

Homeless Twice:

Refugee Young People and Homelessness in Victoria

Multicultural Youth Issues Paper 11

December 2001



Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
for the Workers for Real Access To Housing (WRATH) Working Group

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by

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Disclaimer

This discussion paper has been prepared in good faith. The information in this paper is based on sources believed to be reliable. While every attempt has been made for complete accuracy of data, the authors are unable to accept any responsibility for any misinterpretation, resultant errors, or any action taken or not taken in reliance on the contents of this paper.

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Definitions

"A migrant" is someone who chooses to leave their country of origin for a range of personal, social, religious and economic reasons.

"A refugee", as defined by the United Nations Convention relating to the status of Refugees (1951) is someone who has suffered, or has a well-founded fear of suffering persecution for reasons of race, religion, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion and because this fear has fled his or her country.

"Asylum seeker" is a term used to cover all those persons who seek protection under the 1951 Convention- in short, a refugee that has not been officially recognised as a convention definition refugee after a process of determination by the UNHCR or by national governments where equivalent national legislation exists.

A "homeless person"

The Council to Homeless Persons defines a homeless person as someone who "is without a conventional home and lacks the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. She/he is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and, in some cases, little prospect of self-support" (Council to Homeless Persons: 2000).

Migrant and refugee background

In the context of this paper the term migrant and refugee background refers to young people who were either born overseas or their family migrated from a non-English speaking country, or have come to Australia as a refugee or from a refugee source country.

Acronyms

ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Services
AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Program
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CES	Commonwealth Employment Program
CMYI	Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
CRSS	Community Refugee Settlement Scheme
DETYA	Department of Employment, Training & Youth Affairs
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
DHS	Department of Human Services
ELC/S	English Language Centre / School
ESL	English as a second language
EYIN	Ethnic Youth Issues Network
FSTT	Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma
FYHG	Footscray Youth Housing Group
IHSS	Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
JPET	Job Placement Employment and Training Program
NDCA	National Data Collection
NMIT	Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE
OAA	On Arrival Accommodation
RRAC	Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council
SAAP	Supported Accommodation & Assistance Program
SICMAA	Springvale Indo-Chinese Mutual Assistance Association
SIGSC	State Inter-Government Settlement Committee
TAFE	Training and Further Education
TH	Transitional Housing
THM	Transitional Housing Managers
TIS	Translating and Interpreting Services
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VSPC	Victorian Settlement Planning Committee
WRATH	Workers for real Access to Housing
YAMEC	Young Adult Migrant English Course

Recommendations

1. That the Victorian Office of Housing and at the Federal level, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program undertake longitudinal research focusing on the extent of homelessness in particular communities ie. small and emerging communities, as well as the scope and nature of refugee youth homelessness.
2. That DIMA develop a holistic service delivery model that provides comprehensive support and service for 'at risk' refugee young people. This is vital to aid refugee young people in their resettlement and future in Australia. Such a model should focus on on-arrival information and ongoing support to assist these young people work through Australian income support systems, immigration systems, housing systems, employment, education and training systems, and welfare systems. An on-arrival youth support program could be the initial contact point for this group, and would assist in providing young people and families with information on youth specific services and deliver appropriate assessment and referral to appropriate workers for ongoing support. The aim of such a program would be to link this model into a broader refugee youth strategy. As no such strategy exists this could be developed by DIMA through the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. (RRAC)
3. That increased numbers of youth-focussed positions be based within housing , settlement and welfare services.
4. That Migrant Resource Centre welfare workers be trained to work with a specified caseload of young people within their settlement service programs. In particular, they should be encouraged to conduct outreach work with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds by having youth outcomes tied to funding requirements.

Recommendations Relating to Housing Services

5. That the Office of Housing and SAAP undertake an extensive audit of migrant and refugee youth access to the homelessness service system in Victoria to identify barriers to access at the policy level, and develop strategies to overcome these barriers.
6. Allocation of increased funding for crisis accommodation for young people, and in particular, increased options for gender specific crisis accommodation options.

7. Targeted training and professional development around issues of cultural diversity and young people be included in training programs for all crisis accommodation providers in Victoria.
8. That comprehensive access and equity benchmarks be established for THM's in Victoria.
9. That refugee and migrant young people be given a longer period of support through transitional housing, and into long-term accommodation. The current period of support does not adequately meet the particular needs of this group of young people.
10. That the State and Federal government commit a larger degree of funding to build or acquire larger bedroom and one bedroom housing units.
11. That access procedures to public housing and transitional housing, are simplified for young people from refugee and migrants backgrounds.
12. That the government commit further translation and interpreter funding to youth housing support services.
13. That the state government, in conjunction with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV) develop measures to regulate the private rental market in ways that improve access to this kind of accommodation for refugee and migrant young people.

Recommendations relating to Educational pathways

14. That additional youth support workers be placed at English Language Centres and Schools, and in Adult Migrant English Program Services to assist young people into appropriate education, employment and training pathways, whilst having the flexibility to assist young people access secure forms of housing.
15. That youth specific ESL courses, which provide holistic pre-vocational content such as life skills and an introduction to work in Australia, be developed within TAFE.
16. That DETYA afford greater flexibility in funding to allow for the development of

appropriate education, employment and training opportunities for young migrant and refugee students at risk of leaving school, or those too old to return to school, within both TAFE and other community settings.

17. That funding be made available in TAFE colleges for support workers to assist refugee and at risk migrant and refugee young people to negotiate the TAFE system, and provide referral to local support services.
18. That the Minister for Education and the Minister for Post Compulsory Education and Training in Victoria guarantee funding for the on-going development and implementation of post ELC/S programs and courses that deal specifically with pre-literacy and/or low literacy, preferably delivered through AMES and TAFE's.
19. That young humanitarian entrants should be able to spend up to 2 years in English Language Schools and Centres before attending mainstream schooling.
20. That provision should be made at the state level to allow refugee young people who are over 18 to enrol in pre-VCE levels of Secondary schooling.
21. That students need an intensive bridging program providing high levels of academic ESL tuition and an orientation to the structure and processes of the VCE program through the AMEP funded by DIMA.

Recommendations relating to Employment and Training

22. That DETYA commit targeted funds for the provision of specialised and intensive job preparation and vocational training specifically for migrant and refugee young people, and the wider migrant and refugee communities.
23. That the mutual obligation concept be meaningfully re-evaluated to include the provision by Centrelink of appropriate community language services and that linguistically appropriate information on mutual obligation be provided to refugee and migrant communities.
24. That current mutual obligation activities are often inappropriate and that the Federal government needs to provide a broader range of pre-vocational activities for young people.
25. That Work for the Dole activities must include accredited training and have a significant ESL language component for young people who live in culturally diverse areas of Victoria.

Recommendations relating to Income Maintenance

26. That important communications from Centrelink and other government Departments be sent to more than one address for a homeless young person, and clearly marked important in a variety of languages.

27. That Migrant Services Officers positions are increased within Centrelink, and are responsible for overseeing key areas of strategic development designated to migrant and refugee youth, which include;
 - a) influencing policy with regard to staff training on the refugee experience, cross-cultural communication and service delivery to migrant and refugee young people

 - b) the recruitment and training of bi-lingual workers and interpreters and the development of information accessible to migrant and refugee young people and families.

 - c) liaison with community interest groups and promotion of services available to migrant and refugee communities through these groups (such as rent assistance, the JET scheme).

28. That Centrelink Youth Units are developed in conjunction with community-based services which are sensitive to the needs of migrant and refugee young people and part of the time are outreached to youth services (eg. Youth refuges).

29. That the provision of interpreter services is increased so that migrant and refugee young people and their families are made aware of Centrelink guidelines and services.

Executive Summary

In many ways the refugee experience is an experience of homelessness and displacement. Most refugees arrive in Australia and are immediately homeless. Economic hardship, combined with the variables of the refugee experience, place refugees at extreme risk of remaining in a cycle of chronic homelessness. For young refugees this situation can be further accentuated by disrupted schooling and issues of identity and adolescent development.

Prior to resettlement in Victoria, young people normally spend a number of years in transition; in refugee camps, as illegal immigrants in second countries, or as internally displaced people in their country of origin. 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 indicate that a large number of refugee young people withstand a range of experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared with other Victorian young people. The two most significant experiences are the refugee experience and the settlement experience. Such experiences include the survival of torture and trauma, the experience of long periods of disrupted schooling, and resettlement within fragmented family units. These experiences have a distinct impact on adolescent development and the transition to independence that requires specialised responses from the community.

Refugee and migrant young people are disadvantaged when accessing services and negotiating the service system. In accessing public housing for example, barriers faced by these young people can include communication difficulties, a lack of knowledge of the service system and difficulties associated with negotiating the segmented waiting list.

Most public housing is not culturally appropriate for larger and/or extended families and has been identified as one of the push factors for refugee and migrant youth homelessness in Australia. In addition there is a particular lack of housing stock that is suitable for young single people, making it increasingly difficult for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to access safe, secure and stable long term accommodation.

The refugee and settlement experiences of young migrants and refugees raise complex issues for policy makers and service providers in framing responses that address the increasing homelessness of young refugees. Of particular concern are their special settlement support needs in relation to health, housing and language acquisition. These special needs are not adequately addressed in either the current settlement or housing service systems.

The prevention of refugee and migrant youth homelessness in Victoria requires the development of comprehensive settlement service solutions and housing market solutions as well as employment market solutions. Until young people's hous-

ing issues are addressed, it is unrealistic to expect them to settle into a learning environment, let alone move into viable pathways to employment. Unless newly arrived migrant and refugee young people have suitable opportunities to improve their English language skills, entry into formal training and suitable employment and access to appropriate accommodation remains out of reach for many. Few housing options for homeless migrant and refugee young people and families mean that these young people are at risk of leaving school early, or find it increasingly difficult to participate in education and training.

Education, employment and training services, which are responsive to the needs of migrant and refugee young people, must be an integral part of housing and settlement services in order to assist them to establish new lives. Opportunities to gain the skills needed to move towards economic dependence in ways that reinforce the human dignity of young people are required in order for young people who are homeless or "at risk" of homelessness to move out of the homelessness cycle.

This discussion paper attempts to re-evaluate Federal and State responses to the development of appropriate solutions for homeless young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, recognising that newly arrived migrant and refugee young people, if not properly supported, can fall into patterns of chronic homelessness. This paper gives particular attention to the impact of settlement services, education, employment and training on migrant and refugee youth homelessness.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (formerly Ethnic Youth Issues Network) is a state wide community based organisation that supports and resources organisations and service providers who work with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

In 1992, the Ethnic Youth Issues Network published a resource kit "Breaking Barriers: Non-English Speaking Background Young People and Housing". The kit responded to the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate services for young people and highlighted a diminishing commitment from government to the provision of appropriate levels of support for young people in transition.

Eight years on, the number of migrant and refugee young people becoming homeless or at risk of becoming homeless has steadily increased (EYIN: 1999). A general decline in funding for youth services and targeted youth housing support, combined with the mainstreaming of service delivery to high-need marginalised groups, has created large gaps in service provision to young people from migrant or refugee backgrounds.

Continued concern with migrant and refugee young peoples access to housing support led to the formation of a dynamic working group - Workers for Real Access to Housing (WRATH). Since forming in April 2000, WRATH have been active in generating informed and focused discussion on housing issues, informed the CMYI consultation process and made representations to the Victorian Homeless Strategy.

WRATH believe that where cultural and linguistic diversity, homelessness, resettlement and youth issues intersect, there arise complex and important social issues that need to be addressed.

WRATH together with service providers in the field established that new materials were needed to re-address specific issues relevant to migrant and refugee youth housing issues. In particular, material incorporating historical perspectives on their homelessness, resettlement issues of refugee and migrant youth, and an examination of specific migrant and refugee youth needs in terms of short, medium and long term housing.

This paper aims to encourage and resource future discussions and developments towards appropriately meeting the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are experiencing homelessness in all of its forms. This paper discusses homelessness for this target group within the holistic context of the refugee experience, resettlement, the complexities of homelessness for this group and the homelessness service system.

1.2 Young Victorians and Cultural Diversity

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues believes that culture is a central consideration in all interactions between individuals and groups of individuals, and within organisations; that all interactions between people are cross-cultural at a number of levels and not confined only to issues of race, language and ethnicity. CMYI believe that the study of cultural diversity is as much about reflecting upon one's own culture as seeking to understand the culture of others. In Australia, cultural diversity is a social reality that should be addressed in all attempts at social analysis. Specific socio-cultural experiences, such as the experiences of migrant and refugee young people in Victoria, are best understood within a broader understanding of the diversity of cultures and cross-cultural interactions.

Three broad groupings of CALD young people identified by Goldust and Richmond (1974) are:

- * **Immigrant young people**, who are newly arrived, have often begun schooling in their home country, usually arriving unaccompanied or with parents, or as independent applicants with skills or joining family members under the family migration stream. A special category of immigrant young people are refugees. Refugees, in addition to the normal pressures of settlement, may have experienced war trauma and extended periods of time in refugee camps.
- * **Second generation young people** are usually born in Australia. Their parents having emigrated, they have completed all or most of their schooling in Australia, have grappled with many of the ambiguities of living in two cultures. A sub-category of second-generation young people are those born and raised in inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages in Australia.
- * **Third generation young people** are usually born in Australia, have parents who completed part or all of their schooling in Australia, may or may not been in touch with ethnic/ linguistic heritage of their parents and grandparents, products of inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages.

It is difficult to accurately depict the cultural diversity of young people in Victoria. Limited information on the cultural diversity of young people in Victoria may be found in Census data. On census night in 1996, more than 3.5 million 12-25 year olds were counted in Australia, representing 21% of the total population. Almost 3% of these young people were of Indigenous origin and 14% had been born overseas. Of those born overseas, 5% were born in English speaking countries 9% were born in non-English speaking countries. More than 15% of young Australians spoke languages other than English- 20% of young Victorians reported speaking a language other than English at home (Abbasi & Blacher: 1998).

For young people born overseas and living in Victoria, the main source countries were Vietnam, UK, New Zealand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia (including East Timor). The main languages (other than English) that young Victorians spoke in their homes were Italian, Greek, Chinese languages, Vietnamese, Arabic and Macedonian (Abbasi & Blacher: 1998).

Immigration statistics record young people aged between 16 and 24 years of age to be almost one third of our total settler intake under Australia's humanitarian migration program since 1996. Victoria settles almost one third of all Australia's humanitarian youth settler arrivals. The top source countries for humanitarian youth arrivals in Victoria for 1996- 2001 were the Former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Iraq, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Vietnam, Iran , Eritrea and Afghanistan (DIMA Settlement Planning and Information Unit: 2001). Each year an estimated 3500 young people enter Australia under another migration category than special humanitarian, who have refugee -like experiences , or from countries with high numbers of refugees. Currently there are approximately 16,000 young people who have entered Australia as refugees In Victoria aged between 14 - 25 years who have arrived since July '82. (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee: Needs of Humanitarian Entrants - Data Profile Project, Draft , August 2001).249 of these young people arrived or were granted protection In the past three years.

Over the last 10 years of settlement , refugee young people Initially settled In significant numbers (of over 100) In only 22 of the 78 Local Government Areas (LGA's) In Victoria . 56% settled In 7 LGA's : City of Greater Dandenong (18%) , Brimbank (7%) , Darebin (7%) , Moreland (7%) , Hume (6%) , Moonee Valley (6%) , and Maribyrnong (5.5%). (DIMA I,VSPC Data Profile Project , 2001)

(Further details of the migration process and categories presented in Attachment 1)

2. Young Migrants' and Refugees' Experiences

Studies indicate that a large proportion of refugee young people who resettle in Victoria withstand a range of experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared with other Victorian young people. Each of these experiences has a distinct impact on adolescent development that require specialised responses from the community sector. (Ransley & Fotiadis: 1999, Quek:1991, Drummond: 1994, Wallace: 1990)

The refugee experience for young people can be understood in four distinct stages.

- * pre-flight experiences which are often characterised by persecution and human rights abuses;
- * flight experiences, which talk about the experiences gained by young people during the process of fleeing their home and country;
- * transition experiences, which are characterised by extended periods in refugee camps or as internments in immigration detention facilities, often in neighbouring countries and sometimes in the country where they are likely to resettle; and
- * resettlement experiences, which take into account the difficulties associated in re-establishing a 'normal' lifestyle in a third country.

Each stage of the refugee experience impacts on the other, most notably in resettlement, which is very often the stage of a young persons life where most visible problems emerge. The particular circumstances of the conflict and experiences that each young person has survived will have far reaching effects on their ability to resettle in a safe third country like Australia. Issues of identity and adolescent development are also compounded for young people in the refugee experience.

Common settlement issues for young people in the resettlement stage of the refugee experience are:

- * language and communication difficulties,
- * conflict with parents or carers,
- * disrupted education,
- * trauma from in-flight and transition experiences and family breakdown,
- * health problems including mental health conditions from torture and trauma experiences,

- * inappropriate housing,
- * unfamiliarity with the service system, services and how to access services.

In addition, a young persons ability to adapt to Australian life will greatly depend on their; individual experience; education; background (rural or urban); exposure to other cultures; period of residency in Australia; personal attitudes; family context; and the perceived necessity to retain their own culture (Beattie & Ward: 1998). This list is by no means conclusive, but proposes a framework within which the refugee young persons' diaspora can be understood.

3. Young People and Homelessness

3.1 Understanding Youth Homelessness

There are varying degrees of homelessness ranging from people living in insecure, unsafe or unaffordable housing at risk of becoming homeless, to people living on the street, in parks or squats who are in a state of outright homelessness (Council to Homeless Persons: 2000). Homelessness is not just a lack of shelter but also a lack of a safe and nurturing home environment; a place where people feel comfortable and settled; and a place that is private and where they feel they belong. It may "represent a single acute episode in a person's life, or a condition into which individuals enter and exit repeatedly over the course of their lives" (Neil, et al, 1992:8).

The Australian Council of Social Service in their report on Australia's compliance with the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concludes that;

"Recent estimates show that as many as 23% of Australian children under 15 years of age live in poverty. Levels of social security income are insufficient to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living. The lack of access to affordable housing, and increasing rates of homelessness is a major concern.

Statistics depicting people who are homeless, however, are limited by the "hidden" and "transient" nature of this population and the length of time since the last census. Available statistics however report:

- * The estimated number of people using homeless services in Victoria between July 1996 and June 1997 was 46 000, 37% of whom were children (NDCA, 1997b).
- * Young people were the major group of people using SAAP homeless services, with 45% aged between 15 and 24 years.
- * 61% of people using homeless services were single while 30% were single parents with children (NDCA, 1997b).

Little is known about the extent of homelessness in ethnic minority communities, let alone the extent and nature of youth homelessness among particular cultural and linguistic groups. Census data on homelessness does not include country of birth or languages spoken, and migration data collection on cultural and ethnic identity, languages spoken and visa streams is minimal.

Using available service data to identify need or demand or extent of homelessness for people of CALD backgrounds is also not reliable, due to these people commonly being low users of services, and the inconsistency in recording this data.

3.2 Young Refugees and Homelessness

Young refugees are six to ten times more likely to become homeless than other young people. For example, MacKenzie (2000) writes that the incidence of homelessness for refugee young people in schools alone is estimated at around 800 on any one night in Australia.

In many ways, the refugee experience is an experience of homelessness and displacement. Most refugees arrive in Australia and are again homeless. Refugee young people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness by virtue of their refugee status. For example:

- * refugee young people are often placed at a distinct disadvantage because of their age. They are often unable to fully establish economic viability and social networks that enable them to make full use of the opportunities that are generally available to young people and the community.
- * economic hardship, combined with the variables of the refugee experience, place refugee young people at extreme risk of remaining in a cycle of chronic homelessness.
- * refugee and newly arrived young people are impoverished both in terms of their financial and material circumstances. They are very often socially and economically isolated within the community as a whole, and in relation to the mainstream welfare system.

Recommendations

1. That the Victorian Office of Housing and at the Federal Level, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program undertake longitudinal research focussing on the extent of homelessness in particular communities ie. small and emerging communities, as well as the scope and nature of refugee youth homelessness.

4. Settlement Services and Policy Context

4.1 The Settlement Service System

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) provides, in partnership with other government agencies and many community organisations, a range of services to help refugees and migrants settle in Australia. These services include:

the On-Arrival Accommodation (OAA) program, which provides initial short-term accommodation in self-contained flats. Associated services help clients, based on an individual assessment of settlement needs, to access relevant community services; and

the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS), whereby CRSS volunteer groups provide initial accommodation and settlement assistance, such as arranging schooling and English classes, and accessing welfare and community services to Refugees and Humanitarian Program entrants. (DIMA: Fact Sheet)

A network of government and community based organisations and service providers are funded to provide specialised services on behalf of DIMA under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) which include assessment and referral services for refugees and Humanitarian Program entrants during their initial settlement in Australia, and to help coordinate settlement-related service providers in a particular locality. A case management approach is adopted to ensure that the special needs of humanitarian entrants are identified and addressed promptly by matching them with settlement services that meet their particular circumstances. In 1998-99, funding of \$4.9 million was directed to 42 community-based organisations to provide support and assistance to refugees and humanitarian program entrants across Australia.

4.2 Settlement Policy Context

The Settlement policy context includes:

- * The Integrated Settlement Plan 1994-1999 Victoria, developed by the State Inter-government Settlement Committee (SIGSC), (renamed Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (VSPC) in 1999)
- * the dramatic policy shifts in the human services fields that took place under the Kennett government at the State level,
- * the redevelopment of Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services at a Federal level, and

- * the current state Labour government redirection towards a policy of 'communities that care'.

It is in the context of the Federal government's Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society Policy adopted in 1998 that future efforts to developing and coordinating a more integrated settlement service system for refugee young people must be centred. (DIMA: 1998) The Charter establishes seven principles of best practise in service provision to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, giving particular attention to mainstream service planning, delivery, evaluation and outcomes reporting. It outlines practical benchmarks on cultural diversity that must be adopted by the non-government sector, as well as the government sector. It also clearly identifies that agencies need to be aware of the double disadvantage that may be faced by young people when accessing government services. (DIMA: 1998)

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), an important component of the federal government's settlement policy approach, was established in 1997-98 to provide a national framework for a more holistic, better targeted and responsive approach to the settlement needs of eligible humanitarian entrants, and to improve service delivery integration.

The IHSS has recently approved an "improved service delivery model" that integrates seven service outcomes that are seen as crucial to the successful initial settlement of entrants. These are; accommodation support; information and orientation assistance; household formation support; early health assessment and intervention services; support to proposers of humanitarian entrants; community support for refugees; and service provider support.

The State Inter-Governmental Settlement Committee (SIGSC), chaired by DIMA, developed the Integrated Settlement Plan 1994-1999 Victoria. In 1995, SIGSC Victoria identified the category of "youth" as a particular group of settler arrivals whose needs cut across a range of priority areas that require prioritising.

The SIGSC, renamed the Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (VSPC) in 1999, is made up of representatives from relevant Commonwealth, state and local government departments throughout Victoria and one community agency. It forms a crucial part of the Commonwealth's National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS), which aims to improve migrant access to settlement services, and to plan and co-ordinate co-operative efforts across all spheres of Government.

The VSPC established a working group to examine the Needs of Adolescent Humanitarian Entrants in Victoria in response to community concern for young refugee people in Victoria, their increasing homelessness, family breakdown issues and general disadvantage. In August 2000 the VSPC endorsed a proposal from the working group to establish three additional groups focussing on the particular areas of concern to young people- housing and homelessness, legal and juvenile justice issues and educational pathways. Concurrently, in the same month, the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) again endorsed a focus on the settlement needs of young refugees and drafted a strategy for Refugee Young People.

4.3 Issues with Settlement Services and Policy for Young Migrants and Refugees

Despite a very clear policy priority around youth at the higher levels of government, this has not translated into the development of funding or targeted programs and services to meet the needs of refugee young people, particularly in relation to their housing and educational pathways and support needs. Amid a declining social landscape for young people generally, disadvantaged groups of young people such as young refugees, require government policy translated into action and outcomes.

There are a number of crucial issues that directly impact on the service response and settlement experiences of young people. These include:

- * The assumption that underlies the current settlement service system in Australia is that young people will be sufficiently accessed in a family-focussed case management approach to service delivery. When viewed in a family context, young people appear more resilient. However, when an adolescent or young person is seen as an individual member of a family, the consequences of the settlement process can be seen more clearly alongside adolescence and its associated problems, issues and challenges.
- * Current settlement programs are adult-focussed but make implicit assumptions that young people will also benefit from services. Young people, however, are not sufficiently serviced by the network of settlement service providers, and in Victoria, there are only a few DIMA funded youth-specific workers.
- * Refugees and Humanitarian Program entrants normally have immediate access to some form of income support. Some young refugees may be eligible for the Youth Allowance, however this is significantly lower than other social security payments and can disadvantage them when looking for independent accommodation.
- * Most migrant and refugee people benefit from participation in the Adult Migrant English Program. (AMEP) However, young people are sometimes disadvantaged in these programs because most are vocationally based and do not link young people into VCE and further education and training opportunities.
- * There clearly lies a range of responsibilities towards refugee young people across a range of government departments at the state, federal and local levels. Mostly, these lines of responsibility towards young people are confused and where clear policy statements are made around young people, they do not translate into concrete action at the service provision level.

Despite a re-prioritising of youth needs in some settlement policy, current policy approaches towards settlement in Australia continue to favour a family-focused

model of service provision. The new IHSS model still does not adequately meet the needs of young people. In particular, a continued crisis management approach to dealing with youth issues fails young people resettling in Victoria because it does not adequately address the non-crisis needs of young people in a settlement context.

While the families and communities of young people need specific information about youth services and programs in Victoria, newly arrived young people also need specific kinds of information in their first language that cannot be found in general youth information packages or at ethno-specific services. The development of on-going and flexible processes that can adequately determine and analyse the settlement needs of newly arrived young people in Victoria must be given greater priority by settlement service providers, and more prominence within the broader settlement policy framework.

Recommendations:

2. That DIMA develop a holistic service delivery model that provides comprehensive support and service for 'at risk' refugee young people. This is vital to aid refugee young people in their resettlement and future in Australia. Such a model should focus on on-arrival information and ongoing support to assist these young people work through Australian income support systems, immigration systems, housing systems, employment, education and training systems, and welfare systems. An on-arrival youth support program could be the initial contact point for this group, and would assist in providing young people and families with information on youth specific services and deliver appropriate assessment and referral to appropriate workers for ongoing support. The aim of such a program would be to link this model into a broader refugee youth strategy. As no such strategy exists this could be developed by DIMA through the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. (RRAC)

3. That increased numbers of youth-focussed positions be based within torture and trauma counselling services to work with refugee young people.

4. That Migrant Resource Centre welfare workers be trained to work with a specified caseload of young people within their settlement service programs. In particular, they should be encouraged to conduct outreach work with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds by having youth outcomes tied to funding requirements.

5. Housing Services and Policy Context

5.1 The Housing Service System

A range of Commonwealth and State government programs assist homeless people in Victoria, as well as services provided by the non-government community sector. A range of social security benefits including single parent, aged, unemployment and disability payments that homeless people may access supplement these programs (Council to Homeless Persons: 2000). The major housing programs include:

- * The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
- * The Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP)
- * The Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement
- * Rent Assistance (through the department of Social Security)
- * The Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program
- * The Housing Establishment Fund
- * The Community Housing sector

(Further details of each of these programs provided in Attachment 2)

5.2 Issues with Housing Service and Policy for Young Migrants and Refugees

In addition to issues with the current capacity of housing services to meet needs, issues for young migrants and refugees in accessing housing support and programs include:

- * access to public housing
- * inappropriateness of mainstream accommodation options
- * racist discrimination in the private rental market
- * unfamiliarity with the service system and how to access services
- * many are not articulate enough in English or able to be strong advocates for themselves in accessing services.

Examples of these above issues are included in the following discussions of individual housing programs.

5.2.1 Crisis accommodation

Crisis accommodation in Victoria currently does not have enough bed spaces for young homeless people in crisis. When emergency accommodation options exist, there are even fewer appropriate options for migrant and refugee young people. For example, current models of crisis accommodation raise significant religious and cultural barriers for young people such as Muslim young women who are not able to share accommodation with young men. In addition, young refugees often present with complicated issues and crisis accommodation workers are not always able to communicate effectively with this group of young people.

Maya*, 15 years old, from Lebanon

Maya, 15, a young Muslim woman from the Middle East was found by a police officer at 3 am in the City of Moreland. She had walked from Broadmeadows after a fight with her parents, who had kicked her out of home. For cultural and religious reasons, there was no available crisis accommodation that she could access in the entire Northern region of Melbourne that morning, and she was eventually taken to Footscray, where she was able, over time, to access a youth housing support worker and be placed in transitional housing.

(* not her real name)

5.2.2 Transitional Housing

There are a variety of transitional housing management models and levels of support for young people in Victoria, as well as a range of entry points for young people. Whilst there is some degree of flexibility, Transitional Housing Managers (THM's) exercise a large degree of discretion in their response to clients needs. The transitional housing service system, as a result, creates barriers for young people who are new to Australia. This occurs in part due to a young persons lack of knowledge of the service system and of how to advocate for themselves, as well as the ephemeral nature of the service system guidelines around access and equity at a practice level. Young people are often confused about whether they should access SAAP services directly, or the THM's in their local area. Young people often feel that they have been shuffled around between the two services.

Eric, 20 years old, from Sudan:

Eric first arrived in Melbourne from Egypt where he lived for 16 months after fleeing his country. Eric, with no family in Australia, first came to Footscray Youth Housing Group (FYHG) 3 weeks after his arrival, seeking accommodation and support. Eric presented with poor English language skills and interpreters were needed. He had little knowledge of Australian processes. During his first appointment at FYHG an assessment of needs was done identifying health, legal Issues, education, employment and training, living skills, cultural and religious needs, social and professional networks and housing as his main issues of concern. Eric was assessed as a high-need client who required support in all but one of the above

categories. Eric and the support worker did an initial short term case plan (3 months) that included, assisting him to access transitional housing, linking him to mental health and dental services, providing information on the Australian education system, requesting translation of some documentation, liaising with Centrelink, providing information on places of worship, familiarising Eric with the local and metropolitan areas, the use of public transport and reading maps etc. Within the first month of support, Eric moved into a supported housing property on a three-month lease. He shared with a young male from Ethiopia.

Two months after moving into the property a neighbour complained to the Transitional Housing Managers (THM) about the tenants being too noisy. Without previous discussion with the support agency or the tenants, the THM sent a breach of duty notice. This was very distressing for both tenants who felt that the notice was unfair and feared they would be asked to leave. FYHG advocated on their behalf and linked Eric and his co-tenant to the Tenants Union where they got advice and assistance to respond to the notice. The neighbour kept complaining not only to the THM, but also to the Police and the Council. FYHG had clearly determined that the complaints were unreasonable and that the neighbour was harassing these young people. Legal options to get protection and stop the harassment were discussed. The young men felt they would rather leave than go through a series of meetings and appointments with solicitors, courts, police etc. FYHG advocated on their behalf and a transfer to another property was organised with the THM. A three-month extension of the lease was agreed with the THM. Resolving the above issue took four weeks. The initial case plan had to be reviewed. Some of the support needs identified in the initial case plan had not been addressed yet. In addition, other support needs became apparent eg. budgeting and legal assistance with transport fines and unpaid bills. The new case plan (6 months) included assistance and support with legal issues, health, education and training, financial counselling and information on long-term housing. By the sixth month of living in transitional accommodation Eric was linked to a number of services from which he was receiving ongoing support. The support worker began discussing long-term housing options and Eric identified public housing as the best option. An application for public housing was lodged. The support worker explained that an offer under a wait turn application could take several years and that it would be necessary to try other housing options. If he couldn't find alternative accommodation, a special needs application for public housing could be lodged.

Eric's language skills had improved considerably and he felt he could test the private market on his own. He was eager to start looking for work, as he wanted to financially assist his family. He decided to concentrate on looking for alternative housing and job searching. The support worker gave information on JPET and job network services and linked him to them. Eric had thought that finding work would take a few weeks. After two months of unsuccessful searching he was feeling frustrated and upset that he had been unable to find any work to assist his family. This had a negative impact on his physical health and self esteem. As far as searching for private housing, he was feeling very frustrated as well. He had approached a few real estate agencies and had found that private rental was very expensive. Furthermore, inspecting the properties and filling in applications was more complex than he had anticipated. He discussed this with the support worker who offered assistance to test the private rental market and fill in a special housing needs application for public housing. Over a period of 4 weeks Eric applied for several properties and was unsuccessful. A special housing needs application was lodged. He had already lived 9 months in transitional accommodation and a 90-day notice to vacate was issued. By the end of the 90-day notice (ie. after 12 months living in TH), Eric had not received an offer for public housing. However,

given that his special housing needs application had been accepted, the THM did not apply for an order of possession.

After 16 months living in transitional accommodation, Eric was waiting for an offer in public housing under the special needs segment and receiving counselling from the Foundation for Survivors of Torture. He was on a waiting list at the Dental Hospital for a dental treatment and had paid his transport fines, but was waiting for a court hearing regarding a traffic offence. He had been linked to a financial counsellor for his telephone debts and was about to start a TAFE course in auto mechanics. He had commenced a search for missing relatives with the Red Cross Tracing Service. While he still had a very narrow social network, and was very isolated, he continued to need further support with development of independent living skills (ie. monitoring expenses, personal hygiene, cooking, recreation etc). He continued to need further support to fully understand education, health and bureaucratic systems.

5.2.3 Public Housing

There is an inadequate level of public housing stock in Victoria. In addition, most housing is not culturally appropriate for larger, extended families and has been identified as one of the push factors for refugee and migrant youth homelessness in Australia (Ransley and Fotiadis: 1999). There is a particular lack of housing stock that is suitable to young single people, making it increasingly difficult for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to access safe, secure and stable long term accommodation from the transitional housing service sector.

Refugee and migrant young people are again disadvantaged in the public housing system by language, lack of prior knowledge of the service system and the difficulties associated with negotiating the segmented waiting list. Young refugee people wishing to access public housing need additional, long-term support from youth housing professionals to ensure that their households can be properly established and maintained.

5.2.4 Private Rental Market

Refugee and migrant young people face a double disadvantage in accessing stable accommodation in the private rental market on account of their age, racist discrimination and stereotyping. Young People from refugee backgrounds, in particular, occupy the lower income end of the private rental market and are less likely to be able to access what little stock is available in a market which is tailored to the upper income levels of the private market.

Recommendations

5. That the Office of Housing and SAAP undertake an extensive audit of migrant and refugee youth access to the homelessness service system in Victoria to identify barriers to access at the policy level, and develop strategies to overcome these barriers.
6. Allocation of increased funding for crisis accommodation for young people, and in particular, increased options for gender specific crisis accommodation options.
7. Targeted training and professional development around issues of cultural diversity and young people to all crisis accommodation providers in Victoria.
8. That comprehensive access and equity benchmarks be established for THM's in Victoria.
9. That refugee and migrant young people be given a longer period of support through transitional housing, and into long-term accommodation. The current period of support does not adequately meet the particular needs of this group of young people.
10. That the State and Federal government commit a larger degree of funding to build or acquire larger bedroom and one bedroom housing units.
11. That access procedures to public housing and transitional housing are simplified for young people from refugee and migrants backgrounds.
12. That the government commit further translation and interpreter funding to youth housing support services.
13. That the state government, in conjunction with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV) develop measures to regulate the private rental market in ways that improve access to this kind of accommodation for refugee and migrant young people.

6. Young Migrants and Refugees and Educational Support

Until young people's housing issues are addressed, it is unrealistic to expect them to settle into a learning environment, let alone move into viable pathways to employment. Unless newly arrived migrant and refugee young people have suitable opportunities to improve their English language skills, entry into formal training and suitable employment remains out of reach for many.

6.1 Understanding Young Refugees Educational Experiences

Young people arriving in Australia under the refugee and special humanitarian categories bring with them a diverse range of educational experiences and attainment. Some arrive with intact schooling from their countries of origin while others may have missed out on many years of schooling. Others have had little or no formal education due to their refugee experience. Most newly arrived refugee/migrant students enter Australia with little or no knowledge of English.

The educational experiences of young migrants and refugees fall into three broad groups:

- * Students who have had no formal schooling, are not literate in their first language and have limited numeracy skills. This group includes students who have not had access to formal schooling and students from pre-literate societies, for example, Hmong people from Laos and some students from Somalia.
- * Students who have had disrupted educational background and who have limited numeracy and literacy skills in their first language. These disruptions may be the result of school closures due to war, distance from school or prolonged periods in a refugee camp. This group includes young people from Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Lebanon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Bosnia.
- n Students who have had schooling but in languages other than their first language. For example Chinese (Hakka) speaking students from East Timor who attended an Indonesian school in Timor, a Portuguese school in Portugal, and finally, a school in Australia. These students may be practically literate in one or more languages and may need some time in a literacy class in order to consolidate literacy skills.

Refugee students may be further impeded by special needs such as vision impairment, hearing impairment, emotional trauma, malnutrition or a range of learning difficulties which may be a result of their refugee experience, or exasperated by that experience. They are very often required to adapt to a classroom and learning culture which may embrace and encourage communication skills and learning styles that are

new and at times in direct conflict with cultural values. For example, a student-centred rather than a teacher-centred instructional style.

Few housing options for homeless migrant and refugee young people and families mean that these young people are at risk of leaving school early, or find it increasingly difficult to participate in education and training. Opportunities to gain the skills needed to move towards economic dependence in ways that reinforce the human dignity of young people are required in order for young people who are homeless or "at risk" of homelessness, to move out of the homelessness cycle.

Tam Pham, 18 years old, from Vietnam

Tam Pham's mother came to Australia 5 years ago, leaving Tam with relatives in Vietnam. Due to limited money Tam stopped school when he was 15, he therefore has not been at school for about 4 years. In Australia Tam's mother married an Anglo-Australian farmer living in the far outer suburbs of Melbourne. Upon arriving in Australia Tam went to live with his mother and stepfather. Due to not having been at school for 4 years Tam has found it difficult to settle into the language centre school environment and also feels older than some of the other students. It took Tam 1 1/2 hours one-way to get to school. Tam also found it difficult to communicate with his stepfather and he felt his stepfather did not want him to go to school but help him on the farm, which caused tension between him and his mother too. As a result Tam ran away from home. He initially stayed with friends who were not studying and who lived far away from the Language Centre and Tam found it difficult to become motivated to attend school. Lack of stable housing was extremely disruptive to his education. After living with friends for three months he heard from a youth worker about a housing group and was accepted for housing. Currently he is linked into a youth housing program that has a specific program for newly arrived migrants and refugee young people.

6.2 The Education Support System

Educational support offered to refugees and new arrivals includes:

- * On-Arrival English Language Provision to Refugee and Migrant Young People On entering Australia most students will enrol in an on-arrival English program. The kind of program a young person will enrol in is determined by their age. Young people who arrive in Australia under 18 years on the first of January of any given year, enrol in a secondary English language school/centre. Students aged over eighteen enrol in an Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) class. Language centres orientate young people to the secondary school system and students attend full time. AMEP prepares young people for post-school employment, education and training options and life skills. Students normally attend classes for 20 hours per week.

6.3 Issues with the Educational Support for Young Migrants and Refugees

Issues for Under 18's include:

- * Students are entitled to four terms in an English language school before moving on to secondary school. This is an insufficient time for young people to deal with the myriad of resettlement issues they face upon arrival in Australia. It is common for issues to surface during their time in on-arrival English. Such issues, such as learning difficulties associated with post-traumatic stress can affect the extent to which students learn.
- * Students with previously disrupted, little, or no schooling, enter secondary school with insufficient English language skills and cultural understanding to cope sufficiently. Secondary schools are placed under pressure to provide alternative programs for these students, with little or no extra funding and resourcing. Many students are placed into year 10 classes with students a number of years younger than them as other pathways do not exist.

Zenebe. 15 years old from Ethiopia

Zenebe* is a fifteen year old student from Ethiopia who had two years of schooling in his country before coming to Australia to join his estranged father after the death of his mother. Since arriving in Australia he has completed two semesters (one year) in an English language centre. Although a confident speaker, Zenebe has very low literacy. His current literacy skills are below a survival level and are inadequate for a mainstream educational environment. Secondary school is an inappropriate option, as is TAFE due to Zenebe's age and low language level. Zenebe was placed in a school based literacy program in the northern suburbs, which catered for students under 18 with little or no schooling. However, the school had difficulty resourcing this course and the program did not go ahead. Zenebe's only other option was to be placed in a community based program. Zenebe is at risk of homelessness due to conflict with his father who also is unemployed with poor employment prospects.

(*not his real name)

Issues for over 18's include:

- * Students over 18 are entitled to 510 hours in an AMEP for 20 hours per week. The age in classes range from 18-60 years . Most students want to study more than 20 hours per week. AMEP classes, while being geared towards the development of life skills appropriate to the Australian context, do not adequately prepare students for further study. Most young people want to study with young people of their own age, and to develop social networks through schooling.
- * The fact that over 18 year olds cannot remain at secondary schools means

that many refugee young people who have experienced disrupted and/or scant schooling are unable to access secondary school to a level appropriate to their needs. Options are extremely limited and many young people do not have adequate English language skills after AMES to access vocational training.

- * The new Access program provides training at a higher level, which in effect limits entry for refugee/ newly arrived young people. Combined with a shift in the Department of Education's policy on over 18 year olds being excluded for secondary schools, this has resulted in shrinking options for appropriate and supportive educational pathways for refugee young people.

Ali, 22 years old, from Ethiopia

Ali* arrived in Australia from Ethiopia as a sponsored migrant under the Family Migration Scheme. His natural mother was born in Ethiopia and has now been living in Australia for 9 years. She has sponsored five other family members whom she calls sons and sisters. She was not Ali's sponsor. When he first arrived Ali lived with his mother until their relationship broke down, as have all the relationships between the mother and the family members.

Ali is 22 years old and living in SAAP accommodation. He is not able to access any formal education or training nor is he eligible for any income support. Ali presented with a range of issues including family breakdown. There were unrealistic expectations of Ali to reunite with family members that he had never really known. The financial pressures of contributing to the upkeep of a large family were also very difficult for him. The relationship with his sponsor broke down, as to did the financial support and responsibility towards Ali.

Ali presented with a range of torture and trauma issues, as well as general poor health and poor nutrition. He had additional problems with his eye sight- bad employment practises in his country of origin had left him with damaged eyesight. Ali had low self-esteem and was developing an increasing drug dependency, one that he had not yet recognised.

Ali had employment skills but due to his ill health was unable to work- a combination of loss of self-esteem, anger at his sponsor and mother, combined with his bad health. Prior to resettling in Australia, he had experienced periods of interrupted schooling due to poor economics and war. His support worker found it difficult to find a suitable interpreter- the community was so small that everybody knew each other and issues could not be kept confidential. He felt guilt at being a survivor of the war and wanted to prove himself in Australia to show that he could make a success of himself.

(*not his real name)

6.4 Models of Effective Practice

Models of effective practice that demonstrate a holistic and coordinated approach with flexibility to draw together and meet educational, training, housing and

income needs are presented below.

The Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC), run at the Collingwood and Preston campuses of Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE (NMIT) is an accredited ESL course for young migrants who have not completed their secondary schooling and need an alternative pathway to VCE. It provides skills for students to move into mainstream education, training or employment. The course targets young people who have had disrupted schooling due to the refugee experience, or young people who have been out of the school system for long periods. The age range for enrolment is 16 to 27, catering to young adults who are ineligible for secondary schooling, or for whom it is not appropriate. The YAMEC course is accessible to migrant and refugee young people, especially those recently arrived with disrupted schooling, as it provides flexibility in entry and exit points, offers ESL concurrently alongside vocational streams, such as multi media, work experience and core subjects of maths, English and Australian studies. The course also provides students with support in practical matters such as Centrelink, housing, health issues and job search. Due to the huge demand on the course, there are long waiting lists and students travel long distances to the two campuses as similar courses are unavailable in other regions.

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues JPET Youth Pathways Program Funded by DETYA , this program aims to assist newly arrived young refugees to participate in existing education, employment and training opportunities. Three youth support workers are based at English Language schools and centres in Noble par, Brunswick (out-reaching to Broadmeadows and Collingwood) and Maribyrnong (outreaching to Tottenham). The workers provide advocacy and support for young refugees to address a range of needs including income establishment, housing and health. The workers liaise with appropriate service providers and educational institutions in the development of clear and relevant pathways for refugee young people. This ensures a smoother transition into mainstream employment , education and training for the majority of clients.

Recommendations

14. That additional youth support workers be placed at English Language Centres and Schools, and in Adult Migrant English Program Services to assist young people into appropriate education, employment and training pathways, whilst having the flexibility to assist young people access secure forms of housing.

15. That youth specific ESL courses, which provide holistic pre-vocational content such as life skills and an introduction to work in Australia, be developed within TAFE.

16. That DETYA afford greater flexibility in funding to allow for the development of appropriate education, employment and training opportunities for young migrant and refugee students at risk of leaving school, or those too old to return to school, within both TAFE and other community settings.

17. That funding be made available in TAFE colleges for support workers to assist refugee and at risk migrant and refugee young people to negotiate the TAFE system, and provide referral to local support services.

18. That the Minister for Education and the Minister for Post Compulsory Education and Training in Victoria guarantee funding for the on-going development and implementation of post ELC/S programs and courses that deal specifically with pre-literacy and/or low literacy, preferably delivered through AMES and TAFE's.

19. That there is greater flexibility for the provision of extra time for young humanitarian to spend in English Language Schools and Centres before attending mainstream schooling.

20. That provision should be made at the state level to allow refugee young people who are over 18 to enrol in pre-VCE levels of Secondary schooling.

21. That students need an intensive bridging program providing high levels of academic ESL tuition and an orientation to the structure and processes of the VCE program through the AMEP funded by DIMA.

7. Employment and Training Opportunities for Young Migrants and Refugees

For refugee and newly arrived young people the unemployment rate is disproportionately high. Surveys specific to the labour force participation of refugees demonstrate that refugees have the highest rate of unemployment among all immigrant groups (Wooden, in Iredale and D'Arcy: 1992).

7.1 Understanding Employment and Training Opportunities of Young Migrants and Refugees

Youth unemployment trends in Victoria have been characterised by decreased Labour force participation, and decreased participation in full-time employment. At present, the official unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 nationally is 27% (ABS Labour Force Australia, 6203.0, Tables 11-12). Young people in the 15-19 and 10-24 age groups who are early school leavers and who are not engaged in employment and training, are at greater risk of long term unemployment (Dussledorf Skills Forum, Australia's young adults: the deepening divide, April 1999).

Immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds suffer marked disadvantage in the areas of unemployment, earnings and occupational attainment. Refugees however, are the most disadvantaged group in the migrant and refugee population. Low participation rates associated with having been a refugee include: a lack of qualifications, limited work experience, poor English language proficiency, and recency of arrival, in addition to "...experience of torture and trauma, lack of preparation prior to emigration and past disruptions to education and working life" (Gregory: 1993).

These issues are further exacerbated by young people's experience of family separation, and general lack of social skills appropriate to the Australian context. Iredale and D'Arcy (1992) concluded in their study on refugee participation in the labour market that the role of government and non-government agencies in the resettlement process of refugee and humanitarian recent arrivals is directly linked to their successful participation in the labour market. Young women in particular are further disadvantaged in the labour market and require a specialised response to employment pathways (Gregory, 1992).

Recent structural changes to the labour market have included an increased casualisation of the young work force, a decrease in entry-level positions and new apprenticeship opportunities for young people. Alongside a massive restructuring of employment assistance services, these changes have meant that disadvantaged young people in general, and migrant and refugee young people in particular, face barriers to the labour market.

There is a concern that migrant and refugee young people are increasingly

marginalised from existing employment and training service systems.

Young people perceive a lack of access to English Language support as their greatest barrier to participation in employment and training services (Gregory: 1993, Winestock: 1988, Green et. al: 1985). This relates not only to numeracy and literacy needs, but also to the use of jargon needed to access education and employment programs. Within the present system there are limited options available for young people seeking English language skills. There is a need to provide on-going concurrent ESL support to students in vocational training course.

A final barrier to young people accessing education, employment and training opportunities is that there is little or inadequate promotion of services in community languages, targeted to young people whilst still at school.

7.2. Issues with Employment and Training System for Young Migrants and Refugees

There have been widespread restructures to employment and training provision to unemployed people over the past two years. In particular, the tendering out of employment assistance services from the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) in 1988 to the Job Network, a collection of mainly private and church based organisations that replaced the CES.

Specific areas of concern with the system for refugees and newly arrived young people include:

- * Job Network providers receive funding from the government on how successful they are at placing and maintaining clients in employment. Consequently, those groups of unemployed people who are harder to place in employment are not seen as "financially viable" and they miss out. Newly arrived and refugee young people who require more intensive support than is provided by even the most comprehensive assistance schemes are not accessing the Job Network. The Job Network system does not provide assistance for these young people. It has been reported that; "Some agencies focus on gaining relatively quick and easy revenue from certain job-seekers, while reducing services for others. Some may be seen once and not followed up. Others don't get a look in" (Editorial, The Australian, August 8, 2000).
- * The benchmarks being raised across program areas in terms of employment and training outcomes are unrealistically high for many migrant and refugee young people. Such benchmarks however, are aligned with the Federal government's policy of "mutual obligation". Whilst unemployed people are obligated to undertake a range of activities under mutual obligation, for migrant and refugee young people there are scant opportunities to assist them to improve their English language skills or to develop indus-

try recognised skills. The "blaming the victim" philosophy behind current Federal employment and training policy is doing nothing to equip migrant and refugee young people for the work force. Currently the labour market is experiencing skills shortages, however there is a lack of industry recognised vocational skills training programs available in the community (Colebach: 1999)

- * The Work for the Dole program is the only program where federal employment expenditure is growing (ACOSS: 1999). The Work for the Dole program does not incorporate accredited training, job-seeking assistance or any other form of employment support. The program focuses on creating a "work ethic" and is a punitive measure within the ideology of mutual obligation. Participants do not gain vocational skills, which will assist them to gain sustainable employment.

- * There is no specific resettlement assistance targeted to Special Humanitarian and refugee youth in relation to employment and training needs. The Federally funded Job Placement Employment and Training Program (JPET) specifically targets homeless and disadvantaged young people, with a specific category for refugee young people. However, even these programs targets have increased over the past year in a manner, which can exclude access to those young people who require intensive support, and assistance in negotiating the labour market.

Recommendations

22. That DETYA commit targeted funds for the provision of specialised and intensive job preparation and vocational training specifically for migrant and refugee young people, and the wider migrant and refugee communities.

23. That the mutual obligation concept be meaningfully re-evaluated to include the provision by Centrelink of appropriate community language services and that linguistically appropriate information on mutual obligation be provided to refugee and migrant communities.

24. That current mutual obligation activities are often inappropriate and that the Federal government needs to provide a broader range of pre-vocational activities for young people.

25. That Work for the Dole activities must include accredited training and have a significant ESL language component for young people who live in culturally diverse areas of Victoria.

8. Establishing and Maintaining An Income

The prevention of refugee youth homelessness in Victoria requires the development of comprehensive settlement service solutions, housing market solutions as well as employment market solutions for young people. While a small number of young people will participate in on-arrival educational opportunities, and in some cases, limited labour market programs, few young people will gain success without a regular income and stable accommodation.

8.1 Establishing and Maintaining an Income for Young Migrants and Refugees

It is difficult to clearly identify where the problems of young migrant and refugee homelessness, poverty and disadvantage start and finish due to the complexity of the problem and the interconnectedness of individual issues such as income establishment. WRATH do recommend, however, that the alleviation of young people's relative economic disadvantage will break the cycle of homelessness. Income support provision, and more specifically the issue of establishing and maintaining an income through Centrelink, continues to disadvantage migrant and refugee young people with limited language skills and those who are attempting to negotiate the Australian welfare system.

Diem, 16 years old, from Vietnam

Diem's school welfare teacher referred Diem* to Youth Housing Service for accommodation and support. She was 16 years old and had completed year 10 in her current school. At the time she was living with a friend. Her family problems were considerable. Her father escaped Vietnam since she was 6 years old. He remarried in Australia and had 4 children. Her mother died in a car accident in 1989 in Vietnam. Since then, her grandmother who was living in the same district in Saigon looked after her. She was sponsored by her father and arrived in Australia in 1992.

Diem left home because there was always tension and unhappiness at home, with her stepmother's abusive attitudes and harsh regulation of her life. When she sought out her father for some affection and support, she received the blame for the abuse and further restrictions were placed on her. She was rarely allowed to go out with her friends, was not allowed money of her own, and was generally over-protected and criticised. Her relationship with her stepmother and siblings began to deteriorate and she decided to leave home. Once Diem had left home her family, particularly her stepmother was not prepared to take her back under any circumstances.

Diem first stayed with a friend for about three weeks while looking for more stable accommodation. She was not happy in the house although she realised that she was fortunate to have a roof to live under. Her friend had a lot of

friends, dropping in and staying there, mainly camping out in the lounge room. Some took drugs, she believed. They were noisy and abusive sometimes towards each other. So Diem went out a lot to avoid contact with them. One of her distant relatives helped her to find alternative accommodation, which she shared for 2 months with another friend. She paid \$50 per week, which she could not afford for long. She decided to talk about her problems with her school welfare teacher. In December 1997, her welfare teacher helped contact youth housing service at SICMAA and referred Diem to the service.

Diem's ideal living arrangement was somewhere considered to be - safe, affordable, warm, supportive and with friends of her own choice, preferably students themselves. She said that if you lived with non-students or people who were just fooling around, the atmosphere was a real strain, especially if they were on drugs. Her identified needs included immediate financial difficulty, affordable and secure housing, coping with isolation, fear, mistrust, and uncertainty, social and independent living skills, educational and emotional support.

After discussing the identified needs with her, we decided to provide her with a \$30 food voucher and helped secure a temporary place with a Vietnamese family. She agreed to stay there until we could find SAAP accommodation for her. She paid \$60 per week for board and lodging. This was her most satisfactory arrangement so far, because she had her own room and privacy. She had been learning and sharing the same cooking tasks with the host family, and from time to time they went shopping and purchased their groceries together. Rent was paid fortnightly to the family. We assisted and supported her application for the Youth Allowance at a homeless rate. Diem received \$267.20 per fortnight from the Youth Allowance and a \$20 food voucher from SICMAA if she asked for it occasionally.

Diem felt proud of herself on managing her money fairly well. She believed it is important for her morale to have some savings. She had started putting away between \$10 and \$20 a fortnight with the goal of buying new clothes for the coming school year. To her, it had made a big difference to have \$20 or \$30 food voucher occasionally. Diem moved into SAAP property two weeks before the beginning of her school year 1998. She started year 11. She shared SAAP accommodation with another student who was doing year 12 at another school. She paid \$30 per fortnight for rent because she was under 18 years old. Diem said they were getting on pretty well. They shared the cooking, their household tasks, social and religious activities at the local church and they purchased their groceries together. They often bought their clothes either at the op-shops or at Dandenong market - in fact they preferred op-shops, for they found them interesting.

She felt more confident, safer and had more privacy and good friendship in her current living arrangement. She felt that she could do better at school this year and school was enjoyable. The school's student welfare teacher provided her with additional support in giving her donated second-hand clothing and occasionally donated canned food, toothpaste, brushes, etc. In Diem's opinion, with the school and youth housing service support, the occasional

supplies of food and food voucher, the support and friendship with her co-tenant, she felt more confident and able to live independently and to stay at school.

Until recently, she had a boyfriend, but he left her in December 1998 giving her no specific reason. This hurt and affected her schooling in 1999. Diem left school after she finished the first trimester and moved out to live with her friend's family. It was known that she felt deeply hurt and wanted to cope alone with the things that had hurt her. Diem did not want to talk a lot about her life, but indicated it was a painful experience, and she did not want to relive it. She said that she wanted to forget it and preferred to look to the future.

By May 1999, to my surprise, Diem and her boyfriend dropped in at SICMAA to see the youth worker. She expressed that she wanted to do a reception course at Chisholm TAFE College. The worker helped her get into the course, but she did not complete it because she had been tested pregnant two and a half months after she had started her course. They married in September 1999 and from then on she lived with her husband in her parents-in-law's home. Her relationship with her own family, particularly with her stepmother and sisters has improved. Diem now has a 4-month-old baby boy. Her husband is a full time factory worker and fairly supportive. She has a happy family and a home to live in.

(*not her real name)

An ACOSS analysis of official poverty line figures has revealed that unemployment benefits for singles under 21 are 33% below the Henderson poverty line (ACOSS, Media Release, January 14th 2000) This pushes people into poverty, homelessness and dependence on welfare agencies. The inadequacy of unemployment benefits means that young homeless migrants and refugees are unable to access the private rental market. It is also very difficult to undertake job search activities with the extra associated costs such as travel fares for training or job interviews, and the need to purchase interview clothes or study books.

Young people from refugee backgrounds in particular face an additional financial burden. Many young people send money to relatives who remain in refugee camps overseas, and to support family members in Australia to whom benefits might not be extended ie. spouses under the two year waiting period exemption from income support, or family members seeking political asylum from within Australia.

Gregory's research into refugee young women's experience of labour market services found that these young women "were unlikely to initiate contact or approach mainstream services without referral or the assistance of an advocate." (Gregory: 1993). She also found that there was under utilisation of the Social Security system by young refugee women. Most refugees and newly arrived young people are unaccustomed to using government social services. Due to negative experiences in their countries of origin with government services, these services are often viewed with suspicion and avoided.

8.2 The current system

The following is an overview of the current Income support system through Centrelink. It is not intended to be a definitive guide but gives an outline of payments available to young people and some criteria required for payment. For more details refer to Centrelink Information.

Youth Allowance (YA)

The conditions of eligibility for YA are as follows;

- * Full time students aged 16 - 24 years, or temporarily Incapacitated for study;
 - 16 and 17 year olds must generally be in full time study ;
 - students aged 25 years and over, getting Youth Allowance Immediately before turning 25 AND remaining in the same course.
- * Unemployed under 21 years, looking for work or combining part time study with job search , or undertaking any other approved activity, or temporarily Incapacitated for work.
- * Independent 15 year olds above the school leaving age (eg. homeless) who are in full time study or undertaking a combination of approved activities.
Basic Rates and method of Payment (January 2002)
The YA payment ranges from \$158.80 per fortnight for a single young person with no children, to \$380.10 for a single parent with children.(Refer to Centrelink Guide to Commonwealth payments for details)
- * Special rate for long -term Income support or migrant English students 21 years or over commencing full-time study
- * Young people not considered Independent must meet stringent assessment criteria to be approved for the away from home rate.
- * Payment is generally made to a parent for those under 18 years who are not Independent
- * Work for the dole participants may be entitled to an additional payment of \$20.80 a fortnight
Rent Assistance
- * Rent assistance for singles without children is only paid to those who receive the away from home rate of Youth Allowance
- * Rent assistance is shared where both members of a couple are receiving an allowance or benefit
Parental Income Test
- * A parental Income test applies for young people who are not Independent

The rate reduces if parental income exceeds \$25,150 per annum. The annual income threshold increases for subsequent children (refer to Centrelink's guide to Commonwealth payments)

- * After applying the parental income test, a personal income test is applied. There is an income free area of \$62.00 per fortnight.
Residential qualifications
- * Must be an Australian resident
- * Available to newly arrived migrants after 104 weeks as an Australian resident. People arriving in Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program are eligible on arrival in Australia.
- * Young people on Temporary Protection Visas are eligible for Special Benefit.

Austudy Payment

To qualify for Austudy payment, a person must be undertaking qualifying study and be aged 25 years or over.

Residential qualifications

Same as for Youth Allowance, but may be paid for up to 26 weeks of temporary overseas absence, or longer in certain circumstances.

Rates of payment

Ranges from \$290.10 pf for a single person to \$380.00 pf for a single parent.

No rent assistance is available

Personal Income Test

- * Gross income is assessed
- * The income free area is \$236 per fortnight

A range of other allowances are available under particular payments. Rates and entitlements vary regularly. For updated information contact Centrelink.

8.3 Issues with the System for Young Migrants and Refugees

Issues with the current system include:

- * Young people with language and literacy difficulties lack basic information about their social security rights and responsibilities. They are also least likely to be referred to additional services through Centrelink like, for example, the JET program and rent assistance.
- * Young migrant and refugees are also vulnerable to misinformation (Melbourne City Mission: 1995). Written material such as income support entitlements are presented in English, and the language associated with

income support issues is highly jargonised. There are not enough bi-lingual or adequately trained workers sensitive to cultural needs within the welfare system, and the interpreter service is inadequately promoted and under funded.

- * The Centrelink telephone call centre does not provide information in any other languages and is not used at all by newly arrived young people. Most young refugee and migrant people need assistance filling in forms, reading letters and understanding documents. Migrant and refugee young people are confused about Centrelink procedures and are not provided with adequate explanations of them.
- * The current system provides no "youth-friendly" or accessible space for young people, and the referral process from Centrelink to Job Network Services or other employment services is confusing and often consists simply of providing young people with English language pamphlets. Centrelink staff are so overworked they are often unaware of multicultural community-based services or employment programs to refer young people to.
- * In June 2000, ACOSS revealed that a minimum quota has been set for the number of social security recipients who would be penalised under the Government's Mutual Obligation program (ACOSS, Media Release 28 June, 2000). This quota was part of a formal contract between the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business and Centrelink. Refugee young people as well as other migrant young people who are highly transient and unable to fully understand Centrelink information are particularly discriminated against under this arrangement.
- * Workers with migrant and refugee young people are spending increasing amounts of time advocating on behalf of young people who have breached Centrelink guidelines when they could be spending valuable support time working with young people around additional needs such as accommodation, employment, education and health.
- * People under 30 are more likely to incur Centrelink breaches than any other age group, with people under 25 accounting for 50.6% of all activity test breaches and 57.6% of all administrative breaches. People under 30 account for 71.4 % of all activity test breaches and 76.4% of all administrative breaches.
- * Recent changes in the administration of income support to young people in Australia has 'streamlined' the provision of two separate allowances for students and unemployed young people into a one single payment. Whilst providing a less confusing system for young people to negotiate, it brought with it another set of problems. Specifically, the need for under 18's to either be attending school or be involved in an approved mutual obligation activity. This has created difficulties for migrant and refugee young people. It is very often the case that young people are unaware of their obligations under the social security system until they have left school and by then their options have become even more limited. For example, young people are

expected to sign activity agreements that are written in English often with no interpreter support.

- * Referral processes from Centrelink staff are inadequate and young people feel as if they have no control over the "choices" made for them. In addition, stringent assessment criteria requiring young people's parents or guardians to fill out statutory declarations attesting to their homeless state, along with workers, mean that many legitimate homeless young migrant and refugee people do not access this payment. Concepts of loyalty to family and shame in many cultures mean that many young migrant and refugee people are unwilling to expose family to this process. Additionally, family or guardians are fearful of bureaucratic processes when they have come from countries where government and government agencies are oppressive.

Recommendations

26. That important communications from Centrelink and other government Departments be sent to more than one address for a homeless young person, and clearly marked important in a variety of languages.

27. That Migrant Services Officers are increased within Centrelink, and are responsible for overseeing key areas of strategic development designated to migrant and refugee youth, which include;

- a) influencing policy with regard to staff training on the refugee experience, cross-cultural communication and service delivery to migrant and refugee young people
- b) the recruitment and training of bi-lingual workers and interpreters and the development of information accessible to migrant and refugee young people and families.
- c) liaison with community interest groups and promotion of services available to migrant and refugee communities through these groups (such as rent assistance, the JET scheme).

28. That Centrelink Youth Units are developed in conjunction with community-based services which are sensitive to the needs of migrant and refugee young people and part of the time are outreached to youth services (eg. Youth refuges).

29. That the provision of interpreter services is increased so that migrant and refugee young people and their families are made aware of Centrelink guidelines and services.

9. Conclusion

Newly arrived migrant and refugee young people, if not properly supported, can fall into patterns of chronic homelessness. Often, an early experience of homelessness is precipitated by a family conflict or breakdown, not uncommon during the difficult period of resettlement that newly arrived families must endure. When that initial experience leads to chronic homelessness, escalating patterns of harm create enormous risks for young people themselves and can also ultimately generate huge social and economic costs for the community as a whole.

Young people resettling here as migrants and refugees experience particular kinds of social exclusion and barriers to access, that must be adequately explored and addressed by policy makers across all levels of government if our commitment to settlement, multiculturalism and a 'fair go' are sincere.

Issues of homelessness and cultural diversity must not be separated out in any policy or service context. Instead they must be firmly linked together and examined in relation to the broader issues of poverty, access to employment, education and training assistance for all Victorians. However, access to safe, secure, affordable housing remains central to a young person's ability to resettle successfully in Victoria.

The Federal Government's multicultural policy includes "the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth" (DIMA: 1998). This policy is not reflected in the current approaches of many of the educational, training, employment, and income maintenance services for young people.

The challenge ahead is for the housing sector to work collaboratively with key government and non-government stakeholders across the state and with refugee communities themselves, to develop a coordinated approach that effectively facilitates the more successful settlement of young people entering Victoria under the humanitarian program.

ATTACHMENT 1

The Migration Process for Young People Resettling in Victoria:

Australia administers separate Migration and Humanitarian Programs, which regulate the inflow of people seeking permanent residence in Australia. The government separated the Migration and Humanitarian programs to provide a better balance between Australia's international humanitarian obligations to refugees and the domestic, social economic and environmental goals of Australia, which guide the setting of annual levels. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs administers both programs, reviewing the size and make-up of the various streams on a yearly basis. Young people migrate to Australia in most migration categories.

In the 1999-2000 financial period, the Migration (non-Humanitarian) program consisted of the Skill Stream (35,000 visas), Family Stream (30,500 visas) and the Special Eligibility Stream (2,500 visas). The Humanitarian Program Consisted of the Refugee Stream (4,00 visas), the Special Humanitarian Program (4,250 visas) the Special Assistance Category (1,750), Onshore Humanitarian and Onshore Refugees (2,000 visas).

The Non-Humanitarian stream is designed to target migrants who have skills or outstanding abilities that will contribute to the Australia economy. In 1997-98 there were 4,537 people granted Skilled Stream visas for people migrating into Victoria. The UK, South Africa, China, Hong Kong and India were the top source countries in the same period. The Family Stream consists of the following categories; parents and preferential family, fiances and inter-dependents, spouses and dependent children. No skills or English tests are required for this stream but a relative must sponsor applicants and the sponsor must be financially responsible for the entrant for two years on-arrival. In 1997-8 there were 5,575 visas issues under the family stream for people migrating to Victoria. Children and young people under the age of 26 constituted almost one third of this number. The Special Eligibility migration stream is the smallest in the non-humanitarian stream. It is set-aside for people wishing to reinstate Australian citizenship and residency. Most entrants are from New Zealand (DIMA Settlement Database 1999).

Under the Humanitarian migration program, Refugee Visas are given to people in accordance with the United Nations definition and in some emergency rescue cases. This category of visa is normally given to people who are outside their country of origin and who have suffered or hold a well-founded fear of persecution. The Australian government pays the medical examination and travel costs of refugee entrants and they are eligible for limited on-arrival support and assistance under DIMA's on-Arrival Accommodation program (this is currently 3-6 months). The Special Humanitarian category enables Australia to provide assistance to people who are outside of their country of nationality who have experienced substantial discrimination amounting to gross violations of their human rights and for who resettlement is an appropriate option. Links with Australians are an important eligibility criterion. Applicants must pay their own air-fares and medical costs and some may be eligible for settlement assistance on- arrival,

mostly in terms of information provision and support in accessing mainstream services (DIMA Settlement Database: 1999)

On the 13th of October 1999 the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs announced that unauthorised arrivals to Australia who are successful in their refugee status applications will no longer be given permanent residence but will be given a three year Temporary Protection Visa (Subclass 785) .They will have to apply for refugee status again at the end of these three years. Two classes of refugees have been created with very different entitlements.

ATTACHMENT 2

Housing Support programs and Services

The **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)** is a joint Commonwealth/ State program which funds 1155 non-government organisations and local governments to deliver supported accommodation and related support services to homeless people. SAAP clients include people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless due to a crisis. The SAAP program is innovative in its research and in developing best practice models particularly suited to the diverse needs of homeless people in Australia. Almost 33% of SAAP clients are under 21 years of age. A significant number of young people are from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The **Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP)** is a Commonwealth government program providing capital funding for the purchase of dwellings for people who are homeless or in crisis. Crisis housing purchased by CAP is used to accommodate SAAP clients.

The **Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement** provides the funding basis for public housing across Australia, as well a range of other housing programs. The Commonwealth and States /Territories contribute grants to build or upgrade public housing and for various purposes such as mortgage relief and bond assistance. Public housing stock comprises 6.5% of Australian dwellings (4% in Victoria), however waiting lists are extremely long (approximately 61 000 Victorian households) with long waiting times, for example, an average wait of 2 years in Victoria.

The Commonwealth Government provides **Rent Assistance** through the Department of Social Security to people on low incomes who pay rent in the private rental market. The amount of assistance provided depends on the household make-up and size and is available when rents exceed 20% of the household's income. Rent assistance is also available to people living in nursing homes and caravan parks.

The **Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program** provides funding of \$23.5m annually to 1200 welfare and community organisations so they can assist individuals and families in immediate short-term financial crisis. This program is designed to provide one-off crisis support, rather than on-going assistance. Assistance is most often sought to cope with food, accommodation, electricity and transport/petrol costs.

The **Housing Establishment Fund** is a Victorian Government program providing \$1.7m to 140 emergency housing and SAAP agencies to assist individuals and families with one-off start-up costs such as security, bond, rent in advance and moving expenses. Similar programs exist in other States and Territories.

The **Community housing sector** is run by non-profit agencies mainly funded by State and Commonwealth governments to provide a variety of affordable rental housing in a range of locations with secure tenure. The community sector also promotes tenant participation in housing management so that tenants can maximise control over their own housing.

(Source: Council for Homeless Persons Fact Sheet 1: Homelessness)

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