

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI)

**Involving Young People:
Documenting Youth Participation
Strategies for Newly Arrived
Communities**

CMYI Best Practice Model 1

October 2001

Setting the Agenda on Multicultural Youth Issues

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Principles of Youth Participation

The principle of youth participation is central to any service or youth policy framework that aims to enhance the lives of young people. Providing the necessary skills and experience is an important step in providing opportunities for refugee young people in the process of resettlement.

Young people from refugee backgrounds bring with them a diversity of understanding about participation from a variety of cultural contexts. Many refugee young people have lost a sense of belonging to a community and consequently different mechanisms are required in order to involve them in participatory processes.

Processes which include refugee young people in decision making, both through local communities and political processes at local, state and national levels must be developed in partnership with young people themselves. The consultative process with refugee communities may itself result in the promotion of adult concerns rather than accurately reflecting the lives and priorities of young people. The input and participation of refugee young people may become tokenistic if this possibility is not addressed.

Peer Participation, Peer Support and Leadership Programs generally train young people in creating networks, building relationships, personal identity, coping skills, decision making and negotiation skills. The benefits refugee young people gain in participating in programs or activities such as these may however be even broader. These programs play an important role in assisting refugee young people to deal with the stress and trauma associated with being a refugee as well as the process of successful resettlement in Australia.

1.2 Barriers to Participation

Within our society, young people are generally not encouraged to actively participate or engage in processes of decision making in community life. For young refugees, a range of issues impact on their ability to participate in decision-making processes. These include:

- the immigration and resettlement process;
- language and communication barriers; and

- poor knowledge of Australian mainstream service systems, many of which may not be culturally responsive.

Refugee young people bring with them a diversity of understandings about participation in differing cultural contexts. The degree to which young people are seen as independent thinkers, capable and deserving of greater participation varies considerably with social class, culture and gender.

Young people in general are extremely busy with study, work or mutual obligation activities. For many disadvantaged young people, other day-to-day activities are of greater priority than participatory and consultation processes. Refugee young people in the initial stages of resettlement may not wish to be involved in participation processes due to the more immediate concerns of language acquisition, housing, income, family issues and acculturation.

This is not to say that specific initiatives should not be developed to involve newly arrived refugee young people. These initiatives should be targeted and relevant to the resettlement experience of individual young people.

Refugee young people have fled countries where political systems are dictatorial and people are persecuted for speaking out against governments. For these young people, adequate time and resources must be provided for them to feel comfortable about participating in political processes and youth and welfare services.

1.3 Process of Participation

The most effective avenue for engaging migrant and refugee young people in decision-making is to ensure that the process is structured and linked to an existing group or organisation which may provide support to the young person on an ongoing basis. Adequate lead-up time is vital to allow for preparation and debriefing. To undertake an effective partnership process, information needs to be provided to young people about processes and services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Time also needs to be spent in educating young people about political systems and processes, management structures and consultation methods.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Centre

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) is a statewide community based organisation which aims to enhance life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The Centre has a priority focus on young people from Refugee and Newly Arrived Communities.

Creating life opportunities for young people comes from the belief that young people share experiences, learn skills and draw strength from one another. Given the opportunity, young people can and are able to articulate and voice their concerns about issues affecting their lives. When appropriate support mechanisms are put in place, young people can address their needs by socially connecting and supporting each other

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) has utilised a range of strategies, which draw on peer support including direct services through JPET, Reconnect and other statewide programs.

2.2 Target Group

Refugee young people aged between 12 and 25 years old constitute one third of the total settler intake under Australia's Humanitarian migration program since 1996, and one third of total Humanitarian arrivals who settled in Victoria in the same period (DIMIA Settlement Planning and Information Unit, 2001).

Prior to settling in Victoria, young people from refugee backgrounds spend a number of years in transition: in refugee camps; as migrants in second countries; or as internally displaced persons in their own country. The particular circumstances of the conflict that each young person has survived will have far-reaching effects on their ability to resettle in a safe third country like Australia.

Studies have indicated that a large number of refugee young people who settle in Victoria endure a range of experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared to other Victorian young people. These experiences include:

- surviving torture and trauma;
- prolonged periods of disrupted schooling; and

- resettlement within fragmented family units.

Refugee young people are often placed at a distinct disadvantage because of their age and are unable to establish independent economic viability or social networks that enable them to make full use of the opportunities that are generally available to young people in the wider community.

3. DEFINITIONS

At this point, it is important to define the forms of youth participation discussed in the remainder of the paper.

3.1 Youth participation

The right of young people to meaningful participation is enshrined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC)* Article 2.1, which states:

“Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parents or legal guardians race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.” (CROC)

Further, a community focused definition of participation may also be defined as:

“The process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship” (Hart, 1992:5)

3.2 What is Peer Support?

Peer support is a self-help support system in which a young person may acquire knowledge, learn skills and gain experiences from their peers. Through peer support, young people may gain confidence, ability to manage and take control of their lives and learn to cope with barriers that may have hindered them in participation.

The Peer Support Program aims to provide empowerment for a young person. This may involve:

- Discussing feelings about similar experiences and emotions;
- Identifying barriers and setting goals;
- Sharing information, tips, and resources;
- Locating recreational activities;
- Enabling the young person to advocate for themselves;

- Participating in skills training activities.

3.3 What is Leadership?

In leadership training, young people develop a range of skills such as communication skills, decision-making, public speaking and debating, problem solving, confidence and self-esteem.

Youth participation enables young people to share experiences and learn skills through social interaction with their peers. Through Peer Support and Leadership training, young people can develop a range of personal and social skills that enable them to address issues affecting their lives

3.4 Personal Development

Participants are able to acquire a range of skills, which empower the individual. These skills range from improved self-esteem, acceptance, enhanced communication skills, coping with self and body image, dealing with feelings, dealing with relationships or attitudinal barriers and enhanced coping skills.

3.5 Social Development

Young people are able to develop confidence, decrease feelings of isolation, form friendships, feel understood, improve daily living techniques, achieve a greater sense of awareness of others and a greater confidence in relation to school issues, setting goals, learning self advocacy and improving family relationships.

4. MODELS OF BEST PRACTICE IN YOUTH PARTICIPATION

A range of best practice projects and programs have been specifically designed to target refugee young people. Some of these projects and programs assist refugee young people to deal with migration and settlement issues while also providing young people with opportunities to develop skills and enhance their knowledge about the service infrastructure. As a result, refugee young people will be able to fully participate and contribute to their new community. Other programs have been developed to address specific issues which confront refugee young people in their settlement in Australia.

Documenting best practice models ensures that knowledge acquired by trainers is shared. This process also assists refugee young people to learn about the processes required to participate in such programs.

4.1 Leadership Training for Young CLD Students

In September 2001, the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) piloted a joint initiative with the Australian Red Cross (ARC) and the Visycares Centre to train Year 10 students in Leadership training.

The target group was young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Students were selected from seven schools with a high number of refugee and migrant young people. Year 10 co-ordinators were asked to nominate four students either currently involved in leadership activities or those with a potential to participate in a week long program. Twenty-eight young people participated in the program and the retention rate was 100%.

Program modules included the *Australian Red Cross Youth Leadership Training* modified to cater for young people from newly arrived communities. Modules covered in the training included:

- What is Leadership;
- Communication Skills;
- Decision making;
- Public Speaking and Debating;
- Problem Solving;

- Developing Confidence and Self-esteem; and
- Stress Management.

A CMYI youth leader was employed to facilitate the program for the entire week along with staff members from CMYI, Visycares, Red Cross and representatives from the City of Greater Dandenong and City of Kingston.

From the second day, participants were encouraged to run components of the program themselves, thus developing leadership skills in a safe and supportive environment. By the fourth day, young people organised and facilitated group work, with CMYI facilitators assisting in resourcing and support.

Each day, a guest speaker from Leadership Victoria, some of whom were from refugee and migrant backgrounds themselves, addressed the group about their own experiences. These young people offered to play a mentoring role for the participants. Participants were linked back into leadership and participation initiatives run through local government or schools in their own area. CMYI is in regular contact with the young people regarding involvement in policy forums and youth participation activities at both local and state levels.

CMYI plans to run leadership programs targeting CLD young people on an annual basis. The success of the model hinges on a number of elements. Some of these include strong partnerships between agencies and schools, developing leadership opportunities for participants during the training, involving facilitators with experience and skills in working with the target group and linking participants back to local supports and resources.

For further details on the Leadership Program, please contact

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Carlton VIC 3053

Phone: (03) 9349 3466

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E-mail: info@cmyi.net.au

4.2 Western Young People's Independent Network (WYPIN)

The Western Young People's Independent Network (WYPIN) represents a group of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds between 12-25 years of age and living in the Western region of Melbourne.

WYPIN was established in 1989 by young people who were interested in challenging racism in the community and to empower young people to develop programs and activities in line with their needs and aspirations. WYPIN's Committee of Management is made up of young people.

A notable WYPIN program is an anti-racism play performed by young refugees. This play has been performed extensively in schools for other young people as a community education tool. The performance confronts the barriers that refugee and migrant young people experience, such as racism, isolation, and confusion about their cultural identity. It challenges ignorance and intolerance. It is also a voice and affirmation of the experiences of the performers and other young people. The play also provides an alternative form of expression for the performers for whom English is their second or third language.

WYPIN has also facilitated programs and discussions that recognise indigenous Australians, as the first Australians. Discussions around Australia's indigenous history have helped refugee young people feel more accepted in the mainstream community rather than feeling like outsiders/the other. WYPIN is seen as a critical youth voice on refugee issues in the Western region of Melbourne. Playing a key advocacy and policy development role.

For further details, please contact

Youth Support Worker

Level 2, 289 Barkly Street

Footscray VIC 3011

Phone: (03) 9362 0257, **E-mail:** wypin@vicnet.net.au

4.3 African Young people Peer Support Program

The African Young People Peer Support Program aims to assist young people aged 14 to 20 years old who reside in the Carlton Housing Estate to develop leadership skills, build confidence and trust. The program is run over ten weeks by the Carlton Baths and YMCA during which the young people enhance their skills by addressing the following objectives:

- Define key issues and feelings while adjusting to a new environment;
- Build feeling of safety and security by providing a safe environment;
- Promote a feeling of connectedness and belonging;
- Build leadership skills through role modelling.

Over the ten-week period the young people are involved in the following activities:

Week One

- Introduction – group building activities

Week Two

- Arts as medium – to identify feeling through use of symbols

Week Three

- Sports – to promote team work and trust building exercise

Week Four

- Drama and Role Play for Self-expression – to develop self-expression and confidence and leadership

Week Five

- Music and Dance - to be used for tension relief

Week Six

- Leadership Training – to build negotiation skills, decision-making, participation and team work

Week Seven

- Discovery weekend away – to enhance the above acquired skills

Week Eight

- Mural painting – to express feeling through arts

Week Nine

- Mural painting

Week Ten

- Feedback and finishing – Celebration for a successful completion

For further information please contact Carlton Baths on

Phone: (03) 9347 3677

Fax: (03) 9347 1301

Mailing Address: 248 Rathdowne Street Carlton VIC 3053

4.4 Starters: A Peer Support Project To Enhance The Settlement Of Young Refugees

This project, developed and implemented by the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB), aims to provide a peer support program for young newly arrived refugees in Australia.

The concept of this project is based on the idea that in Australia, peer assistance is an accepted practice for young people, particularly in educational settings. Young people with common experiences and circumstances are trained to provide leadership and support for their peers and possibly facilitate some aspects of recovery and resolution.

The peer support programs are designed to be preventative in their orientation and encourage young people to seek assistance in the early stages of a problem. With trained volunteer support the programs are extremely cost effective means of managing adolescent psychological health and welfare.

After appropriate training, young peer supporters from a refugee background, provide leadership and support to their newly arrived young peers. At the same time they increase their own skills and knowledge about their environment. This enables young people to more easily negotiate the constant everyday difficulties of setting into a new country, a new environment and a new community.

For further information details, please contact

Springvale community Aid & Advice Bureau INC.

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E-mail: scaabspr@vicnet.net.au

4.5 Greater Dandenong Sports Project

The Greater Dandenong Sports Project is a preventative community development model originating from the highly successful and innovative *Springvale Project of 1997*. This project featured partnerships between primary and secondary schools, sports clubs/associations, community agencies and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The model attempts to address a range of issues around access and participation of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in sports, connecting marginalised and at risk young people into community diversion from drugs and alcohol, and increasing young women's participation in sports.

The program recognised a range of barrier for newly arrived young people including:

- Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds rarely play community based sports after school hours;
- Sports clubs and associations experience difficulty in recruiting members from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- Collaborative partnerships between schools, sports clubs and community based agencies promotes increased participation rates of young people;
- As a result of boredom, young people are at risk of becoming involved in activities which could bring them into conflict with authority;
- Young people's involvement in sport after school promotes ongoing commitment to a healthy lifestyle;
- Awareness of the benefits of sports in needs to be raised among culturally and linguistically diverse families.

The aims of the program include to:

- Link young people to positive sporting activities after school, on weekends and during school holidays;
- Create partnerships between schools, sports clubs and community agencies;
- Promote the involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in local sports clubs;

- Encourage family involvement;
- Strengthen connection between young people and their future involvement in sports and healthy lifestyles;
- Support sports clubs and associations to effectively engage young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Leave young people and sports clubs to further enhance relationships after the introduction program to ensure sustainability.

Program Target Groups

Target groups are Primary and Secondary school students within the City of Greater Dandenong, young people identified as being at risk and marginalised, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Key Stakeholders Involved

1. Schools - lunchtime, after school, weekend, sports leadership
2. Sports Clubs / Associations - Junior programs development, cross-cultural training for local clubs, financial support to improve young people's access, involvement of local coaches to create school programs, creation of links between local clubs and schools and encourage increased participation of young people in local clubs
3. Community Groups - development of specific programs for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, collaboration with religious groups and initiating community sports and recreation needs analysis.
4. Agencies - South Health (Greater Dandenong Community Health Services, School focused youth services in the Springvale and Dandenong clusters, Victoria Police, MRC and City of Greater Dandenong.

For further details please contact

Sarah Edwards and Kristen Yates - Project Workers

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E-mail: k.yates@southhealth.org.au

4.6 Peer Support Foundation

4.6.1 Peer Support Program

Peer Support is a structured program operated by the Peer Support Foundation Victoria, where senior students are trained by teachers/parents to work with small groups of junior students in the development of mutual support and friendship.

The program is based on the principle that at every level and in every age group in society, people absorb information and values from each other. Peer Support is used to transmit sound ideas into the school community by training volunteer senior leaders to act as group leaders to junior students.

The Peer Support Program aims to:

- Help primary and secondary school students develop confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and the ability to resist peer group pressure;
- Provide support to junior students who participate in the Peer Support Program;
- Develop leadership and communication skills for senior students who act as discussion facilitators and special friends for younger students;
- Help senior student develop a responsible attitude towards the social environment and the school;
- Provide a safe and friendly environment in order to develop trust and clarify their goals and values;
- Improve communication between teachers and students, older and younger students and parents;
- Provide resources, consultation and networking benefits to all participants in the Peer Support movement.

The objectives of the Peer Support Foundation are to:

- Establish Peer Support Programs in Victorian Primary and Secondary Schools wherever and whenever feasible;
- Organise and run teacher training workshops to induct teachers into the major principles and processes associated with the program and to provide training to enable teachers to train students;

- Support those teachers and schools who implement the program by providing resources, consultancy and opportunity to share experience of the program;
- Offer assistance in school evaluation of the program with the aim of modifying the program to suit local conditions.

The Peer Support Program helps students with direction in their lives. It gives senior students opportunities for self-development and provides junior students with a supportive environment in which to develop their own individuality.

Peer Support Programs are designed to improve the sense of community within schools and promote a more caring and sharing environment for students. It also gives students the opportunity to develop their communication skills, enhances self-awareness and self-esteem and provides a comfortable situation to build trust, share ideas and feelings in a non-judgemental atmosphere.

4.6.2 Go for It Making a Difference Together

Go for It Making a Difference Together is a one-day leadership program for junior students. This program is designed to assist students develop and enhance their skills through participation in the following modules:

1. Characteristics of positive leaders and leadership;
2. Development of skills for leadership (incl. Listening, Assertion, Public speaking and Brainstorming);
3. Problem solving campaigns;
4. Organisation of meetings;
5. Action plan;
6. Ideas and strategies.

4.6.3 Supportive Friends Program

Supportive Friends is a preventative program, which develops practical life skills in senior students. This one-day workshop tries to address the psychological dimensions of anxiety, depression and suicide. It encourages success, happiness and fulfilment through practical outcomes based activities. The Program assists students to enhance their abilities to cope with the pressure of their final years and develop confidence to support their peers.

During the one-day workshop, the following skills were learnt:

- How to approach someone who looks upset or depressed;
- How to be a good listener;
- How to use open and closed questions;
- How to be caring but unobtrusive when dealing with peers;
- How to tell if someone is upset or depressed;
- How to handle issues of confidentiality;
- How to seek help for someone if it is needed;
- How to refer serious issues to adults.

4.6.4 Peaceable Schools through Peer Mediation

Peer Mediation is a process by which student conflicts such as name-calling, teasing, threats, and property disputes are handled by the disputants themselves, with the assistance of other students who have been trained as mediators.

The aim of this program is to develop and enhance teachers and parents skills in Peer Mediation. Teachers and parents will develop skills in training and implementing Peer mediation to students in their schools.

Central to the plan is the creation of a co-operative school context, achieved through the institution of rights and responsibilities approach to discipline and the liberal use of co-operative learning. The conflict resolution strategies of mediation, negotiation skills, group problem solving and developing interpersonal skills are essential. Student mediators and the parties in dispute learn to recognise, manage, and resolve conflict in peaceful non-coercive ways. Students Mediators help disputants communicate and resolve their own problems, keep all information confidential from other students, listen and respect all points of view and understand their own conflicts and learn how to handle them.

Peer Support Foundation of Victoria can be contacted on:

Phone:(03) 9885 8956

Fax: (03) 9885 4238

Mailing Address: 46 Taylor Street (P. O. Box 17), Ashburton VIC 3147

E-mail psupport@peersupport.com.au

4.7 Connect Leadership Training

CONNECT Leadership Training, auspiced by the Migrant Information Centre, is underpinned by the VicHealth strategy to promote mental health in Victorian Communities. The project aims to assist newly arrived young people and their parents to develop a sense of belonging within the school and local community, engage in social and recreational activities and provide them with supportive environments.

The project offers training for secondary school student to develop skills and experiences so that they can effectively support newly arrived young people in their school environment. Through training, CONNECT LEADERS offers friendly support and information about their school and local community. They assist newly arrived young people to get involved in activities, make decisions and develop a sense of belonging. Prior to involvement in the training, participants are informed about CONNECT LEADER Rights and Responsibilities.

Training is offered over three days and students develop the following skills and experiences:

- Culture and Cross Cultural Training;
- Settlement Issues for CLD young people;
- Communication Skills;
- Creating Networks;
- Homework;
- Leadership training;
- Negotiation and decision making;
- Coping skills;
- Debrief and Activity development.

For further information please contact the Migrant Information Centre:

333 Mitcham Road, Mitcham VIC 3132

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Website: www.miceastmel.com.au

4.8 Chronic Illness Peer Support Program (ChIPS)

In 1993 the Centre for Adolescent Health developed the **Chronic Illness Peer Support Program (ChIPS)** to support young people aged 13 to 26 years who live with a chronic condition or illness.

The **ChIPS** program is a peer support model, which aims to improve quality of life by addressing the psychological needs of chronically ill young people. The program is run by young people for young people and is designed to enable easy dissemination into community settings by using a non-categorical approach. This approach recognises that independent of illness types, young people face many similar concerns and issues.

The program uses five structured models of youth participation. These are:

1. Peer Support Group

Each ChIPS program involves eight discussion sessions involving six to eight young people. Sessions are held once a week and last for an hour and a half. Group discussions focus on topics such as school, hospital, medication stress, relationships, and social skills development. Groups are facilitated by health professionals and chronically ill young people trained as peer leaders.

2. CHIP-ERs

At the completion of the eight-week program, all participants are able to attend social activities such as dinners, video nights, excursions and educational workshops such as drama, art and music run by the Centre for Adolescent Health.

3. Reference Group

Fourteen young people with a range of chronic illness form five-specialist committees: Social, Resource, Publications, Workshops and Public Relations committee, which are involved in the running of the program.

4. Leadership Training

The ChIPS program offers a 20-hour leadership program that provides participants with further opportunities for personal and social development. The training covers communication skills, group dynamics, and leadership and public speaking skills.

5. Group Facilitation

Young people trained as peer leaders facilitate other groups. This provides an opportunity for them to consolidate new skills while experiencing the satisfaction of being able to assist others.

Participants acquire a range of personal and social skills that lead to empowerment in dealing with chronic illness. Personal development ranges from a greater sense of emotional well-being, improved acceptance of their condition and improved self-care to enhanced coping abilities. The program also fosters social development within participants by improving peer and family relation, develop confidence, decrease social isolation, and build confidence about school issues.

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5. Conclusion.

The purpose of this paper has been to document the diverse range of youth participation programs focusing on newly arrived young people in the state of Victoria. Many of these programs have been developed and implemented in consultation and partnership with newly arrived young people themselves. It is hoped that in documenting these programs, government and non-government communities based organisations may refer their clients or even feel inspired to develop their own projects.

6. References

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