

## Involving Migrant and Refugee young people in Social and Recreational Activities

### 1. Overview

This CMYI Information Sheet assists those running events and activities for migrant and refugee young people. Many young people face issues such as social isolation, depression, lack of social connection, culture shock, language difficulties and for refugees, recovery from the effects of torture and trauma. Opportunities for newly arrived young people to participate in social and recreation activities with their peers are therefore critically important. It is also critical to be sensitive to these issues when organising activities. Activities that may be suitable for mainstream young people may cause more mental harm for migrant and refugee young people if not sufficiently adapted or modified.

When running activities for this group of young people, some general principles should be applied:

- ❖ Maximise choices available to young people;
- ❖ Create a safe, supportive environment, allow for challenge in a non-threatening way
- ❖ Be as predictable as possible and provide information about what will happen
- ❖ Acknowledge previous skills and experiences – build on knowledge.

### 2. Cultural Awareness

Be aware of the importance of religious events or community activities that young people may prioritise (e.g. church service, Saturday morning language classes, or fasting for Ramadan) when planning for your event. Work around these important events, or better still find ways to integrate your program into the community. e.g. hold a family fun day for Chinese New Year. Contact your local MRC for a list of important cultural festivals and religious practices for people in your area.

### 3. Working with Families and Communities

Young people and their families need to be made aware of the program, how it is run and the benefits of the young person's involvement. The concept of recreation activity may be quite foreign to some families while others will be very supportive of the young person's involvement. Strategies for involving family and community include:

- ❖ Work with bi-cultural community workers from the same communities who can provide cultural support and role modelling, as well as build trusting relationships with families;
- ❖ Translate information to distribute to young people and parents/guardians.
- ❖ Call families (with interpreters where needed) and talk to them about the program;
- ❖ Hold a community meeting using interpreters to discuss your proposal. To maximise success go to established groups;
- ❖ Invite family members and community leaders to see the program first hand;
- ❖ Promote the program and recruit young people through schools, English Language Centres, ethnic community organisations, and Migrant Resource Centres;
- ❖ Informed consent is essential. Provide first language information to families Access generic translated parent consent forms for activities via the CMYI website;
- ❖ Given many families seek greater connection with one another, try running a family holiday program that has activities for young people of different ages as well as family members;
- ❖ Practical support from families may be minimal. Study is often a priority. Families also struggle to learn a new language, seek employment, and look after young children.

### 4. Cost

The financial cost of your activity may prevent newly arrived young people from participating. Strategies to avoid this include:

- ❖ Make activities free or less than \$5.00;
- ❖ Select low cost activities that young people and their families may access themselves in the future;
- ❖ Where possible, make exceptions for young people who are enthusiastic and committed but who cannot afford to pay;
- ❖ To reduce costs, form partnerships with agencies offering in-kind or financial support.

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**Setting the Agenda on Multicultural Youth Issues**

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### 5. Transport

Transport to the activity can be a barrier as young people may either be unfamiliar with the transport system or families may have only one car to accommodate the whole family.

- ❖ Try to provide transport or meet at a local point, close to public transport and familiar to the young person (such as their school or the railway station);
- ❖ Make sure activities are finished before dark so that young people can get home safely. This is especially important for young women who may not be able to be seen out alone after dark.

### 6. Choice of Activities

Activities need to be non-threatening. Some newly arrived young people may not have developed the knowledge or the skills to enable them to participate in certain activities. Ensure an instructor is provided for young people that may need assistance. Activities should be culturally and religiously appropriate. Try to find a way to accommodate all participants. It is often not hard to think of ways to adapt your activity so everyone can take part.

1. **Mixing Genders:** Some cultures do not allow boys and girls to participate together. Asking young women and men to hold hands for example can be inappropriate. Split the group or run separate girls and boys activities.
2. **Clothing:** Some cultures have more strict dress codes. Families may feel comfortable with young people participating as long as they can maintain cultural dress codes. Simply ask about what is OK. If an activity requires special equipment or clothing make sure that you can provide it, or let people know what is required well in advance.
3. **Emotional Safety:** Games and activities considered engaging and fun that are commonly used by youth services for Australian born young people may need to be adapted for more recently arrived young people:
  - ❖ Activities that may lead to a feeling of loss of control e.g. blindfolding;
  - ❖ Surprises and sudden change may trigger traumatic memories;
  - ❖ Activities where young people's personal space is challenged, and where there is physical touching e.g. asking people to carry each other;
  - ❖ High challenge activities with little support where young people are asked to take sudden physical or personal risks
  - ❖ Revealing intimate details about themselves and their bodies;
  - ❖ Physical games that may make people feel very uncomfortable or ashamed.

### 7. Communication

- ❖ Don't presume that everyone has a good level of knowledge about the activity. Concepts such as 'swimming between the flags' could be totally unfamiliar to a newly arrived young person;
- ❖ Check about the level of English that is spoken and understood by the group. Ask for ideas from participants about the meaning of key terms and concepts (in a non-testing or competitive way);
- ❖ Encourage questions and requests for help.
- ❖ Use visual aids, demonstrations, and body language to help communicate your message;
- ❖ Throughout the session, be aware of the type of language you are using and keep it as simple as possible. Even Australian jargon such as "give it go", could confuse a young person who is more recently arrived.
- ❖ Try not to "dumb down" your language by speaking in broken English, in an accent or shouting.