

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI)

Educational Support Issues
for
Refugee & Newly Arrived
Young People

Multicultural Youth Issues Paper 14

March 2003

Setting the Agenda on Multicultural Youth Issues

1. THE CONTEXT

1.1 CMYI - Organisational Background

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) is a statewide community based organisation that 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.

The Centre operates within an inclusive framework involving youth agencies, migrant and refugee communities, government and non-government organisations, as well as having an ongoing commitment to improving the social and personal status of young people from CLD backgrounds.

1.2 Background to the Issue

The issue of Homework Support Groups and Educational Supports for refugee and newly arrived young people is constantly discussed in the community sector as a prevalent and on-going area of concern. These concerns have been raised by a range of different stakeholders, in a variety of contexts, forums and networks. Key stakeholders include community organisations, secondary schools, education and support service providers, vocational institutions, and the students (and their parents) themselves.

The issue of additional and appropriate educational support impacts directly on refugee and newly arrived young people in the following areas:

- ❑ On rates of educational participation;
- ❑ On economic viability;
- ❑ On social well-being and ability to connect with, participate in, and contribute effectively to, the society.

CMYI recognises that in ensuring equitable access to educational services for this group of young people, particularly in the context of refugee settlement in Australia, that an appropriate response needs to be initiated on a structural level and in a co-ordinated manner.

2. THE NEED

2.1 The Need for Additional Educational Support Structures

It is clear from the high numbers of young people attending homework support groups and the demand for the increased provision of this type of service, that a more structural approach to the issue is required.

Young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds experience a far greater risk of leaving the educational system earlier than is common for other young Victorians. This is due to a number of factors that inhibit their access to education and in turn limit their future options.

Some of the issues faced by refugee and newly arrived young people include:

- **Language barriers:** many young people find it difficult to cope with language acquisition, a situation that is compounded by current curriculum requirements. There are also significant implications for students who may also be illiterate in their first language;
- **Lack of knowledge:** many newly arrived young people lack a working understanding of the Australian education system, the various curriculum and available pathways. This is usually the case for whole family units;
- **Study Space:** many newly arrived young people lack of a quiet space to study at home;
- **Disrupted schooling:** many newly arrived young people have experienced disrupted schooling for varying lengths of time. In some cases, young people may have received no previous schooling at all, either in their country of birth or in the transitional country they lived in prior to settlement in Australia.

2.2 Documenting the Educational Experiences of Refugee Young people

In April 2002, the Refugee Young People and Transitions Working Group published a discussion paper entitled: *Learning Pathways for Refugee Young People-A Discussion Paper for Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENS)*. The paper provides an outline of the specific needs of this particular group of young people. The document also articulates some of the key issues refugee young people encounter upon entry into the Australian education system. Issues outlined include:

- The need for a more flexible and holistic approach to the provision of education;
- The impact of trauma on young people;
- Inadequate support services to facilitate the introduction and on-going support needs of newly arrived refugee young people.

The paper also outlines the current educational pathways available to English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students within schools and vocational pathways for young adults.

CMYI also published a paper on the issue of educational pathways in 1998. Entitled *Briefing Paper on Educational Pathways for Refugee Young People*, the document articulates the specific needs particular to refugee young people.

This paper offers case studies of young refugee young people with recommendations for practical responses to their issues in the context of educational support. The need for documentation of these issues arose from the observations of workers delivering services to refugee young people in CMYI's *Refugee Youth Pathways (JPET) Program*. Issues and structural shortfalls emerged as a pattern of experience for this particular group of young people attempting to engage in the Australian education system.

Some of the key recommendations in the paper included:

- That young people arriving in Australia with disrupted schooling be placed in English Language Centres/Schools for a period of no less than two years;

- That vocational education facilities provide more young adult courses for newly arrived young people that are linked into career development and employment pathways;

- That students aged 18 and over, upon exiting the language Centres/Schools, be eligible to enrol into Year 10 courses.

3. THE RESPONSE

3.1 CMYI Statewide Network Meeting on Educational Supports

On September 12th 2002, CMYI held its quarterly Statewide Network Meeting focusing on Homework Support Groups and Educational Supports for refugee and newly arrived young people. This topic was selected because of its significance and importance to the sector's target group.

The purpose of the CMYI Statewide Network Meetings is to provide a regular forum in which workers who are involved with CLD young people have the opportunity to meet and share information. The network provides an excellent opportunity for individual workers to network with others in the field.

The September meeting started with a brief networking session where participants were given the opportunity to find out more about existing programs and services. This included more specific information regarding Homework support models (paid staff/volunteers), and possible funding sources.

CMYI invited providers of Homework Support Groups (HSGs) to talk about the models they employed to provide this essential service to refugee and newly arrived young people. They discussed key issues facing their particular programs. These presenters explored some of the major challenges encountered regarding the sustainability and co-ordination of their respective HSGs.

4. EXISTING MODELS

Below are three models outlined at the CMYI Statewide Network Meeting held in September 2002.

4.1 The Brotherhood of St. Laurence Homework Centre.

This community-based program has been operating for ten years in the Fitzroy Library. The Brotherhood employs two paid staff members, and has a volunteer co-coordinator to facilitate six regular volunteers. The program acquires trust funding for resources and occasionally organises excursions for the students. There is a core group of 40 students who attend the program. A total group of 80 students of secondary school age attend sporadically. Most of the participants are from Vietnamese, Chinese, and African backgrounds and most reside in the local public housing estates.

Key Issues raised include:

- ❑ Difficulty in co-ordinating volunteers;
- ❑ Difficulty in facilitating large groups of young people;
- ❑ Number of students accessing the program has doubled in the past year;
- ❑ Lack of training for volunteers;
- ❑ The need for careers advice as part of the program.

4.2 St. Jude's Anglican Church Carlton

This church based organisation operates out of the church hall and facilitated the needs of primary and secondary students from surrounding public housing. The students are mostly from the Horn of Africa with the majority of Somali background. There are 30 to 40 regular participants. Young women and young men are tutored separately. The program is co-ordinated by one paid worker who also co-ordinates a pool of 40 volunteers. The volunteers have made a long-term commitment to the program and are teachers and Dip.Ed students from the church community. This program also offers home tutoring for students who require it.

Key Issues raised include:

- ❑ Need for funding and resources;

- ❑ Difficulty in establishing a working relationship with local schools, in order to provide a more co-ordinated approach to individual student needs;
- ❑ The need for more intensive home tutoring for primary school aged children to prevent problems with literacy and numeracy in secondary school;
- ❑ Issues around facilitating the educational support of young women who have domestic responsibilities, including minding younger siblings.

4.3 Northcote Secondary College

This school-based program offers students attending the school a two hour weekly program facilitated by paid teachers. 20 students regularly attend the program, from a range of backgrounds although students from Somalia predominate. The program focuses on the identity issues and emotional wellbeing of students. The program was established to address the specific needs of refugee and newly arrived students that were at risk of dropping out of school. This program is viewed in a pathways context.

Key Issues raised include:

- ❑ Implications for schools meeting the needs of refugee and newly arrived young people, regarding barriers to resettlement;
- ❑ Establishing networks with other relevant agencies;
- ❑ Lack of funding;
- ❑ Problems in engaging parents of young people;
- ❑ Arising welfare issues including, drug & alcohol and mental health issues.

5. A NEW APPROACH

5.1 Key Issues

- ❑ Cross-sectoral partnerships are critical to the facilitation of educational support programs, for example, AMES partnerships with schools;
- ❑ HSGs often work in isolation without resources and adequate funds;
- ❑ HSG are limited in their capacity to support young people through their educational transitions and pathways;
- ❑ Transport issues for students;
- ❑ Recruitment, training and long-term engagement of volunteer staff;
- ❑ The need for the establishment of a body of key stakeholders to further investigate strategies.

5.2 Outcomes

- ❑ A group was established consisting of twelve cross-sector stakeholders. This group will investigate possibilities for addressing some of the major issues raised at the network meeting. These include issues surrounding individual HSG concerns regarding the provision of a service that, in most cases, is under-resourced and working in isolation, as well as, and the sustainability issues that they encounter.
- ❑ This group will also examine possibilities for structural responses to the issue. The very existence and need for HSGs (focussing on literacy and numeracy issues) reflect that there are significant gaps in the provision of education and pathways to refugee and newly arrived young people. These issues are better tackled in a cross-sectoral response involving the education sector and community organisations on a local and Statewide level.

5.3 Recommendations

- ❑ That this working group be resourced and supported by DEET.
- ❑ That DEET devises effective mechanisms for communication for this working group to articulate issues and strategies at a senior departmental level, in order to affect change structurally.

- The need for more alternative courses providing greater levels of flexibility within schools and vocational institutions.
- Need to document models and funding sources, to provide a referral source for workers across the sector.
- Increasing the capacity for community collaboration with existing mechanisms such as the MIPs and LLENs projects.
- That an implementation plan be drafted in partnership between DEET and CMYI (as the convening body of the Educational Support Network Working Group).