain and/or fear that results from a particular event or series of events.

Trauma can also be 'passed' from one person to another; in other words, a person might not have directly experienced the events but has become traumatised through exposure to someone who has. There are two common ways in which this can occur:

- **Intergenerational transfer:** this is where a child takes on the symptoms of a traumatised parent, grandparent or other caregiver.
- **Vicarious trauma:** this is where a worker becomes traumatised after hearing the experiences of those with whom they are working. This will be discussed in more detail in Topic 12.

**Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is the name given to a number of symptoms which often occur following exposure to extreme trauma.

## Recognising Trauma<sup>51</sup>

The impact of trauma in the context of the refugee experience must include an understanding of the psychological, social and existential impacts of the refugee experience. These can be grouped in four areas:



### 1. Anxiety

Anxiety in young people can present in a wide variety of ways including:

- intrusive and recurrent distressing recollections of the traumatic event such as recurrent memories, images, nightmares of trauma and flashbacks;
- impairment in ability to think, concentrate and remember;
- conditioned fear response to reminders, places, things and people's behaviours leading to avoiding fearful situations and emotional withdrawal;
- generalised fear not directly related to trauma such as fear of strangers, fear of being alone and fear of dark places;
- hyper-vigilance or watchfulness;
- a startled reaction to sudden changes in environment such as noise;
- reduced capacity to manage tension and frustration, leading to reduced control over impulsive behaviour;
- emotional numbing leading to denial, detachment, reduced interest in activities and people;
- psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, panic attacks, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation, dry mouth.

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<sup>51</sup> This section draws heavily on *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* (VFST) and the YAPA Fact Sheet: *Working with Young Survivors of Refugee Trauma and Torture*.

## 2. Loss of Relationships

There are a number of ways in which a young person might display trauma that has resulted from the loss of significant relationships. These include:

<b>Grief responses</b>	Numbness, denial Pining, yearning Preoccupation with lost person Emptiness, apathy, despair Anger
<b>Changes to attachment behaviour</b>	Increased dependency, clinging behaviour Fierce self-sufficiency Compulsive care-giving Guardedness, suspiciousness
<b>Depression</b>	Pessimism Loss of interest Sleep disturbance including difficulties falling or staying asleep, oversleeping and dreams with loss-related content Appetite disturbance including overeating or low appetite Difficulties with concentration and memory Self-degradation Self-blame Hopelessness Suicidal thoughts and plans

## 3. Shattered Core Assumptions

The refugee experience can erode a young person's core assumptions about human existence and result in:

- loss of meaning and purpose;
- damaged capacity to trust and intense sense of betrayal;
- need to build a new outlook because previous expectations and dreams for the future no longer apply;
- being more alert to issue of human accountability;
- heightened sensitivity to injustice;
- impacted moral concepts with behaviour either overly regulated by considerations of what is good or bad or alternatively lacking consideration of good or bad;
- loss of faith in adult's ability to protect;
- loss of continuity of the self or negative impact on developing self-concept.

#### 4. Guilt and Shame

In order to survive, many refugees have to do things that run counter to their sense of morality and ethics and about which they later feel deeply guilty and ashamed. This may apply directly to young people from refugee backgrounds and to what they observe in the behaviour of those closely associated with them such as family members. Guilt can also come simply from the realisation that they are alive and/or living in a safe place while other people important to them are not. Guilt and shame can manifest in many ways including:

- preoccupation with feelings of having failed to do something more to avert violence;
- use of fantasy to exact revenge and repair damage done during traumatic event;
- self-destructive behaviour;
- avoidance of others due to shame;
- inhibited experience of pleasure;
- self-blame expressed as self-deprecating;
- altered sense of self as being, for example feeling 'dirty' or 'bad'.

#### Responding to Signs of Trauma

Young people rarely identify themselves as traumatised. It is thus very important for workers to know about the many ways in which trauma can manifest (as outlined above). It is also helpful to know enough about the types of experiences young people from the particular country/background are likely to have had to be able to make an informed assessment of how closely the young person needs to be monitored for signs of trauma.

Assisting trauma survivors to come to terms with their past experiences requires specialist expertise. There are agencies in every state and territory undertaking this work and to which referrals can be made:

- ACT: Companion House: [www.companionhouse.org.au](http://www.companionhouse.org.au)
- New South Wales: STARTTS: [www.startts.org](http://www.startts.org)
- Northern Territory: Melaleuca Refugee Centre: [www.melaleuca.org.au](http://www.melaleuca.org.au)
- Queensland: QPASTT: [www.qpastt.org.au](http://www.qpastt.org.au)
- South Australia: STTARS: [www.sttars.org.au](http://www.sttars.org.au)
- Tasmania: Phoenix House: [www.mrchobart.org.au/phoenix/phoenix](http://www.mrchobart.org.au/phoenix/phoenix)
- Victoria: Foundation House: [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)
- Western Australia: ASETTS: [www.asetts.org.au](http://www.asetts.org.au)

Anyone working with young people from refugee backgrounds in any capacity needs to know which of the above agencies provides services in their location and what the referral protocols are.

These agencies run courses for workers to help them respond appropriately to the needs of trauma survivors and it is recommended that those working with traumatised young people from refugee backgrounds consider taking one of these courses to supplement the information provided here which, by necessity, only covers first principles.

## Recovery from Trauma

When it comes to the 'first principles' mentioned above, it is relevant to note that there is general agreement that the trauma recovery framework has four key objectives. Knowing what these are and strategies for achieving them is important for those working with young people from refugee backgrounds as it is possible to support the recovery goals.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

Objective	Way This Can Be Achieved
<p><b>To restore safety, enhance control and reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety</b></p>	<p>Providing access to basic needs, e.g. health, welfare, education, accommodation</p> <p>Identifying causes of anxiety and accommodating the effects of anxiety</p> <p>Providing services that are safe and consistent</p> <p>Providing information about the trauma reaction</p> <p>Ensuring the young person is actively involved in deciding on interventions</p> <p>Introducing relaxation exercises</p>
<p><b>To restore attachment and connections to other people who can offer emotional support and care, and overcome grief and loss</b></p>	<p>Fostering a trusting and continuing connection with an available caring adult</p> <p>Encouraging participation in group activities to reduce social isolation</p> <p>Promoting belonging by overcoming settlement problems</p> <p>Linking to supportive groups and agencies</p> <p>Providing opportunities for constructive social/ political action to restore a sense of purpose</p>
<p><b>To restore meaning and purpose to life</b></p>	<p>Encouraging participation in group programs that promote communication, reduce isolation and enhance self-esteem</p> <p>Offering opportunities for integration of past, present and future through art, storytelling and drama</p> <p>Creating opportunities to envisage a positive view of the future</p> <p>Exploring concepts of self, other and the community in a safe environment</p> <p>Validating the trauma and difficulties experienced</p> <p>Validating the cultural differences in their values</p> <p>Providing human rights education and information that helps them contextualise and understand the situation in their home country</p>

<p><b>To restore dignity and value, which includes reducing excessive shame and guilt</b></p>	<p>Facilitating expression of guilt and shame</p> <p>Reflecting that it is normal for them to wish they could have done more to prevent others from being harmed</p> <p>Allowing the telling and retelling of events and stories</p> <p>Assisting with developing ways to reduce guilt</p> <p>Providing space for discussion about the political and social environment’s contribution to the development of shame</p> <p>Facilitating community acknowledgement of human rights violations and the need for redress</p>
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## Racism

Around one in five Australians say they have experienced verbal abuse or name-calling.

More than one in 20 Australians say they have been physically attacked because of their race.<sup>52</sup>

Young people from refugee backgrounds are not the only people who experience racism but it can be argued that, for some, its effects can be more profound because it:

- undermines their sense of safety in Australia;
- reignites memories of past persecution and abuse;
- impedes them from feeling connected to this country.

The experience of racism can further exacerbate the impacts of trauma and can lead to a re-experiencing of the most humiliating aspects of past trauma.

Racism can be **visible** or **invisible**, **explicit** or **subtle**.

In its most overt or visible form it can include people using racially linked terms to refer to others, making ‘jokes’ or comments that refer to a person’s race in a negative way, using aspects of a person’s racial identity to intimidate a person or excluding people on the basis of their race. Overt racism can be verbal or written. The latter includes racist graffiti and websites. Overt racism can also extend to violent acts. Young people often experience more explicit racism and discrimination at school (i.e. racist bullying and exclusion, and conflict between groups of young people).

Invisible racism is, by its very nature, much harder to identify and address. This too can take many forms. For example, it might involve a service provider giving less support to

<sup>52</sup> From Racism: It Stops with Me. [www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au)

someone because of their race or an employer deciding not to interview someone because their name suggests they are from a particular background. Invisible racism often involves prejudices people are reluctant to talk about or even admit to having. It can also be reflected in community attitudes and in the representations of migrant and refugee young people in the media which are often negative, fail to recognise diversity and do not portray the achievements and strengths of multicultural young people and their communities.

Racism can also be **systemic** or **structural**. For example, if the only way to get access to a particular service is to fill out a form in English, and no support is provided to non-English speakers to complete the form, the agency is disadvantaging people on the basis of an attribute (language ability) linked to their race.

A study of over 800 Australian secondary school students found that racism had huge mental health impacts on young people who experience it, including:

- ongoing feelings of sadness, anger, depression and being left out
- headaches, increased heart rate, sweating, trembling and muscle tension
- a constant fear of being verbally or physically attacked
- not wanting to go to school
- having little or no trust in anybody apart from family.<sup>53</sup>

For young people from refugee backgrounds, the experience of racism and discrimination threatens personal and cultural identity and can have a detrimental impact on mental health, psychological development and capacity to negotiate the transition to adulthood. As such, the experience of racism and discrimination can also be a key barrier to social inclusion, as it can diminish a young person's sense of connection and belonging to their community and broader society, reinforce the experience of marginalisation and isolation and inhibit participation in education, employment or recreational activities.

Racism can also reduce people's ability to work or study and to achieve their future goals. Racism also affects people's general wellbeing when they are denied equal access to jobs, services and education.

A National Anti-Racism Strategy called **Racism – It Stops With Me** was launched in August 2012 to educate the public – and especially young people – about how damaging and hurtful racism can be – not just to the victims but to the whole community. The strategy is supported by an excellent website: [www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au).

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<sup>53</sup> From Racism: It Stops with Me. [www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au)

## Social Media

**Cybersmart:** [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has a very accessible website that focuses on all aspects of using social media. It has sections specifically for young people of different ages, as well as parents and teachers, and includes a number of interactive activities.

Social media is a part of most young people's daily lives. According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), 90% of young people between 12–17 years and 97% of those aged 16 and 17 years use social network services.<sup>54</sup>

Recent consultations<sup>55</sup> revealed the following benefits for young people of using social media:

- making new connections and building community (including the opportunity to create 'safe spaces' to engage with others online);
- taking action and creating change;
- strengthening existing relationships;
- seeking information or entertainment.

The report drawn from these consultations also noted that:

- social media is often the first place young people will go to seek information;
- social media is accessible and easy to use for young people;
- social media can increase engagement with young people who might face other barriers to connecting with a service/organisation;
- social media is an effective way to increase young people's awareness of the programs available through organisations and/or services.

It must be noted, however, that young people's experience of social media is not always positive and there are some risks and concerns around the impact of social media. One risk that is of particular concern is that of cyber bullying and workers with young people should have an awareness of how to support young people should they be faced with cyber bullying. In 2009, the Effective Communication with Young People report outlined a variety of other concerns that young people had about their uses of social networking sites including:

- privacy and security issues,
- hackers and employers gaining access,
- embarrassing photos,
- loss of privacy through 'tagging',

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<sup>54</sup> From What Makes You Tweet. YACVic. June 2013.  
[www.yacvic.org.au/component/docman/doc\\_download/336-report-what-makes-you-tweet-young-people-s-perspectives-on-the-use-of-social-media-as-an-engagement-tool?Itemid=](http://www.yacvic.org.au/component/docman/doc_download/336-report-what-makes-you-tweet-young-people-s-perspectives-on-the-use-of-social-media-as-an-engagement-tool?Itemid=)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

- loss of some control,
- concern about privacy rules (while some users were aware of the rules, others were not),
- claims that one provider was encouraging them to not go 'private',
- lack of internet access, slow service and/or poor coverage in some rural and more remote locations,
- 'addiction' to use of the sites by some users,
- involvement with the site is sometimes taken 'too far' and users say things they would not normally,
- loss of personal intimacy, and
- advertising by some companies and organisations on social networking sites.

Some young people from refugee backgrounds will already be proficient in the use of social media when they arrive in Australia as they will have been using it in their home country and/or their country of first asylum. For others, however, this is a whole new world and their lack of familiarity with it can be intimidating for them and make them very vulnerable.

There are a range of issues that young people from refugee backgrounds confront in the social media sphere. These include but are by no means limited to the following:

- Not knowing how to use the technology: those who have grown up using information technology can intuitively pick up how to use new applications. For those who have not, it can be quite daunting.
- Not knowing the 'culture' of social media: in each social media subculture, there are unwritten conventions about what's acceptable and what's not. It is easy for a newcomer to make a faux pas that can result in ridicule and embarrassment.
- Not knowing how to use social media safely: young people who have grown up in Australia and gone to school here occasionally make (sometimes very tragic) mistakes, despite having been alerted to the risks of social media; those who haven't had this exposure, and are very keen to 'fit in', face even greater risks.
- Missing out on social interaction: if a young person is not 'connected' they are separated from the medium through which young people interact and will also miss out on information about social and recreational opportunities.
- Being concerned about privacy and/or security issues: in a number of countries from which young people from refugee background come, sharing information about oneself can be very dangerous. Even once they are in Australia, this fear does not entirely leave them. There is also the very real issue of concern about family members in their country of origin. Some might be concerned that anything they say (even revealing their presence in Australia) might compromise the safety of people they love.
- Not knowing about how to respond to things that are 'posted': many things on social media can be confronting and hurtful, such as seeing negative things written about you, discovering that someone you thought you were in a relationship with is seeing someone else, learning that all your friends had gone to a party to which you were not invited etc.

Social media can be a tricky issue for those working with young people from refugee backgrounds. The key to working with young people is to establish a relationship with them and many young people see social media as integral to having a relationship. Further, many workers see social media as a way to 'keep an eye on' how the young people with whom they are working 'are travelling'. Social media can, however, easily lead to the professional-personal boundaries becoming very blurred.

Many agencies and educational institutions have policies in relation to connecting with clients/students/patients via social media. It is important for workers to find out what their workplace policies are and to abide by them. These policies can be used to explain to the young people why it is not possible to connect in this way.

If the workplace allows workers to connect with clients/students/patients through social media, it is essential for workers to:

- establish whether there are any policies in their workplace regarding the use of social media and abide by these;
- seek advice from a supervisor about acceptable and unacceptable social media connection;
- be very careful about what they post on their own websites, particularly in relation to personal disclosure;
- be even more careful about comments they post on the young person's site.

## Sexuality and Sexual Health

A survey in Victoria<sup>56</sup> found that most young people in Years 10 and 12 at high school are sexually active to varying degrees. Selected statistics include:

- About one in four Year 10 students and half of all Year 12 students have had vaginal intercourse.
- Of the young people who had ever had sex, about half of the males and 61% of the females had at least one sexual partner in the last year.
- Between 15% and 19% had two sexual partners in the last year.
- Students in Year 10 are more likely to have had their most recent sexual encounter with someone they met for the first time (15%) than students in Year 12 (7.6%).

### **Sexual attraction**

- Most young people (93%) reported attraction to members of the opposite sex.
- 4.6% are attracted to both sexes, with less than 1% stating they are solely interested in same sex partners.
- Males are more likely to report same sex attraction, while females are more likely to report attraction to both sexes.
- About 2% of the most recent sexual encounters at the time of the survey were with a person of the same sex.

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<sup>56</sup> Summarised from *Teenagers – Sexual Behaviour*. Website of the Victorian Government [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Teenagers\\_sexual\\_behaviour](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Teenagers_sexual_behaviour)

### **Contraception - common issues**

- A New South Wales study found that 86% of young people in relationships of one year's duration or less don't use condoms every time they have sex.
- Over half of those who use the contraceptive pill don't use condoms to protect themselves from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
- About 50% of teenagers are sexually active for 12 months before they visit their doctor for prescription contraception.
- Around half of all teenage pregnancies occur within the first six months of becoming sexually active.

### **Safe sex**

- One in four teenagers have had sexual intercourse without using a condom.
- Only 40% of Year 12 students always use condoms.
- One in four teenagers report they were either drunk or high during their most recent sexual encounter.
- Estimates suggest that about 28% of Australian teenagers may be infected with Chlamydia.

### **Sexual confidence**

- Most young people feel confident they can deal successfully with issues such as unwanted sex or a partner who is unwilling to use a condom.
- Most young people don't feel confident they can talk about sexual issues such as contraception with their parents.
- 22.8% of young people didn't discuss any sex-related issues, such as condom use and avoiding pregnancy or STIs, prior to their most recent sexual encounter.

### **Unwanted sex**

- 5% of teenagers reported that their most recent sexual experience was unwanted.
- 15.9% experienced unwanted sex because they were drunk, with higher figures for females (17.6%) than males (13.9%).
- 6.1% experienced unwanted sex because they were using recreational drugs, with higher figures for males (6.9%) than females (5.4%).
- 12.6% experienced unwanted sex because they were pressured by their partner, with higher figures for females (13.9%) than males (11%).
- 2% experienced unwanted sex because they were pressured by their friends, with higher figures for males (2.9%) than females (1.2%).

As discussed in Topic 1, adolescence is a time of emerging sexuality and when, for many, their first sexual encounters will occur. It is a time that can be both confusing and exciting. It can also be a time during which young people are exposed to a range of pressures, not least from their parents/carers, their peers and the media.

For young people from refugee backgrounds, these pressures are complicated by the fact that their parents or carers have grown up in a different culture in which the sexual mores are likely to be very different. Many parents/carers find the Australian teenage culture in which their children are engaging both confusing and confronting and feel concerned

about what they perceive to be Australian attitudes to sexual relationships. Sex and relationships often become a major source of tension within homes.

**Many young people from refugee backgrounds therefore will benefit from two complementary kinds of support:**

- **Culturally appropriate information and advice about relationships, sexuality and sexual health.**
- **Culturally appropriate support that will assist them to manage family expectations and pressure.**

## **Key Messages for Young People about Sexual Relationships**

There is a lot of information for young people about sexuality and sexual relationships, some of which will be discussed later. Underpinning most of this are some key messages for young people.

Ideally, a sexual relationship should be based on:

- **Good communication:** a healthy and fulfilling sexual relationship has to be underpinned by open and honest communication between partners. If this does not come naturally, there are websites (see below) that show how this can be achieved.
- **Mutual enjoyment:** both parties should find enjoyment and fulfilment from a sexual relationship and thus need to work together to ensure this occurs.
- **Mutual respect:** it is important that sexual relationships are based on respect for each other's needs, desires and value as a person.
- **Consent:** both parties in a sexual relationship must be happy and comfortable about everything they do within the relationship. Non-consensual sexual activity is a crime, so it is important to understand the laws around consent.
- **Risk mitigation:** it is important to understand the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and to know how to practise safe sex.

When working with young people from refugee backgrounds, especially those who are recently arrived, it might, however, be necessary to go back a few steps. Having not grown up in Australia, these young people can often feel quite bewildered about how to go about meeting prospective partners and how to communicate with people of the opposite (or same) sex.

On a case-by-case basis, it might be necessary to engaging with the young person in a constructive and respectful dialogue around a range of issues including but not limited to the following.



**Where you can go to meet other young people**

**Age-appropriate behaviour**

**What kind of clothes to wear**

**Personal hygiene**

**How you can open a conversation;**

**How to read the signals the other person sends out**

**What types of behaviours are acceptable and not acceptable**

**How to interact with a prospective partner**

**Where to get information and advice**

Before moving on, it is worth noting that:

- some young people from refugee backgrounds come from countries where same sex relationships are illegal and punishable by lengthy terms of imprisonment. As discussed in Topic 9, those attracted to the same sex can find it harder to come to terms with their own sexuality and to reveal this to their parents or carers and community;
- workers have a responsibility to ensure that their own beliefs do not have a negative impact on the way they treat the young person with whom they are working.

## **Information for Young People about Sexual Relationships**

There are some excellent websites and information packages specifically designed to help young people to navigate the complexities of sexual relationships.

Two youth friendly websites are:

**I Stay Safe** - [www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe/](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe/)

Developed by the Queensland Government, the site is especially for teenagers, and aims to answer questions about safe sex and sexual health.

**Like It Is** - <http://www.likeitis.org.au/>

This site has been developed by Marie Stopes International and promotes itself as “no frills, no judgements and definitely no holds barred!”

It is worth noting, however, that these resources have not been developed with a culturally diverse audience in mind so if using them, you might want to check with the young person whether they find it appropriate.

It would also be an interesting exercise to go onto these sites (or any of the sites included in the resource list) in class to look at their contents. Ask the participants to reflect on how suitable these sites might be for young people from refugee backgrounds.

There are also a number of training programs for workers and young people.

One well-regarded train-the-trainer package is **LOVE BiTES** which was developed by the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN). This can be found at [www.napcan.org.au/programs/uj](http://www.napcan.org.au/programs/uj).

Another well-regarded training program is **Crossroads**. Developed by the NSW Department of Education, this program targets Year 11 and 12 students. See: [www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/pdhpe/crossroads/index.htm](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/pdhpe/crossroads/index.htm)

## Sex and the Family

As previously mentioned, boyfriends, girlfriends, dating and sex can be the cause of considerable friction within the homes of young people from refugee backgrounds. While such tension is not unique to these families, the combination of different cultural values and the impact of past trauma can exacerbate it.

Counsellors, in particular school counsellors, are trained to support young people to deal with these issues. If the relationship between the young person and his/her parents/carer is fragile or breaking down, consideration should be given to encouraging the young person to accept such specialist advice if you are confident the person has the skills and knowledge to work with someone from a refugee background.

If, on the other hand, it's a situation where young people are simply seeking some guidance or support about how to engage with their parents/carer on issues to do with dating, relationships and sex, there are some strategies that can be employed:

- Before you proffer any advice, find out as much as you can about the norms of the culture (or religious or ethnic group) to which the young person belongs.
- Ask the young person about:
  - what they want to achieve;
  - how his/her family is reacting;
  - why they think they are reacting in this way?
- Work with the young person to help them to understand their parents' or carers' motives and reactions and to think of whether there might be a way to respond to their concerns and engage in constructive dialogue.

- Emphasise the importance of keeping communication open with their parents or carer.
- Work with the young person to develop communication strategies to use with his/her family that are respectful and non-judgemental, that take the parents' or carers' concerns into account and which are likely to lead to a mutually acceptable outcome. Draw on key lessons from Topics 7 and 8.
- If the young person feels there is merit in this, suggest using a mediator (such as a trusted relative or community elder) to be present when the young person speaks with his/her parents or carer.

## Police and the Law

Those working with young people from refugee backgrounds need to understand how they might view police and the law in order to be able to support them to reframe their attitudes and support better engagement with police. Important things to bear in mind include the following:

- Most young people from refugee backgrounds come from situations in both their country of origin and country of first asylum where people in uniform are to be feared. In some instances, people in uniform were the perpetrators of violence against the young person or his/her family. If those in uniform were not violent, it is possible that they were corrupt. It is not uncommon for officials in some parts of the world to use their positions to extort money or sexual favours from vulnerable people. So when young people from refugee backgrounds come to Australia, they arrive with the notion that the police (and by extension, anyone in uniform) is someone to be feared and not to be trusted. The fact that they learn otherwise in their pre and post-arrival cultural orientation classes might temper their views a little but it can take quite some time for them to accept that those in uniform in Australia will not pose a threat.
- In many parts of the world, the laws of the country are seen as flexible rather than absolute. For example, there might be a law that says people should wear seatbelts but most people will only do this if they see a policeman and, if they are pulled over, they can escape penalties if they hand over some money. The idea that laws are taken seriously in Australia and that there are penalties for infringing the law is quite a strange concept for many new arrivals.
- Australia is also a very heavily regulated society. There are laws for a great many things such as wearing helmets on bicycles, smoking, not leaving young children alone, having child-seats in cars etc. Many of these laws do not exist in other countries and so new arrivals can be in a situation of 'not knowing what they don't know'. Here too, many of these laws are covered in their orientation sessions but hearing about something and internalising it can sometimes be quite different.
- As discussed in Topic 9, a number of activities in which young people from refugee backgrounds might unwittingly engage, such as 'hanging out' in shopping malls, can lead to misconceptions on the part of members of the public, security officers and the police.

The areas which are particularly problematic for young people from refugee backgrounds are those relating to having tickets on public transport and driving without a licence.

Helping young people from refugee backgrounds to understand the letter and culture of the law in Australia and to re-shape their attitudes to uniformed officials requires a multi-pronged strategy which can include:

- being aware of what young people are told in orientation classes<sup>57</sup> so reference can be made to this and key concepts can be reinforced;
- informing young people about their rights and responsibilities under the law using clear and simple language;
- supporting young people who need assistance with legal issues (e.g. through referrals to Legal Aid or a local Community Legal Centre);
- building a relationship with the local police, including but not only the ethnic liaison officers, to increase their understanding of the young people from refugee backgrounds in their area and ensure that young people have an advocate in interactions with the police;
- providing opportunities for young people to interact in a positive way with the police (e.g. through sporting activities, camps etc);
- encouraging young people to consider a career with the police or any of the other emergency services, thus enabling them to shape the culture from within.

A number of resources have been developed for newly arrived youth to help them understand Australian laws. One such resource is *What's the Law: Australian Law for New Arrivals*. This was developed by Legal Aid in the ACT ([www.legalaidact.org.au](http://www.legalaidact.org.au)) and it contains a DVD, information for teachers and student activity sheets linked to the 10 stories in the DVD.

When it comes to educating the police, there is a useful resource called *Taking the Initiative*. This was designed specifically for police around Australia, to help them get to know what other jurisdictions are doing to improve their relationships with Australia's new arrivals. See [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/gateways/police/](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/gateways/police/).

## Financial Literacy

Managing money is yet another challenge facing young people from refugee backgrounds when they arrive in Australia. Here too, its complexity results from the interplay of many factors including but not limited to the following:

- Life as a refugee is one of deprivation. For many having permanent residence in Australia is the psychological end to their time as a refugee and, by extension, everything associated with this. Some young people might want to access a range of consumer goods and services that Australia offers, regardless of the limitation of their income and/or the financial consequences.
- Allied to the above, young people from refugee backgrounds mix with other young people who have grown up in Australia and who, over time, have acquired things seen

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<sup>57</sup> See [www.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/ausco-resources.htm](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/ausco-resources.htm).

as desirable to young people – fashionable clothes, a mobile phone and a variety of electronic devices – and who are able to go to concerts and other places of entertainment. Understandably they might desire to have and do these things too and believe that this is important to their being able to 'fit in'.

- Some young people had privileged backgrounds in their own country before being forced to flee. They had to leave all of this behind and for many, the loss of socio-economic status is significant. A desire to rebuild this can be a key driver in many young people's settlement journey.
- Other young people who have never had much money have very little appreciation of what budgeting means or had a chance to learn about the merits of saving.
- Some companies that market desirable commodities are less than ethical in the way they do so. They offer enticing plans and deals (in particular mobile phone plans) designed to lure unsuspecting people in and then impose exorbitant payment schedules or penalties for late payments. Those with little financial literacy, like young people from refugee backgrounds, are particularly susceptible to unscrupulous operators.
- Centrelink's payments to young people often cause friction within the home. The Australian welfare system and concept that a young person would receive an independent income is often very unfamiliar (both conceptually and practically) to many newly arrived families, including young people. Sometimes young people see this income as their own spending money, rather than as being a necessary contribution to the family's household expenses (food, rent, utilities, etc.) and sometimes they resent relinquishing the sense of independence that this income allows. Often families have not discussed or negotiated expectations on the use of a young person's Centrelink income until it becomes a source of conflict.
- When young people first get into financial difficulties, they don't know who to turn to. They are ashamed to talk to their parents/carers or don't want to add to their worries and are reluctant to talk to people within their own communities. Small debts can easily mount because they have been 'swept under the carpet'.

The following are some simple tips for helping young people from refugee backgrounds deal with money:

- If a young person is experiencing financial difficulties, refer them to an expert. Most settlement support agencies either employ financial planners or have links to agencies that have this expertise.
- State government departments of Fair Trading have excellent resources in community languages about financial management, consumer rights and how to complain. Go to the website of the relevant agency in your state and territory to download resources.
- Assist the young person to work out a plan for meeting all their various financial obligations and saving for the things they want. This will include advice about budgeting and saving, as well as discussion using their income to support family, either in Australia or overseas.

- Check with Centrelink that the young person you are supporting is receiving the correct entitlements. It can be common for many young people from refugee backgrounds to not be receiving correct income support.
- Where appropriate, support families to resolve conflict in relation to a young person's independent Centrelink income.
- Explain where you can get second-hand clothes and other items at a fraction of the cost of new or, if required, to access material aid.
- Reinforce to the young person that positive relationships in life are more likely to be formed on the basis of who they are, not what they have.



The ASIC website Money Smart has an excellent section for under 25s [www.moneysmart.gov.au/life-events-and-you/under-25s](http://www.moneysmart.gov.au/life-events-and-you/under-25s). Money Smart also has information in 26 languages

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Professor L. Newman and A. Harris. *Refugee and Asylum Seekers: supporting recovery from trauma*. Trauma and Grief Network. Australian National University. <http://tqn.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Refugee%20Tipsheet.pdf>

S. Mares and J Jureidini. *Child and adolescent refugees and asylum seekers*, in M. Dudley, D. Silove and F. Gale (Eds), *Mental Health and Human Rights*. Oxford University Press. 2012.

### YAPA FACT SHEETS:

Working with young survivors of refugee trauma and torture. YAPA. [www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/facts/torture.php](http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/facts/torture.php)

Issues for Young Refugees. YAPA. [www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/facts/refugees.php](http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/facts/refugees.php).

The Centre for Multicultural Youth has a series of Fact Sheets on working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. These can be downloaded from [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au).

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*Red Aware*. A sexual health peer education program developed by YEAH (Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS). [www.redaware.org.au/about/](http://www.redaware.org.au/about/)

*Sexual Health*. An education resource developed by NSW HSC On-line. [www.hsc.csu.edu.au/pdhpe/options/young/4019/1-2-5/hoyp1\\_2\\_5.htm](http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/pdhpe/options/young/4019/1-2-5/hoyp1_2_5.htm)  
*I Stay Safe*. Queensland Department of Health. [www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe/](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe/)

*Like It Is*. Marie Stopes International. <http://www.likeitis.org.au/>

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*Crossroads*. NSW Department of Education. [www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/pdhpe/crossroads/index.htm](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/pdhpe/crossroads/index.htm)

*Sexual Behaviour*. Victorian Department of Health [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Teenagers\\_sexual\\_behaviour](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Teenagers_sexual_behaviour)

*Coming Out, Coming Home or Inviting People In?* Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. [www.glhv.org.au/report/coming-out-coming-home-or-inviting-people-supporting-same-sex-attracted-women-immigrant-and-r](http://www.glhv.org.au/report/coming-out-coming-home-or-inviting-people-supporting-same-sex-attracted-women-immigrant-and-r)

*What's the Law: Australian Law for New Arrival*. An education resource developed by ACT Legal Aid. [www.legalaidact.org.au](http://www.legalaidact.org.au)

J. Collins, G. Noble, S. Poynting and P. Tabar. *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime: Youth Ethnicity and Crime*. Pluto Press Australia. 2000.

*Taking the Initiative*. DIAC. [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/taking-the-initiative](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/taking-the-initiative).

NSW Department of Fair Trading. Publications about consumer issues in community languages. [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au).

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## Specialist Trauma Counselling Services

- ACT: Companion House: [www.companionhouse.org.au](http://www.companionhouse.org.au)
- New South Wales: STARTTS: [www.startts.org](http://www.startts.org)
- Northern Territory: Melaleuca Refugee Centre: [www.melaleuca.org.au](http://www.melaleuca.org.au)
- Queensland: QPASTT: [www.qpastt.org.au](http://www.qpastt.org.au)
- South Australia: STTARS: [www.sttars.org.au](http://www.sttars.org.au)
- Tasmania: Phoenix House: [www.mrchobart.org.au/phoenix/phoenix](http://www.mrchobart.org.au/phoenix/phoenix)
- Victoria: Foundation House: [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)
- Western Australia: ASETTS: [www.asetts.org.au](http://www.asetts.org.au)

## Self-Directed Activities

1. Select and read one of the references listed above about working with young people who have experienced torture and/or trauma.
2. If it was not done in class, go to the website of the trauma counselling service for refugee survivors of torture and trauma in your state or territory. See list above. Make a note of the address, referral information, resource list and training opportunities.

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3. Go to the websites of one or both of the two largest counselling services for refugee survivors of torture and trauma: Foundation House in Victoria and STARTTS NSW. Look at their resource lists and read/download things that you feel will be relevant for you in your work.
4. Use Google or other search engine or the reference list to find websites for young people that provide information about sexuality and relationships. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do you find the information relevant and easily accessible?
  - Do you think the site would appeal to a 14, 18 or 20 year old?
  - Does the site contain the type of information a 14, 18 and 20 year old might be looking for?
  - Does the site contain anything for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
  - Is it a site you would recommend to young people from refugee backgrounds?
  - Are there any young people you would think twice about recommending it to? Why?



7. Look at the Legal Aid ACT resource: *What's the Law: Australian Law for New Arrivals*. List the ways in which you might use this in your work with young people from refugee backgrounds.

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8. Find images or newspaper articles which present young people from refugee backgrounds (as opposed to asylum seekers) in a particular light. This may be positive or negative and may include articles that perpetuate stereotypes etc. How do these stereotypes impact on young people from refugee backgrounds? What can workers do to effect change on this issue?

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9. Fatima comes to you in considerable distress. When you speak to her, you establish that she owes over \$10,000 on her credit card and is behind with her rent. What steps would you take to support Fatima in resolving this situation?

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## Topic 11: Consultation and Advocacy

**Topic 11** is about consultation and advocacy. In Topic 11 you will learn about:

- the importance of empowerment;
- how to consult with young people from refugee backgrounds;
- how to support young people to advocate for themselves;
- strategies for advocating on behalf of clients;
- complaints mechanisms.

### Empowering Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.<sup>58</sup>*

Empowerment is an integral part of the settlement process and this is no less important for young people than it is for adults; after all, they are the adults of the future.

Accepting that it is a gross generalisation, it is fair to say that many young people:

- have a keen sense of 'fairness' and think about what's 'right and wrong';
- want to have a say in things that concern them;
- are eager to stand up against things they perceive to be unjust.

Young people from refugee backgrounds are no different in this regard and, in many cases, can be even more passionate because they, more than many other young people, have first-hand experience of injustice.

What is it we need to consider about young people in general and young people from refugee backgrounds in particular when thinking about supporting these young people to have a voice and advocate for the things that are important to them?

You might wish to pose this question to the group.

While there are doubtless lots of views on this, it is suggested that there are three areas in which an approach specific to young people from refugee backgrounds should be considered:

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<sup>58</sup> Chinese proverb attributed to Lao Tzu.

- 1) **Consultation:** how information is gathered about a perceived problem or issue.
- 2) **Contextualisation:** helping young people from refugee backgrounds to understand how things work in Australia and when things are not as they should be.
- 3) **Effective advocacy:** empowering the young people to become effective advocates in their own right.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

## Consultation

An excellent guide on this topic is the Centre for Multicultural Youth's *Considering Consulting*.<sup>59</sup> It suggests that consultation on issues pertinent to them benefits young people from refugee backgrounds by:

- enabling them to be meaningfully included in decision-making processes;
- providing a forum for them to articulate their needs and aspirations;
- increasing their participation in programs and activities coordinated by generalist youth service providers;
- improving outcomes for young people from refugee backgrounds by ensuring their views are translated into practice;
- increasing the confidence that young people from refugee backgrounds have in consultation processes;
- increasing the knowledge of young people about the service system, current policy issues and community and government structures.<sup>60</sup>

This being said, it is important not to **begin** into consulting without first giving very careful consideration to a number of critical issues:

- Is there another way of obtaining the information? You need to check to see whether any of the key advocacy bodies (see list in reference section) or local service providers have taken up the issue or whether there is published research. Consulting just for the sake of consulting is not only considered unethical but it can also undermine your credibility with key stakeholders, not least the young people.

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<sup>59</sup> Alison Coelho. *Considering Consulting: A guide to meaningful consultation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. 2007. Centre for Multicultural Youth. Available at [www.cmy.net.au/Assets/170/2/ConsideringConsulting.pdf](http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/170/2/ConsideringConsulting.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid Page 7.

- Is there a real chance that the consultation process will lead to change? There are some things young people might like to change but where change is improbable, for example where there are broader issues to consider (e.g. lowering the driving age to 16) and/or where there is embedded government policy (e.g. immigration detention) and/or where solving the issue is immensely complicated (e.g. world hunger). By not focusing on achievable objectives, you run the risk of disempowering young people.
- Is there any chance that the consultation process will harm the young people in any way? Most young people from refugee backgrounds have had a traumatic past. Asking them to relive the past without good cause and without appropriate support mechanisms in place is not ethical and should be avoided at all costs.

AND consideration should be given to a number of key issues relevant to consulting with young people from refugee backgrounds:

- Newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds don't always know how things 'should be'. This might mean that they don't know what they should be able to expect and/or to what they are entitled. It might also mean that they have over-inflated ideas about entitlements and how things should happen.
- It is unwise to assume that all young people from refugee backgrounds will understand concepts such as democracy, adolescence and individualism, or even settlement. In some cases these words do not exist in their first language; in others, they are concepts clouded with layers of meaning that can be obscure to outsiders.
- In recent years there has been considerable attention given to identifying and meeting the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds. This is laudable but what has happened in some places is that the same young people (usually articulate youth leaders) are consulted over and over again, often receiving no feedback or seeing little benefit for their participation. Understandably they can become very cynical and jaded, which in turn can cloud the views they express.
- An important survival strategy legitimately employed by many refugees is suspicion. Just because your motives might be sound does not mean that the young people from refugee backgrounds will automatically trust you or your motives. Not having a prior relationship with the young people or not working collaboratively with someone who does almost guarantees that the information collected will be incomplete and/or compromised.
- The notion of being asked for an opinion does not always sit comfortably:
  - Many people from refugee backgrounds (especially those who have spent long periods in camp environments) have been institutionalized. They become used to things being done for them and to things happening around them without any opportunity for them to play a role. Parents or those caring for them can pass on this passivity and sense of acceptance of the status quo to their children. For some young people it can take time to develop a sense of agency (though other young people seemingly embrace this freedom with vigour).

- Some young people from conservative countries are not used to being asked for their opinion. There is an acceptance that their parents or carers make the decisions and that they must do as they are told.
- Amongst some communities, culture dictates that it is impolite to criticise and improper to ask for more. There is a view that one should be grateful for what one gets. In other communities, however, the opposite is often the case. Because they have had to struggle for everything for many years, they keep pushing – asking for more than they need because they are not yet convinced that the worst of their struggles are over.
- There are various things that might make it difficult for young people from refugee backgrounds to participate in consultations, not least:
  - financial constraints: many families are struggling financially so transport fares to attend can be prohibitive. Covering these costs should be a minimum consideration, as should be the provision of refreshments;
  - parental consent: parents or carers might be suspicious about the consultation process and be wary about giving their consent and/or might be reluctant to allow their daughter (or son) to go to a particular location at a particular time or to mix with people of the opposite gender/from a particular group;
  - time constraints: young people have homework and study commitments; many are also holding down some form of employment and they might also be involved in some form of sporting or other pursuits. Finding time for something else can be hard.
- There are various things that might make it hard for you to gather information from a group of young people from refugee backgrounds, including language barriers, your lack of understanding of the young people's background and culture, your inexperience with cross-cultural communication and your inability to 'read' group dynamics.
- Last but by no means least is the issue of language. Just because a young person seems confident in English does not mean that they have the ability to accurately express their views about complex topics or issues of importance to them. They might be unable to nuance their language to express exactly what they want to say and you end up with what they can say rather than what they would prefer you to hear. The reverse is also possible. Lack of understanding of nuances and jargon can limit how much the young person understands what the worker is saying. Language is an even greater barrier for young people with less proficiency in English. Finding a suitable interpreter (through TIS) can make a real difference to the quality of information obtained.

All of this might suggest that consulting with young people from refugee backgrounds is all too hard. It was not meant to give this impression – just to emphasise that it is not a pursuit that should be entered into blindly.

So now we have the caveats, how should we go about consulting with young people from refugee backgrounds?

The following provides a useful guide:



Let's expand on this.

### **STEP 1: SET YOUR OBJECTIVES**

First you need to be very clear about why you want to consult. What are the issues and is consulting the best way to gain a better understanding of them?

Then you need to articulate these reasons clearly and succinctly. These are your objectives.

When writing objectives, it is important to remember that they should be **specific, relevant, measurable** and **achievable**.

### **STEP 2: DECIDE HOW YOU ARE GOING TO CONSULT**

There are lots of different ways of gathering information. It is important to select the one that is best suited to achieving your objectives.

The following table adapted from Considering Consulting<sup>61</sup> provides some useful guidance:

METHOD	PROS	CONS
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anonymity for young person</li> <li>Large potential outreach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Translation required – both of original document and responses - costly and time-consuming</li> <li>Not suitable for groups with low levels of literacy</li> <li>Distribution costs</li> <li>Low return rate</li> </ul>

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<sup>61</sup> *Considering Consulting: A guide to meaningful consultation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.* CMY 2007.

Telephone Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to build trust with young person.</li> <li>• Less intrusive than one-on-one interview and young people may feel more free to express their thoughts if they're not being watched.</li> <li>• Can be conducted at any time so easier for young people with busy lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to engage fully without face-to-face contact.</li> <li>• Cold calls can be intrusive.</li> <li>• Young people may have to speak on a phone in family environment which may limit their responses.</li> </ul>
Individual Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face contact assists in building trust.</li> <li>• Potentially produces good qualitative information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face contact can be a source of anxiety for a vulnerable young person, especially one from a refugee background.</li> </ul>
Group Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less intimidating than an individual consultation.</li> <li>• Potentially produces qualitative and quantitative results.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific needs and expectations of refugee and newly arrived young people often get omitted from group processes.</li> </ul>

### **STEP 3: DRAFT YOUR QUESTIONS**

After selecting the best way to gather your information, you need to draft a set of questions to ask.

The questions should be:

- directly related to your research objectives;
- clear and unambiguous;
- open-ended rather than closed (unless a yes/no answer is required);
- sufficient in number to gather desired information but not too many to bore or annoy those being consulted; and
- ethical (see below).

### **STEP 4: COMPLY WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)<sup>62</sup> has developed ethical principles and associated guidelines for research involving humans that are widely regarded as benchmarks. The core values reflected in these principles are **integrity, respect for persons, beneficence** and **justice**. How these should be applied to research (which is in essence what a consultation is) is set out below.

<sup>62</sup> NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research at [www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au).

Research that has **integrity** is:

- justifiable by its potential benefit;
- designed so that its methodology is appropriate to its aims;
- based on a thorough study of literature and current research;
- designed to ensure that the rights and interests of participants are not compromised;
- implemented or supervised by competent researchers;
- carried out with integrity.

**Respect** in research is recognition of the intrinsic value of human beings and involves:

- abiding by the values of research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence;
- having due regard for the welfare, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage of anyone involved in the research;
- respecting the privacy, confidentiality and cultural sensitivities of the participants and their communities;
- fulfilling any specific agreements made with the participants or the community;
- giving due scope to the capacity of human beings to make their own decisions;
- empowering participants to make informed decisions about participation.

The principles of **beneficence** are:

- the benefits must outweigh any inconvenience or harm associated with the research;
- research should be designed to:
  - minimise risk (see below);
  - clarify potential benefits for participants;
  - not compromise the welfare of participants.

Research that is **just** ensures that:

- the process of recruiting subjects is fair;
- there is no unfair burden on participants;
- there is fair distribution of and access to the benefits from participating;
- there is no exploitation of participants in the process of conducting the research;
- research outcomes are made available to participants in a timely manner.

Further, it is essential to consider the fact that **research is only ethical if its benefits outweigh any risks**. An assessment of potential risks involves:

- identifying any potential risks;
- gauging their probability and severity;
- assessing the extent to which they can be minimised;
- determining whether they are justified by the potential benefits of the research;
- determining how they can be managed.

There is an additional dimension that **MUST** be considered if you wish to **consult with a minor**, i.e. anyone under the age of 18. According to the law, consent to a young person's participation must be obtained from **BOTH** the young person (whenever he or she has sufficient competence to make this decision) and the parent or guardian (in all but

exceptional circumstances<sup>63</sup>). If the young person is an unaccompanied minor, the Minister for Immigration might be their guardian (see Topic 6).

While all of the above should be considered not negotiable, it is fair to say that there are some principles that are of particular relevance when seeking to consult with young people from refugee backgrounds:

- **Informed consent:** information about the reasons for the consultation should be given in a language and format that maximizes the chances that the participants (and their parents/carers) will be able to understand what the consultation is about and what is involved in participating. Where consent to participate is required, this should be in writing in a form that sets out exactly what consent is being given for. The reality of the refugee experience is that critical decisions are often made without involving the refugees and, in many instances, they have little control over their lives. It is vital that this not be replicated in Australia.
- **Non-coercion:** there must be no coercion of potential participants or their parents/carers to induce them to participate. The decision must be made freely and not because of any sense of being ' beholden ' to an agency that has been ' good to them ' or because they are afraid that if they do not agree, they might miss out on a service or some form of support.
- **Opportunities to withdraw:** any participant should be able to withdraw at any stage without giving reasons and without incurring any penalty. Like the ethical principles listed above, this is an important part of empowering young people from refugee backgrounds to take control over their lives.
- **Privacy and confidentiality:** there are a number of reasons why these are of particular importance for young people from refugee backgrounds, not least:
  - the refugee experience teaches many people to be wary about sharing information as it might be used against them in some way. They need to be assured that this will not happen;
  - young people from refugee backgrounds are often concerned about what their parents/carers (or members of their community) will think about them, particularly if the issue being discussed is of a personal or sensitive nature. They are unlikely to open up if they think that what they say might be divulged to others.
- **Risk minimisation:** re-traumatisation as the result of discussion of sensitive topics is an important risk to consider and manage when consulting young people from refugee backgrounds. Similarly it is relevant to think of whether there might be issues associated with jointly consulting with males and females (for example with young people from a Muslim background) or whether there might be any other cultural or religious sensitivity to manage.

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<sup>63</sup> See [www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au) for explanation of what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances' requiring authority from a designated person or organisation.

### **STEP 5: OBTAIN APPROVAL**

If you are conducting anything more than an informal consultation, it is wise (or in some cases necessary) to obtain approval. Depending on the type and purpose of the research, approval needs to be obtained from one or more of the following:

- your line manager
- senior management of your organisation
- your research supervisor
- a Human Research Ethics Committee.

This is a way of checking that you have planned things well and that the process you plan to use is ethical.

### **STEP 6: ORGANISE LOGISTICS**

Logistical arrangements will of course vary depending on the method of consultation.

For face-to-face consultations, a range of things need to be considered, including but not limited to:

- the venue: young people usually prefer informality but you also need to think about privacy and whether there might be interruptions/distractions. You also need to think about whether the venue is accessible (especially if you are thinking of an evening session);
- timing: you need to arrange a time that is most convenient for the group with whom you want to consult;
- transport: how will the young people get there? Do you need to reimburse them for travel or arrange for them to be picked up by a trusted person?
- refreshments: having food and drinks available is important, especially if the young people come straight from school or work. It is also respectful and can help break the ice.

Consideration should also be given to whether an interpreter will be required. Make sure you leave enough time to book one if required and make sure the interpreter is well-briefed about the objectives of the consultation.

### **STEP 7: RECRUIT THE PARTICIPANTS**

Recruitment is something that should run in parallel with organising the logistics. Here too it will vary considerably depending on the objectives of the consultation and whether you have an existing relationship with the group with whom you plan to consult:

- If you have an existing relationship, you need to be very careful about ensuring that participation is entirely voluntary and not done because the young person feels obligated (see section on informed consent above).
- If you don't have an existing relationship with the intended target group, it is best to seek the support of someone who does. This might be someone from a school or youth

group or faith community or an agency/program working with young people from refugee backgrounds.

### **STEP 8: CONDUCT THE CONSULTATION**

The aforementioned CMY publication *Considering Consulting* gives some very practical advice about how to conduct consultations with young people from refugee backgrounds. In summary, they suggest the need to:

- ensure the person conducting the consultation is a trained facilitator;
- ensure that the participants are entirely comfortable with the process and their involvement within it;
- be respectful toward the participants;
- be culturally responsive;
- be flexible and prepared to change tack if things are not going according to plan;
- vary the approach used according to how the consultation is progressing;
- avoid complex language;
- tailor the method of data collection according to the participants, for example, some young people might feel more comfortable drawing than using words to explain how they feel;
- try to involve quieter participants rather than letting the more vocal ones dominate the discussion.

### **STEP 9: PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO PARTICIPANTS**

After you have analysed the information collected, feedback should be provided to the participants. This does not need to be very complex, just a simple explanation of the key findings and what you plan to do with them. This is really important for many reasons, not least:

- paying respect to the young people and recognising the important role they played in supporting the advocacy initiative;
- giving the young people a sense that things can be changed for the better and that there are people prepared to support them to do this;
- helping young people learn how they can effect change.

### **STEP 10: MAKE BEST USE OF THE RESULTS**

Once you have obtained information from a consultation, you have an ethical obligation to use it wisely to improve things for the participants or other young people in similar circumstances.

First it is necessary to work through the following questions:

- What have you learnt from the consultation?
- What are the key lessons?
- How can these lessons be strategically used?
- Who needs to know?

- What is the best way to engage with these people?
- Might there be value in forming a strategic alliance to tackle the issue?
- Is any further research required?

To whom you target your advocacy is of course dependent on the nature of the issue you were examining and the results of the consultation.

In the case of the research example used earlier in this section, if the consultations pointed to the barrier(s) to participation lying with:

- the recreational program, the focus of advocacy might be on how to make the program more relevant and accessible to young people from refugee backgrounds;
- community leaders, the advocacy might focus on reassuring the leaders that the program welcomes young people from their community and that they would be safe and respected within the program;
- the settlement provider, advocacy might be required to ensure that the provider disseminates information about the program to young people from refugee backgrounds and encourages them to participate.

Or maybe the consultations showed that the young people are participating in other recreational programs and have no interest in the one run by the council. In this case, no advocacy is necessary.

## Contextualisation

All young people need to learn how things work and that they can play an active role in addressing problems if and when they occur. It is a progressive learning process, with much of the learning coming from parents/carers, teachers and other significant adults in their lives. Newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds are often a bit behind on this learning because:

- they have not grown up in Australia so they don't know how things are done here. It is probable that things operated very differently in the country or countries in which they previously lived (for example, if you needed something changed, you paid a bribe);
- their parents/carers (and often members of their community) are also unfamiliar with how things are done in Australia so they cannot provide guidance.

Irrespective of their 'core business', those working with young people from refugee backgrounds therefore have a very important role to play in helping the young people gain an understanding of how things operate and what they should expect. This can take many forms, including but by no means limited to talking to young people about:

- their rights and responsibilities within Australian society;

- what they should be able to expect when they interact with service providers, shop keepers, police, etc.;
- what you or your service is doing to address issues encountered (especially those with a direct impact on the young person concerned and most definitely those upon which you have consulted).

## Effective Advocacy

'Advocacy' is the act of trying to persuade another person that a particular idea has merit or that something should happen or be done.

The first thing to remember about advocacy is that **effective advocacy is rarely adversarial**. Even when advocacy is undertaken in response to a major problem, talking it aggressively is unlikely to achieve the desired result. Adopting a more subtle and strategic approach can be far more effective.

It is also important to remember that advocacy is not about winning or losing. Rather it should always be about **securing the best possible outcome**.

Helping young people from refugee backgrounds to acquire the knowledge and skills to do this is an important contribution to facilitating their settlement in Australia.

The challenge facing those working with these young people is to capture their desire to shape their own lives and their sense of justice and channel them constructively. In simple terms, this involves assisting the young person to identify:

- **the exact nature of the problem:** this might sound strange but often problems are not as simple as they might seem at first or sometimes other things cloud the issue. For example, a young person might feel aggrieved because he was not allowed to go on a school excursion and believes it is because he is African but the real reason he was not allowed to go is that he had not submitted the assignment that the class was told was a prerequisite for the excursion;
- **why things are as they are:** before you set about trying to change something, it is important to think about why it is happening that way and whether there are good reasons for it to be like this. For example, there are sound health-related reasons why alcohol is not legal for people under the age of 18. Other things are not meant to happen the way they are (e.g. discrimination) and/or are an unintended consequence of another action (e.g. removing a bus route to save money means that young people cannot get to soccer training). If you understand the reason, you have a better chance of doing something about it;
- **whether the desired result is achievable:** there are some issues where there is a good chance that, with strategic advocacy, things can be changed for the better. Other things are much harder to change because they are embedded in legislation or have bipartisan support from parliament. It is better to encourage young people to focus on achievable objectives as this helps build their advocacy skills and their sense of empowerment;

- **who has the capacity to resolve the issue:** it is important to target the right person within an organisation if you want to change things. For example, if a young person was treated rudely by the person at the counter at the local Centrelink office, the person to target would be the branch manager. If, on the other hand, the issue related to how much money those receiving Youth Allowance receive, advocacy might need to be targeted to federal politicians;
- **what options there might be:** when you approach someone with a problem, it is usually a good idea to be able to suggest some solutions. This makes it easier for the other person to see a way forward;
- **what is the most strategic way to advocate:** strategic advocacy is rarely adversarial. It is about finding common goals and working collaboratively to realise these. This is far more productive than showing anger or creating a situation where the person who needs to change things is reluctant to do so because it might seem like buckling to pressure or losing face;
- **are there potential supporters or allies:** in many cases, it is not just one person or one community affected by a problem. Joining forces with others can strengthen the power of arguments. Sometimes too, peak agencies (see reference list) might also have the issue on their radar. Seeking their advice and/or working with them on an issue can be a great assistance.

Wherever possible, be there to provide a sounding board each step of the way and to help the young person readjust the strategy as events unfold.

## Advocating on Behalf of Clients

In the human services sector, there are two kinds of advocacy:

- **direct advocacy:** where the worker is the person who makes representation – usually on behalf of a client;
- **indirect advocacy:** where the worker supports someone else to do the advocacy.

Hitherto the focus has been on indirect advocacy – empowering young people to advocate on their own behalf. There are times, however, when it is more appropriate for the worker or agency to be the advocate. This can apply in many types of situations, including but by no means limited those where the young person with whom they are working:

- needs a particular service from another agency;
- has not received a service to which they are entitled;
- needs something that cannot easily be obtained;
- is being adversely affected by the policy of their own or another agency.

How such direct advocacy on behalf of clients is undertaken should vary depending on the situation and the strategies employed should match the circumstances. This being said,

there are some underlying principles to guide common forms of settlement-related advocacy – and you should note that each involves consultation.

### **1. Advocacy in relation to service access:**

The most common form of direct advocacy used by workers involves them trying to secure services for their client(s) from other agencies or programs. The principles underpinning this form of advocacy are as follows:

**WHAT:** You need to be clear about exactly what it is the client needs (and perhaps why they are not receiving it if there has been a blockage).

**WHERE:** You need to know (or find out) where you can get these services/support and establish exactly what the agency offers.

**HOW:** You need to know what you need to do to ensure your client has access to these services. This might involve making a call, filling in a form, taking the client to the service etc.

**FOLLOW UP:** Never assume that, because a referral has been made, everything has fallen into place. Always check with the client and/or the agency.

### **2. Advocacy in relation to service difficulties:**

Another common form of advocacy is required when the client (or sometimes the worker themselves) experiences problems with another agency. In such cases, a slightly different strategy is required:

**STEP 1: Identify the problem:** Sometimes this is easier said than done, especially if the person presenting with the problem is feeling upset or aggrieved. It is, however, important to spend some time getting to the bottom of the problems e.g.:

- establishing what happened in the lead up to there being a problem;
- finding out who said what to whom and when;
- making sure you have all relevant documentation; etc.

**STEP 2: Establish what should have happened:** Sometimes people can be upset without good cause, e.g. when they have been denied access to a service to which they were not entitled or where it was outside the mandate of the agency to provide the service. It is entirely different, however, if something that should have happened did not. More often than not this involves someone being given inaccurate advice or being treated inappropriately. The key to addressing such problems is knowing what should have happened, and to do this you need to find out about the relevant policy of the agency concerned. This might, for example, involve looking at service entitlements and/or the agency's client service charter.

**STEP 3: Raise your concerns:** The next thing to do is to raise your concerns with someone with sufficient authority to address them. In most instances this is someone at the manager level. There are some important things to bear in mind when doing this:

- take the approach that the matter is something you would like their help to sort out rather than suggesting or implying that they or their agency have been at fault;
- present the facts as you know them. If you are relying on what you have been told, make sure this is made clear (e.g. 'it is my understanding that ...' or 'my client told me that ...');
- make reference to their policy;
- respectfully suggest a way in which the matter might be addressed (if one is obvious);
- make sure you record the result of the conversation in the file notes or in your diary.

**STEP 4: Follow Up:** If the resolution of the matter was that something would be done, it is a good idea to check that this has in fact happened. If not, or if you were unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion in Step 3, it is wise to bring the matter to the attention of your supervisor. If this is not possible, it is best to write a letter addressed to the person to whom the person you have been dealing with reports. This letter should clearly, succinctly and non-judgementally set out everything that has occurred and request their intervention. If the matter is not resolved at this stage, you might wish to consider referring the matter to a relevant complaints body (see below).

### 3. Policy Advocacy

There are times when you might think that the position taken by your, or another, organisation is disadvantaging your client(s) and, when you investigate the matter, you discover that the obstruction is not specific to your client but is linked to government policy, especially if embedded in legislation or regulations. When this is the case, it tends to be much harder to find a resolution – but not impossible – and it is rarely something a worker can (or should try to) do by him/herself.

Generally speaking, when a worker identifies a systemic problem, the best thing to do is to bring the problem to the person supervising them (be this another member of staff or the chairman of the management committee) who will then be responsible for what happens next. This being said, there are certain things a worker can do to help the process along. These include:

- be clear about what the problem involves;
- find out what policy/regulation/legislation is involved and exactly what it says;
- think carefully about why it says this. Is the problem linked to a broader policy objective or maybe it is an unintended consequence of an effort to do something else (see examples below);
- consider whether there are any other ways that the objectives of the agency concerned can be addressed without disadvantaging the clients;
- document the findings in relation to the above.

Presenting this information to a supervisor helps that person think about what to do next. Depending on what the issue is, there are certain things that the person might consider doing. These include:

- raising the matter at an interagency meeting and seeking support from other agencies;
- raising the matter with a peak agency (for example the Settlement Council of Australia or the Refugee Council of Australia) and asking for their support to address the matter;
- writing to or asking to meet with the local Member of Parliament, the relevant Minister or head of the agency concerned;
- initiating a campaign.

When looking at systemic problems it is important to remember that it is often quite difficult to bring about change and, especially if it involves trying to change legislation, the process can be time consuming ... even if all players agree that change is needed. Without effective advocacy, however, policy rarely changes, especially to the benefit of vulnerable or disenfranchised groups in society. The committed work of the many refugee advocacy groups in Australia over time has achieved significant benefits for people from refugee backgrounds so the task, while onerous, is a crucial aspect of the work of the sector.

## Complaints Mechanisms

There are times when expert assistance is required to deal with a serious problem. Depending on the nature of the problem, it might be relevant to seek assistance from one of the agencies that have responsibility for investigating complaints. The main agencies that do this are listed below.

### **The Office of the Ombudsman**

Advocates who want to make complaints about government agencies can do so to the relevant Ombudsman. There is a Commonwealth Ombudsman that deals with complaints against Commonwealth departments and their services and there are also state Ombudsmen that perform a similar role in relation to state agencies.

The role of each Ombudsman's Office is to undertake an impartial investigation of complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by a government department or agency. If complaints are found to be valid, the Ombudsman's Office will then assist in the resolution of disputes and seek to address defective administration.

Further information about the Commonwealth Ombudsman can be found at [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au).

### **The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)**

The Australian Human Rights Commission (formerly the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission) was established in 1986 as an independent statutory organisation that works to protect and promote the human rights of all people in Australia. Complaints may be made to the AHRC if it is perceived that there has been an abuse as defined by one or more of the following Acts:

- Age Discrimination Act 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

Specific grounds for complaint include discrimination on the basis of race, sex, pregnancy, marital status and disability in specific areas of public life such as employment, education and in the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs. The Commission also inquires into allegations of breaches of human rights by the Commonwealth government or its agencies.

More information about AHRC and how to make a complaint can be found at [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au).

### **State Government Complaints Bodies**

In addition to the Ombudsman's Offices, most state governments have also established bodies that are responsible for addressing concerns related to services for which they have responsibility such as health, housing and education. Information about these can be found on the relevant state government website.

### **The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission**

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is an independent statutory authority responsible for administering the Trade Practices Act 1974. ACCC's goal is to enhance the welfare of Australians through the promotion of competition and fair-trading and provision of consumer protection. It is intended that the ACCC complement the state and territory consumer affairs agencies which administer consumer protection legislation in their jurisdictions.

For more information about the ACCC go to [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au).

## **References**

### **Complaints Bodies:**

Australian Human Rights Commission: [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au).

Commonwealth Ombudsman: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au).

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission: [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au).

## **Peak Agencies:**

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network: [www.myan.org.au](http://www.myan.org.au)  
Refugee Council of Australia: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au).  
Settlement Council of Australia: [www.scoa.org.au](http://www.scoa.org.au).  
Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia: [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au).  
Australian Council of Social Services: [www.acoss.org.au](http://www.acoss.org.au).  
Forum of Services for the Treatment of Torture and Trauma: [www.fastt.org.au](http://www.fastt.org.au)  
Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA): [www.mdaa.org.au](http://www.mdaa.org.au)

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*Good Practice Principles: Guide for Working with Refugee Young People*, Victorian Settlement Planning Committee. 2004. [www.cmy.net.au/ResourcesfortheSector](http://www.cmy.net.au/ResourcesfortheSector)

*Taking Young People Seriously, Consulting Young People About their Ideas and Opinions: A Handbook for Organisations Working with Young People*, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Department of Victorian Communities. 2004. [http://www.yacvic.org.au/sector/detail-participation.html?filename\\_num=258084](http://www.yacvic.org.au/sector/detail-participation.html?filename_num=258084)

*Working the System: a guide for citizens, consumers and communities*. Public Interest Advocacy Centre. 2003. [www.piac.asn.au/publication/2007/02/working-system](http://www.piac.asn.au/publication/2007/02/working-system)

## Self-Directed Activities

1. If you were looking to find out what the young people from refugee backgrounds with whom you work think about extending opening hours, what type of consultation strategy would you use and why?

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2. You have been asked by your supervisor to look into reported cases of homelessness amongst young people from refugee backgrounds in your local area. How would you go about doing this?

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3. Explain the difference between advocacy and adversary. Why is this distinction important?

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4. What does duty of care mean in the context of client advocacy?

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5. Why is it important to ensure that your advocacy strategy identifies the right person to whom to take your concerns?

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6. Give three reasons why it is important to support young people from refugee backgrounds to be effective advocates.

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7. Visit the website of one of the complaints bodies listed in the reference section. What types of complaint do they deal with? How do you go about lodging a complaint?

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## Topic 12: Self-Care

**Topic 12** is all about you, In Topic 12 you will learn about:

- the challenges and pitfalls you might encounter when working with young people from refugee backgrounds;
- the role and importance of supervision;
- why it is necessary to understand how others view you;
- the importance of self care.

### Challenges and Pitfalls

As explored in previous topics, young people from refugee backgrounds have complex needs and working with them can be both professionally and emotionally challenging. This work also presents a range of pitfalls to which unwary workers can easily succumb. Awareness of both the challenges and pitfalls is important for anyone working with this group of vulnerable young people.

The following is a list of common challenges and pitfalls confronted by those working with young people from refugee backgrounds. It should be noted, however, that it is not an all-inclusive list because each person will be affected in different ways by their work. Most people will also make the odd mistake along the way.

### Managing Workloads

There are some jobs where at the end of the day you can turn off a machine or put down a pen and think 'yes, that's it; I have done all I can' and then go home and not think about work at all. This is not one of those jobs.

The reality of working with young people from refugee backgrounds is that no matter how much you do, there will always be more you can or feel you must do.

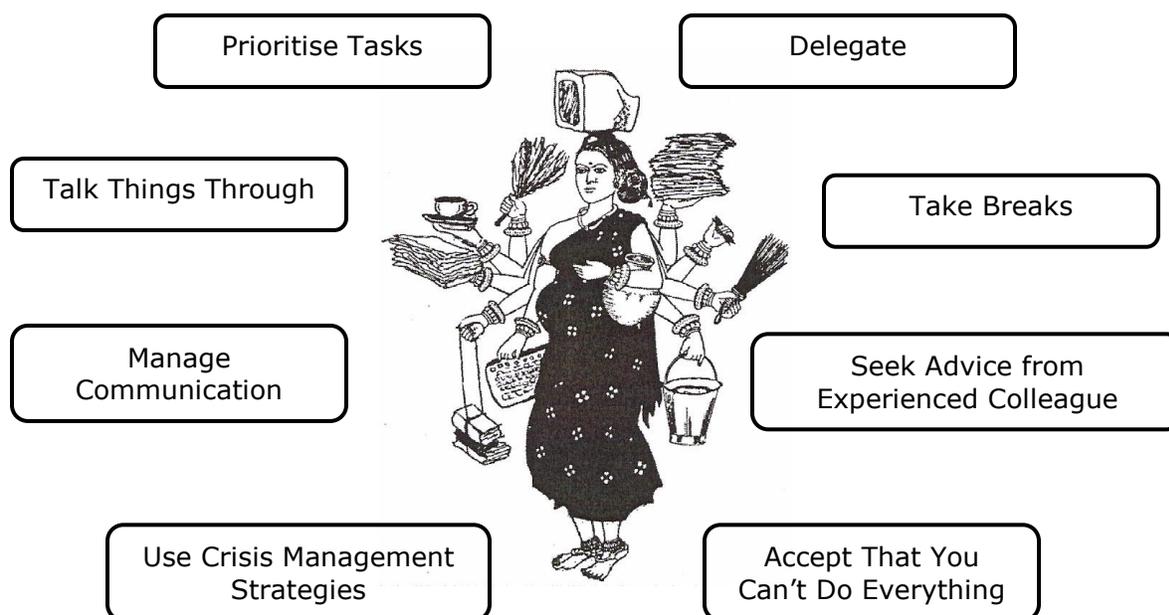
Some people respond to this by working very long hours, worrying about work when they are not there, avoiding taking holidays or time in lieu and always feeling that they are letting people down. These people tend not to stay in their jobs for long because it all becomes too hard.

Other people learn to manage their workloads and these are the people for whom their work with young people from refugee backgrounds can be mutually beneficial if the strategies they use are sound.

Each person uses different strategies to cope with demanding work. Some strategies work better than others for both the worker and the client (or student or patient).

At the least effective end of the self-preservation strategy spectrum, the worker 'switches off'. Such workers are emotionally distant and lack any empathy. They go through the motions of work but care very little about the outcomes. Sometimes they become very cynical. Sometimes they resent the fact that their clients, students or patients always seem to have problems that they must solve. Such workers might keep on working year after year but they are not doing themselves or those with whom they are working any favours by doing so.

**Effective workload management strategies** enable a worker to deal with the many challenges of work in a way that keeps the worker strong and focused and ensures those with whom they are working receive quality care. Some tips for doing this include (but are not limited to) the following:



## Being Flexible

'Expect the unexpected' should be a mantra for anyone working with young people. No matter how organised you are or how good your plans might be, there is a very real chance that things will not go according to plan. When this happens you have two choices: forge ahead regardless or accommodate the new situation. Depending on the circumstances, either one is a valid response but if you select the former, you should first consider whether you are doing so because it is the best way to deal with the changed circumstances and not something you are doing because it is easier than adapting your plans to suit the new situation.

A corollary to this is that workers in this sector need to be able to accept that there will always be an element of uncertainty. You can do your best to minimise this but it will always be there and it is best not to allow yourself to get too anxious or upset.

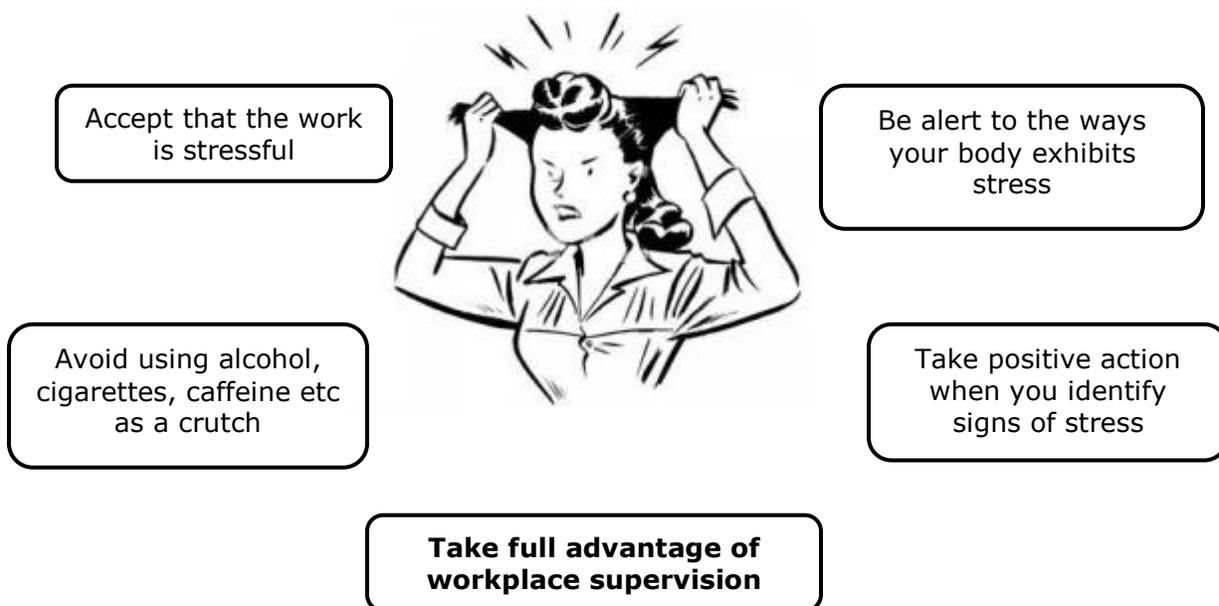
## Dealing with 'Failure'

Another inescapable reality is that there will be times (hopefully not too many) when despite your best endeavours, things don't go well. A client (or student or patient) might harm themselves or others or engage in criminal behaviour. Or maybe it will be a case of the young person expressing anger and frustration directed to you or refusing to engage with you. When anything like this happens, don't ignore it – deal with it. Discuss the circumstances with your manager and/or supervisor. Be open and honest about what you did and said. Brainstorm what might have been done differently. Learn from this.

**HINT:** Keep a list of success stories and refer to this at times when things don't go according to plan or when something bad happens to a young person with whom you have been working.

## Dealing with Stress

It goes without saying that, as wonderful and rewarding as working with young people from refugee backgrounds can be, there will always be stressful times. As with other challenges mentioned here, the important things to remember are to:





## Avoiding Vicarious Trauma

*'I don't have a problem stepping into their shoes, it's the stepping out again that's difficult'.<sup>64</sup>*

Trauma is contagious. It is inevitable that some of the trauma an individual has experienced will be passed on to those who work with them. The chances of this happening are significantly increased if the worker:

- comes from a similar background; and/or
- has experienced some form of trauma themselves; and/or
- has come from a 'sheltered background', i.e. one in which they have had little exposure to world news, documentaries about the things that can happen in times of war, etc.; and/or
- is young and has had little professional experience.

'Vicarious trauma' is the term used to describe a common phenomenon in the helping professions that comes about because the empathy that workers need in order to engage effectively with their clients (or students or patients) leads them to internalise the other person's trauma and in so doing, become traumatised themselves.

While the symptoms of trauma need to be recognised as culturally diverse and specific, trauma reactions are generally divided into three categories:

- **intrusive reactions:** dreams/nightmares, flashbacks, obsessive thoughts, physiological reactions and other persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event;
- **avoidant reactions:** general numbing in responsiveness and avoidance (particularly of things related to the traumatic material); and
- **hyper-arousal reactions:** hyper-vigilance and difficulty concentrating.

Workers may also experience or exhibit reactions such as the following:

- anxiety;
- depression;
- sleeping problems;
- feeling overwhelmed by emotions (e.g. anger, grief, despair, shame, guilt);
- increased irritability;
- procrastination;
- low self-esteem;
- having no time or energy for self or others;
- increased feelings of cynicism, sadness or seriousness;
- increased sensitivity to violence (e.g. when watching television);
- disruptions in interpersonal relationships;
- substance abuse.

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<sup>64</sup> From RCOA Advocacy Help Kit. [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au).

Connected to these experiences, vicarious trauma might also involve a change in a person's beliefs about themselves, the world, and other people within it. This is known in the psychological field as changes in their 'cognitive schema', and may involve:

- feeling that the world is no longer a 'safe place' (for themselves and/or others);
- feeling helpless in regard to taking care of themselves or others;
- feeling their personal freedom is limited;
- feelings of alienation (that their work sets them apart from others).

It is important not to 'pathologise' these reactions (in other words to view them as medically or psychologically abnormal). All research on this subject points out that these reactions are normal human reactions to repeated exposure to distressing events.

If left unaddressed, vicarious trauma is likely to have a negative impact on the worker's:

- ability to interact constructively with clients/students/patients;
- colleagues and the workplace environment;
- personal relationships.

It is often hard to recognise when you are suffering from ... or slipping into ... vicarious trauma. That is why it is very important to:

- know what to look out for;
- take some time to engage in self-reflection;
- consciously take steps to avoid vicarious traumatisation. These include managing your workload, ensuring you eat properly, exercise and get enough sleep and having regular supervision (see below);
- be aware that experiencing symptoms of vicarious trauma is normal and does not mean that you are a failure or incompetent;
- recognise how beneficial supervision can be;
- ask for help when you first recognise signs of vicarious trauma – don't leave it too late;
- watch out for signs of vicarious trauma in those with whom you work and - if you are worried about them - don't ignore it, reach out to the person and encourage them to seek help.

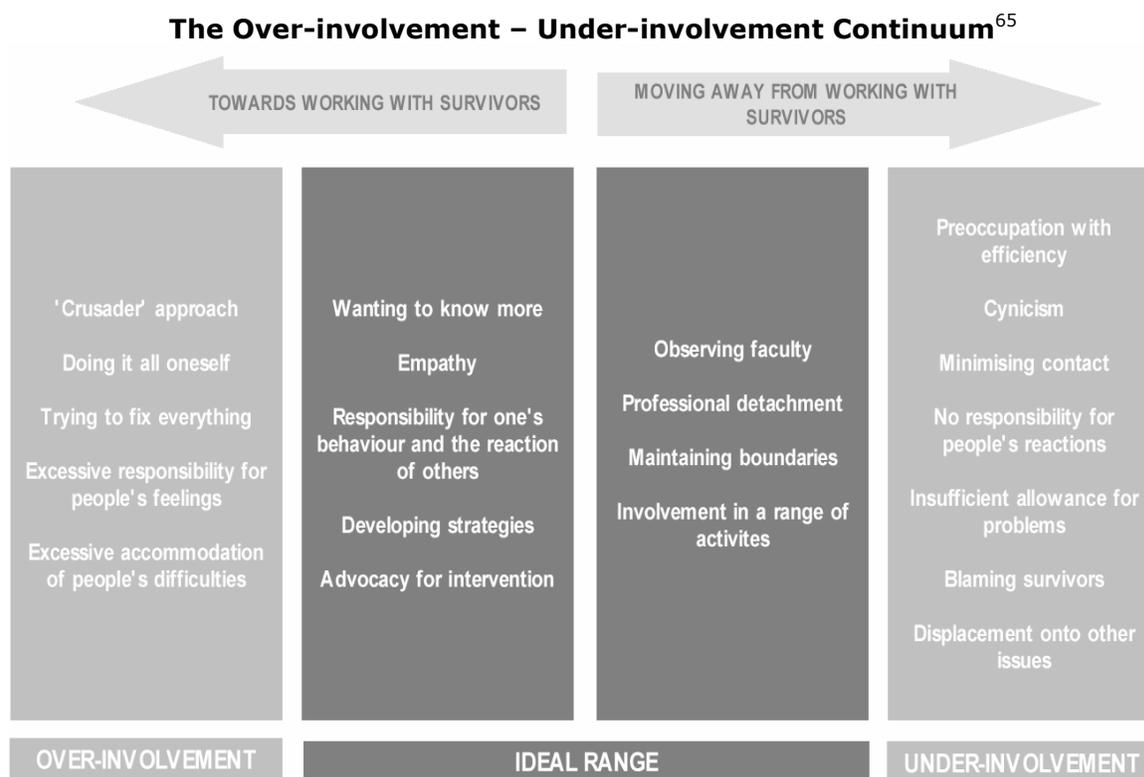
The specialist torture and trauma counselling services in each state and territory also run training sessions for workers about vicarious trauma. It is recommended that you look out for and attend these.



## Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Maintaining professional boundaries between worker and client (or student or patient) is a fundamental requirement of any people-related work. This is a necessary protection for both the client and the worker. This being said, it would be hard to find a worker who has never overstepped these boundaries as it is such an easy trap into which to fall.

The following diagram from Foundation House provides a useful way to think about professional boundaries.



Maintaining professional boundaries when working with young people from refugee backgrounds can be even more complicated if:

- you are young yourself: the people with whom you are working might be a similar age or not much younger than you are. You might have shared interests and go to the same places in your spare time. If it was not for the fact that you met at work, you might otherwise be friends.
- you are from a refugee background: you might have a shared history with your clients and can relate to what they are going through.
- you are drawn to your clients: young people from refugee backgrounds can be very engaging. It is often hard not to want to 'go the extra mile' in order to help them.
- the young people with whom you are working are confused by your friendly demeanour and informality of dress and speech. They might interpret this as meaning you are not a professional or that you want a relationship outside the workplace.

The challenge that faces every worker is to find the balance between being caring and empathetic and becoming too involved and losing all sense of objectivity.

<sup>65</sup> *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*. Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture. 1998. p 153.

There are certain things that are considered both **'unprofessional'** and can lead to problems if not observed. These include:

- **inviting clients into your home;**
- **'friending' your clients on Facebook or linking via social media (see Topic 10);**
- **being 'too relaxed' in the workplace – you have to remember you have a job to do and your clients depend on you to do this as a professional, not a friend;**
- **discussing your personal life with clients in anything but a superficial way;**
- **going to a client's home for reasons unrelated to your work;**
- **seeing clients for purely social reasons unrelated to your work;**
- **embarking on a romantic or sexual relationship with a client.**

It is acknowledged that in all but the last example – which is unambiguously unacceptable - there are some grey areas, in particular for workers who are also members of their clients' community and for workers in country towns where work-life boundaries are often more blurred. Workers in such situations are advised to speak to their supervisor about their circumstances and agree on what is acceptable and unacceptable.

And if workers ever feel they might have overstepped a boundary and/or are in a situation where a client is seeking something from them that is not part of their job description, it is imperative that they talk to their manager or supervisor. They must not ignore it or hope it will go away. Chances are it won't and it can leave them in a very difficult situation and be detrimental to their client.



## Maintaining a Work-Life Balance

The need to maintain a work-life balance is linked to many of the above but has separate elements and is definitely worth emphasising, as failure to do this is likely to result in burn-out and/or impaired efficiency in the workplace and/or broken relationships at home.

Irrespective of the kind of work that you do, you need to do things away from the workplace that have nothing to do with work. When working with young people from refugee backgrounds this is even more important because this work is often stressful and emotionally draining.

Each person has to find their own way to separate themselves from their work and maintain a healthy lifestyle but there are a few common themes. They are all common sense but one of the things we must remember is that when we are stressed, common sense can easily fly out the window – so it is worth setting them out and reminding yourself about them at times of stress:

- Give yourself permission to have fun and consciously plan to do things you find enjoyable. You should not feel guilty about having fun.
- By all means do things in your own time that have something to do with work – such as attending study groups or film screenings – but make sure you are doing plenty of other things as well.

- Make time for friends. Don't keep putting them off because 'you are too busy at work'.
- Make sure you are eating sensibly and getting enough exercise and sleep.
- Don't allow yourself to get into a situation where you 'need a drink' when you leave the office or walk in the door at home.
- Set limits on the time you talk about work/clients at home and give your family permission to remind you that you are 'becoming boring' by talking too long about work-related things. If you find yourself 'having to unload' when you get home – seek out supervision (see below). This is the correct way to debrief.
- Try not to take work home; do as much as you can in the office. If you do feel the need to take work home, make sure that this only happens occasionally not all the time.
- If you find yourself lying in bed thinking/worrying about work on more than the odd occasion, schedule some supervision. It is far better to work this through with a skilled person than to allow it to take over.
- Pamper yourself occasionally. Do something that gives you pleasure like having a massage, taking a long hot bath, walking down the beach, going for a run ...

And if you do feel that things have all become too much, or you find yourself arguing with family members, or getting angry over little things – seek help. Everyone who works with people from a refugee background will be affected in some way by their work. You would not be human if you weren't. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it is a sign that you are being responsible to yourself, your family and friends and most importantly, those with whom you work.

## Supervision

There are some common misconceptions about professional supervision. Some think that it has something to do with being judged or assessed; others think that going to supervision means that the person is not good at their job. Both are entirely wrong.

Undertaking regular workplace supervision is sound workplace practice for anyone working with people with complex needs. Supervision is a time set aside for a worker to talk to an experienced worker or someone with specialist skills during which the worker:

- reflects on things that are happening in their life, especially those related to or affected by their work;
- identifies things they found (or are finding) challenging without jeopardising confidentiality;
- talks through options and strategies to deal with these;
- receives advice and affirmation;
- builds a repertoire of responses;
- is supported to feel confident and in control.

If supervision is not offered in your workplace, talk to your manager about it and encourage them to either introduce it or escalate the suggestion to someone with the power to do so.

If you have colleagues who are wary about undertaking supervision, encourage them to cast aside their scruples and reassure them that it is something intended to make their work easier and to make them better at their job.

If you are a bit sceptical about supervision – give supervision a go.

If you are receiving supervision and it is not doing the things listed above, reflect on this. Is it you? Are you afraid to open up? Or is it the person from whom you are receiving supervision? Is s/he someone you do not feel comfortable with? If it's linked to your own reservations, try to change the way you are thinking. If it's about your current supervisor, seek out someone else, ideally someone:

- with whom you feel comfortable;
- whose judgement you trust;
- you know will not judge you;
- you respect;
- whose advice you consider sound and relevant;
- who makes you feel stronger and good about yourself;
- who helps you to provide the best possible assistance to young people from refugee backgrounds.

## Self-Awareness

In previous topics the focus has been on understanding the young people with whom we are working. This makes perfect sense. Possibly less obvious is the need for each of us to understand what makes us who we are and how this influences the way others perceive us.

Each one of us is an amalgam of many factors including but not limited to our:

- gender,
- age,
- ethnicity,
- class,
- religion,
- level of education,
- confidence in dealing with new people,
- life experiences,
- interests and hobbies,
- attitudes to people from particular backgrounds/religions etc.

And each one of us will be perceived differently by different people, for example a young, confident female worker might variously:

- be favoured by young clients because she is outgoing and of a similar age;

- experience problems with young male clients who misinterpret her outgoing nature as being a desire to enter into a relationship with them;
- be seen as threatening to parents/carers from a conservative country who sees her as potentially leading their child 'astray';
- be favoured by parents/carers because she can provide a link for their child into the wider community;
- have her competency questioned by parents/carers (and even young people) not used to women being in positions of authority and/or who might think that as she is young, she cannot know anything; etc.

In this instance, the same worker is being viewed quite differently by different clients (and/or their parents/carers) based on their assumptions about her – not because of anything she has done.

It is not just who we are but how we act and behave that can influence how others perceive us. As previously mentioned, many young people from refugee backgrounds come from conservative cultures. Especially when newly arrived, they can be very confused by informal dress and behaviour and by some forms of adornment such as tattoos and body piercing. Such things are not typically associated with 'professionals' in the countries from which they come. It will possibly be harder for them to believe that the worker is experienced and competent.

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The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) - <http://www.acwa.asn.au> – runs various accredited courses related to responding to spontaneous disclosure of trauma (often referred to as 'Accidental Counsellors').

## Self-Directed Activities

1. Why is understanding how a young person from a refugee background views you so important for your work with this person?

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2. In the light of the discussion in class about the things that define you to others, how will you manage this with the young people with whom you will be working?

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3. What do you think will be the most challenging "boundary" issue you will need to manage in your work? Why is this the case and what can you do about it?

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4. Have you ever been traumatised (eg by a car accident, witnessing a violent crime)? How did this make you feel? How did you work through these feelings?

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5. Following on from the above, have things happened to you some time after your traumatic event that brought back all of the memories and feelings of the trauma? What sort of things were they? How did you feel? What helped you to move into a more comfortable state of mind?

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6. Have you ever felt 'out of your depth'? What made you feel this way? How did you feel? How did you deal with the situation?

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7. How do you recognise when you are stressed? Does your body tell you? Do members of your family or your friends make comments to you?

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8. Do you have any self-care strategies, and if so, what are they? If you don't, spend some time thinking what sorts of things make you feel better when you are stressed. Make a promise to yourself that you will draw on these when you feel stressed.

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## Appendix 1

### WORKING DEFINITIONS OF TERMS<sup>66</sup>

#### Government of Western Australia: Office of Multicultural Interests

[http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi\\_terminology.asp](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi_terminology.asp)

#### **Acculturation**

The process whereby the attitudes and/or behaviours of people from one culture are modified as a result of contact with a different culture. Acculturation implies a mutual influence in which elements of two cultures mingle and merge.

#### **Ancestry**

Describes the ethnic or cultural heritage of a person, that is, the ethnic or cultural groups to which a person's forebears are or were attached. In practice, Ancestry is the ethnic or cultural groups which the person *identifies* as being his or her ancestry.

#### **Anglo-Saxon**

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from the country of England in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

#### **Anglo-Celtic**

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from England and /or Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

#### **Assimilation**

The process whereby members of an ethnic group shed their traditions and culture and adopt the customs and attitudes of the mainstream culture. In Australia, assimilation policy was the Government's response to the influx of refugees and immigrants from war-torn Europe from 1945 to the early 1960s. Although this was officially replaced by a policy of 'integration', until the early 1970s, assimilation remained the final goal and reflected the values embedded in the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 (known as the White Australia Policy).

#### **Asylum seekers**

People who have applied for recognition as refugees under the United Nations *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. but whose cases have yet to be determined.

#### **Caucasian**

A term based on the now discredited method of racial classification. The term is used by some Australian agencies, for people of fair complexion and usually of European origin. It is also a definition for a 'broad division of humankind covering peoples of Europe, Western Asia, South Asia, and parts of North Africa.' The Office of Multicultural Interests does not encourage the use of this or similar racial descriptors, such as 'mongoloid' or 'negroid'.

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<sup>66</sup> It is noted that this glossary includes some Western Australian specific information but it is felt that the contents are of sufficient general relevance to include in an unedited form.

### **Celtic**

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from the countries of Ireland Scotland, Wales, the county of Cornwall and the Isle of Man in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship traditionally signifies legal, political and national identity. It brings with it certain rights and responsibilities. **Active citizenship** refers to individuals working towards the betterment of their community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work and other such efforts. Active citizens may not have formal/legal citizenship status. **Democratic citizenship** reflects sensitivity to different needs, claims and interests within the accepted principles, practices and legal norms of the broader political community.

### **Cross-Cultural Training**

A process aimed at developing the awareness, knowledge and skills need to interact appropriately and effectively with culturally diverse customers and co-workers.

### **Cultural Competence**

A set of skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that individuals, professions, organisations and systems use to work effectively in culturally diverse situations The ability of systems, organisations, professions and individuals to work effectively in culturally diverse environments and situations.

### **Cultural Competencies**

A set of skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that individuals, professions, organisations and systems use to work effectively in culturally diverse situations The ability of systems, organisations, professions and individuals to work effectively in culturally diverse environments and situations.

Two subsets of cultural competency are:

- **Cultural awareness:** the understanding that there is difference. Also an understanding of the social, economic and political context in which people exist.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** legitimising this difference: a process of self-exploration that enables us to see how our own life experiences impact upon others.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD)**

Culturally and linguistically diverse refers to the wide range of cultural groups and individuals that make up the Australian population. It includes groups and individuals who differ according to religion, race, language and ethnicity except those whose ancestry is Anglo-Saxon, Anglo Celtic, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. For ease, CaLD is commonly used as an abbreviation for culturally and linguistically diverse.

### **Cultural Diversity**

A description of a society composed of people from many cultural and linguistic groups. This term is frequently used to mean multiethnic, multi-faith or multilingual in the Australian context.

### **Cultural Pluralism**

A term used to describe a society in which ethnic groups are encouraged to maintain and promote their culture, language and heritage within society. The WA Charter of

Multiculturalism moves away from this form of multiculturalism due to its potential to create, and further encourage, divisions within society based on factors such as ethnicity, language and religion, and to further marginalise members of the most vulnerable communities. It encourages a focus on celebratory multiculturalism rather than on addressing the barriers that prevent people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from participating equitably in society.

### **Culture**

Culture comprises four elements – values, norms, institutions and artifacts – that are passed on from one generation to another. Cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving.

### **Democratic Pluralism**

A term used to describe a society in which the rights of all groups to participate as full and equal members of society are safeguarded and protected within a framework of citizenship. It is different from cultural pluralism, which focuses only on cultural difference, because it recognises the range of differences that exist between individuals and within communities, such as age, physical and intellectual ability, gender, and socio-economic background.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination occurs when a person, or a group of people, are treated less favourably than another person or group because of age; race; colour; national or ethnic origin; sex; pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic.

Discrimination happens when a person is denied the opportunity to participate freely and fully in normal day-to-day activities. It might include harassment or victimisation in the workplace; being unable to gain physical access to a building or facility; being denied goods and services; difficulty in obtaining appropriate accommodation and housing; or not being able to join a trade union.

Discrimination is characterised into two forms:

- **Direct (overt) discrimination** occurs when one person or group of people receive less favourable treatment than another person or group in the same position would have received on the grounds of their age, race, colour, national or ethnic origin; sex, pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic.
- **Indirect (covert) discrimination** includes practices and policies that appear to be 'neutral' or 'fair' because they treat everyone in the same way but adversely affect a higher proportion of people of a group of people characterised by age, race, colour, national or ethnic origin; sex; pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic. It can occur even when there is no intention to discriminate.

### **Equality**

**Formal Equality** - prescribes equal treatment of all people regardless of circumstances, on the understanding that all have the same rights and entitlements. Its underlying logic is that by extending equal rights to all, inequality has been eliminated. Sameness of treatment is equated with fairness of treatment. Formal Equality does not take into account the accumulated disadvantage of generations of discrimination or the disadvantage faced by groups by a system that fails to recognise different needs.

**Substantive Equality** - involves achieving equitable outcomes as well as equal opportunity. It takes into account the effects of past discrimination. It recognises that rights, entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout society. Substantive Equality recognises that equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results.

Where service delivery agencies cater to the dominant, majority group, then people who are different may miss out on essential services. Hence, it is necessary to treat people differently because people have different needs.

### **Equity**

Equity refers to the quality of being fair and just. Social Equity refers to policies, programs and services that meet the needs of all individuals and groups and enable all to participate as full and equal members in all aspects of society.

### **Ethnic**

An adjective used to describe a population of human beings whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common ancestry; recognition by others as a distinct group; or by common cultural, linguistic, religious or territorial traits.

### **Ethnicity**

Membership of a particular cultural group. It is defined by shared cultural practices including but not limited to holidays, food, language and customs. People can share the same nationality but have different ethnic groups, while people who share an ethnic identity can be of different nationalities.

### **Ethnic Group/Community**

A group/community established based on ethnicity (see above).

### **Ethnocentrism**

The tendency to judge all other cultures by the norms and standards of one's own culture, especially with regard to language, behaviour, customs and religions, as a way of making sense of the world.

### **First Generation Australian**

A first generation of a family to live in Australia.

### **Immigrant**

A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another.

In Australia the following terms are used to differentiate between immigrants who arrive in Australia through two immigration programs.

- The term 'migrants' is used when referring to people who enter through Australia's Migration Programs which are the Skilled Stream and the Family Stream.
- The term 'refugees' is used when referring to people who enter through Australia's Humanitarian Program.

### **Integration**

Generally describes the process of developing a society that respects, values and draws on the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the population. Unlike the process of assimilation, integration does not involve the shedding of traditions and cultures by ethnic groups and adopting the customs and attitudes of the mainstream. Rather it involves the

development of a dynamic culture that draws on the diversity of the traditions of the variety of ethnic groups.

### **Mainstream**

Refers to the prevalent attitudes, values, and practices of the majority group in a society.

### **Minority Communities**

Everyone belongs to an 'ethnic group' of one sort or another. However, non-dominant ethnic groups are often referred to as 'minorities'. Minority groups can include ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

### **Multiculturalism**

A term used to describe the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity. In Western Australia, it means all Western Australians are entitled to exercise their rights and participate fully in society, regardless of their different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The principles of Multiculturalism, as stated in the 'Western Australian Charter of Multiculturalism' (2004), are:

- **Civic Values** - the equality of respect, individual freedom and dignity for all members of society subject to the acceptance of the rule of law, social, political and legal institutions and constitutional structures.
- **Fairness** - the pursuit of public policies free of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of characteristics such as origins, perceived 'race', culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.
- **Equality** - Equality of opportunity for all members of society to achieve their full potential in a free and democratic society where every individual is equal before, and under, the law.
- **Participation** - the full and equitable participation in society of individuals and communities, irrespective of origins, culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.

### **New and emerging communities**

A term used to describe ethnic communities that are small in number, have recently settled in Australia and often lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, relative to more established communities.

### **Prejudice**

Unfounded opinions or attitudes relating to an individual or group that represents them unfavourably or negatively. Prejudice may be directed at a person the basis of race, skin colour, language, religion or culture.

### **Race**

The term 'race' is an artificial construct used to classify people on the basis of supposed physical and cultural similarities deriving from their ancestry. Although there is no scientific evidence to support the existence of human races, people tend to assume that there are racial categories.

Under the Western Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* race includes colour, descent, ethnic or national origin or nationality and may comprise two or more distinct races.

### **Racism**

A belief or ideology that creates artificial social divisions on the basis of characteristics or abilities specific to a particular 'race' which distinguishes it as being either superior or inferior to another 'race' or 'races'.

### **Refugee**

Any person who has left their own country of nationality due to an established fear of being persecuted on the basis of ethnicity, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable to, or is unwilling to return to it.

### **Second Generation Australian**

A person born in Australia who has at least one parent born overseas.

### **Social Capital**

Generally refers to the quality of social interactions, trust and networks between individuals, families, communities and governments for mutual benefit. The core idea of social capital is that social networks have value.

### **Social Cohesion**

A process that involves a complex set of social relations. It is constructed on the foundations of institutional, political and social structures that ensure the wellbeing of all citizens. Social Cohesion takes in four aspects of welfare: equity in access to rights, the dignity and recognition of each person, autonomy and personal fulfilment, and the possibility of participating as a full member of society.

### **Social Exclusion**

Relates to the sense of isolation and estrangement that certain people experience within a society, and the discriminatory practices of individuals and institutions that limit, or prevent, the exercising of rights, such as democratic participation, and access to opportunities and resources such as housing, employment and healthcare. The sense of exclusion may be based on characteristics such as culture, ethnicity, nationality, religion, perceived 'race', sexuality and physical or intellectual ability.

### **Social Inclusion**

Suggests that members of society, irrespective of age, ethnicity, social background etc. have a sense of belonging to and a stake in the social, economic, political and cultural systems of their society.

### **Tolerance**

Willingness to recognise and respect the beliefs or practices of others. The Office of Multicultural Interests avoids the use of the word in the context of multiculturalism due to its association with the act of enduring something that is troublesome or of which one does not approve.

### **Youth/Young People**

In Australia, the terms 'youth' and 'young people' are used interchangeably and refer to people between the ages of 12 and 25 (inclusive).

## Appendix 2:

### Key Government Agencies

#### Department of Home Affairs

PO Box 25  
Belconnen  
ACT 2616  
Telephone: 131 881  
[www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)  
(See DHA website for addresses of state offices)

#### Department of Social Services

GPO Box 9820  
Canberra  
ACT 2601  
Telephone: 1300 653 227  
[www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)  
(See DSS website for addresses of state and regional offices)

#### State/Territory Multicultural Affairs Agencies

##### New South Wales

###### Multicultural NSW

Level 8, 175 Castlereagh Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Postal address:  
PO Box A2618  
Sydney South, NSW 1235  
Telephone: 02 8255 6767  
Fax: 02 8255 6868  
Website: [www.multicultural.nsw.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.nsw.gov.au)

##### Victoria

###### Victorian Multicultural Commission

Level 3, 3 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne, VIC 3002  
Postal address:  
GPO Box 4698  
Melbourne VIC 3001  
Telephone: 03 9651 0651  
Website: [www.multicultural.vic.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au)

## Queensland

### **Multicultural Affairs Queensland**

Level 4A, Neville Bonner Building  
75 William Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
Postal Address:  
GPO Box 806  
Brisbane QLD 4001  
Telephone: 13 QGOV (13 74 68)  
Website: [www.multicultural.qld.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au)

## South Australia

### **Multicultural SA**

24 Flinders Street  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Telephone:  
08 8226 1944  
1800 063 535 (Freecall)  
Website: [www.multicultural.sa.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.sa.gov.au)

## Western Australia

### **Office of Multicultural Interests**

Department of Local Government  
140 William Street  
Perth WA 6000  
Postal Address:  
GPO Box R1250  
Perth WA 6844  
Telephone: 08 6552 1500  
Website: [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)

## Tasmania

### **Multicultural Tasmania**

GPO Box 123  
Hobart TAS 7001  
Telephone:  
03 6232 7119  
1300 135 513  
Website: [www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cdd/multitas](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cdd/multitas)

## **Northern Territory**

### **The Office of Ethnic Affairs**

GPO Box 4396

Darwin NT 0801

Telephone: 08 8999 4375

Website: [www.multicultural.nt.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.nt.gov.au)

## **Australian Capital Territory**

### **Office of Multicultural Affairs**

GPO Box 158

Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone: 02 6207 0555

Website: [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/multicultural](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/multicultural)