

**REPORT FROM CMYI's STATEWIDE MULTICULTURAL YOUTH ISSUES
NETWORK (SMYIN) MEETING**

**A Code of Ethical Practice for youth workers in Victoria:
How will this impact on our work with young people from
refugee and migrant backgrounds?**

Thursday 28th June 2007

Overview

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues' (CMYI) second Statewide Multicultural Youth Issues Network (SMYIN) Meeting of 2007 provided an opportunity for those working in the multicultural youth sector to discuss the introduction of a Code of Ethical Practice for youth workers in Victoria.

Earlier this year, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria released a draft Code (www.yacvic.org.au), and discussions held at the recent National Youth Conference (Are we there yet?) indicate that Victoria may follow the lead of states such as Western Australia in introducing a Code of Ethical Practice.

"A Code will provide workers and agencies with a statement of both ethical principals, workers boundaries and practices giving us a guide that outlines a set of values to inform our professional practice" (Child Safety Commissioner October 2006)

This SMYIN Meeting provided an opportunity for those working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to provide input into this draft Code, raise any concerns and find out more about how the Code will be developed and implemented. Forum participants were asked to consider:

- What will a Code mean for those working cross culturally; and does the draft Code address our cross cultural practices?
- How are young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds described in the youth workers Code of Ethics?

The SMYIN meeting, held at CO.AS.IT (189 Faraday Street, Carlton), was attended by 39 representatives from organisations ranging from local, state and federal government, multicultural and community organisations, police, sports, higher education, community legal and performing arts.

Speakers

Carmel Guerra

Director, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues

Carmel Guerra opened the forum with a preamble to why it is important that those working in the multicultural youth sector are involved in the development of a Code

of Ethical Practice. The SMYIN meeting was an opportunity to share information, raise awareness and encourage discussion.

Carmel asked participants who had read the draft Code, and only a very few participants raised their hand. She encouraged workers to contribute after today, and engage with debate so the Code represents and reflects issues pertinent to our work.

To get a sense of who was at the forum, Carmel asked participants to introduce themselves and say whether or not they were youth work trained. Of the 29 people who were in the room at the time, 15 had youth work training and 14 had other kinds of qualifications (social work, community development, psychology, arts, etc)

Bernie Geary

Child Safety Commissioner

Bernie Geary, Victoria's Child Safety Commissioner, spoke about the history behind the development of the Code of Ethical Practice. Bernie talked about his own experiences starting out in the youth work field; how he started out as a youth outreach worker (by accident) and thought of it as a 'gig', until realising the importance of his work and its impact on young people's lives.

Speaking about why a Code of Ethical Practice is important, Bernie talked about the poor position youth work is in and how it could be strengthened. A Code could support the sensitive employment of youth workers and support workers to know where they stand by referring to a body of knowledge that underpins youth work practice.

Jen Rose

Policy Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)

Jen Rose provided an overview of the process YACVic has so far undergone in the development of the draft Code. YACVic is taking the lead in the development of the Code of Ethical Practice and has established a working group to steer the process. To date, YACVic has hosted focus groups, consulted with the Indigenous community organisation's policy network, and released the Code for broad public consultation via a submission process. YACVic plan to hold consultations with young people, although this is in the planning stage at the moment. The SMYIN meeting represents part of this consultation process and is an opportunity for multicultural youth workers to feed in.

WHAT'S IN THE CODE?

- Human Rights framework – Human Rights should underpin the work of youth workers as human rights provide guidance about how we treat people. (e.g. CROC Article 1, Article 3)
- Definition of youth work, young people and the youth sector
- Discussion on values
 - The young person is the primary consideration
 - Young people are seen in their social context
 - Youth work is holistic and takes into account the whole person
 - Ensuring, enabling, empowering
- Principles of youth work – recognition of indigenous peoples, primary consideration, social environment, equity, empowerment, duty of care, corruption, transparency, confidentiality, cooperation/collaboration, knowledge, self-awareness, boundaries, self-care, integrity, ethical awareness, social justice, anti-oppressive practice, participation UN CROC, UN Convention Human Rights, Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATION

- Overall support for a human rights framework, however concerns raised around the strengths of this;
- Definitions – additions suggested such as case management, under 12s etc;
- Comment received on the principles – that there could be specific emphasis on the experiences of newly arrived young people and CLD young people;
- Inclusion of 'respect' as a principle;
- Further information would be valuable (e.g. info for application in the workplace) – not necessarily user friendly.

Jen also acknowledged YACWA and the United Kingdom National Youth Agency for using their codes as basis for draft; as well as Tim Corney & Lauren Hoiles for drafting the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice.

Floor/Panel discussion

AA	Abdi Aden, Youth Co-ordinator, City of Whittlesea
BG	Bernie Geary, Child Safety Commissioner
CC	Craig Campbell, Programs Manager, Salvation Army Brunswick Youth Services
CG	Carmel Guerra, Director, CMYI
DA	Diana Amato, Co-ordinator – Community & Sector Development, CMYI
HS	Heather Stewart, Lecturer, Youth Studies, Australian Catholic University
JR	Jen Rose, Policy Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
KM	Khalid Mohamed, YouthLinx Worker, Good Shepherd
LD	Lindi Dietzel, Indigenous Youth Employment, Diversitat
NB	Nancy Badr, Youth Services Team Leader, South Eastern Region MRC
NP	Natalia Pereira, Multicultural Youth Worker, City of Whitehorse
RI	Rosemarie Iera, Training Co-ordinator, CMYI
RT	Rod Tresise, Case Manager, DHS Refugee Minor Program
ST	Simon Tengende, Founder, Skinny Twin Theatre Troupe
TC	Tim Corney, Centre for Post Compulsory Education, University of Melbourne
ZB	Zara Bautista, Multicultural Youth Worker, CMYI

CC	Who writes code? If professionals write the code, how are young people's perspectives taken into consideration – also ties with connectedness. If professionals write it, they will filter their values/issues through this. Need to make sure we are serious about consulting with young people.
----	---

TC	Code is not for youth workers, but for people who work with young people
----	--

HS	My concern is the mechanism of introducing the Code, and what it will mean for practice, so we feel supported as workers and can use it as guideline for making best decisions.
----	---

TC	I have been involved in debates over Code for a long time. Interested in what it means as a profession. Safety of young people is key at moment (with introduction of the Child Safety Commissioner, etc) - defining work and sector. Role of training in TAFE/Uni in sector (i.e. we have Certificates/Degrees). We have these training packages, so a Code can compliment this and how youth workers are trained so there is some uniformity
----	--

NB	There is a difference between mainstream youth workers and multicultural youth workers. I am interested in how a code will take into consideration CLD youth work.
----	--

CG	WHY DO WE NEED A CODE?
NB	I think it would be beneficial, something to go back to, especially for youth workers who are working on their own (e.g. in large organisations, or with limited support). My concern is: how will it effect us as multicultural youth workers? Reading the code, some areas overlap, but some areas need to be made clear in the code (e.g. complexities of bicultural youth work). Overall, though, I think the Code is positive.
HS	How many of you are managed by youth work trained supervisors/managers? I think we need to do an audit of where youth workers are located (e.g. Police youth worker, with supervisor with no training/content). My sense is that CLD youth workers are in larger organisations who may not be properly supported, etc.
ST	Who is custodian of the Code? How will it bring people together?
ZB	Will it limit some of the diverse natures of the role [for multicultural youth work]?
KM	This is not the first time I've heard about a Code. Studying youth work, this issue came up: do we have something that binds us? I am optimistic that youth workers can have their own association that can represent them. i.e. youth workers are some of the lowest paid workers; it would be good to have a body to represent us.
TC	You can't have laws without law-makers. A Code, if it's just self-regulatory, it doesn't carry much weight. Logical next step is that a professional association will follow. A general definition of 'profession' is that there is a specific body of knowledge that sits underneath it. Youth work can claim a body of knowledge – it's not social work, or welfare. Primary focus is young person. So this is what the Code is about.
HS	We have more than that (focus on young person) – body of knowledge is around young people in transition, social justice/participation. e.g. Outreach model, drop in centre, knowledge of adolescent development, etc.
TC	Code brings together a body of knowledge, so workers can sign up to it or not – yes, that's what I do, or no, this is not what I do. It should be a catalyst for people to congregate around.
NP	I am social work trained, but I work with young people. A concern I have is how to fit in with both the social work/youth work code of ethic. I'm also a multicultural youth worker, as well as a bicultural youth worker. My main concern is that there isn't a focus on multicultural/CLD youth work, and we tend to get overlooked. It isn't reflected as well as I would like it to be – we are specialist workers within a specialist field. How does the Code respect this?
TC	This is why we are here. We want to make the document stronger (e.g. that's why Indigenous community participation was so important). We want CLD community/youth workers to respond.
JR	We welcome any feedback into how we can incorporate this. E.g. should it be in the definition, or for principles? There are a range of ways we could do this...
HS	This is an issue that has been raised. For example, in multicultural youth work, is your primary client the young person, or is it the young person and their family? CLD youth workers often say, the only way to do my job is <i>with</i> families and communities. CLD youth worker needs to work in different context. Our tradition of youth work is still Anglo, and it helps to look at this

	tension.
NB	I agree. This is a primary thing. We don't just work with the young person, but sometimes siblings or families. From a bicultural point of view, it would be rude for me <u>not</u> to go to a party [issue with boundaries]. There are many layers of complexities for CLD youth workers. i.e. for youth workers working within their own community [bicultural/bilingual], and for those that are not working in their community.
HS	Problem is how to avoid boxing people, e.g. do we want to go down the path where the Code has to have a section on GLBT young people, indigenous, rural, refugee, migrant, etc., or should we ensure it is general/ encompassing and recognises diversity? An anti-oppressive framework is how this has been addressed in the Code.
RI	In terms of principles, I support recognition of family and the social context of young people. We need to emphasise <i>young person and their social context</i> , language should be not just focus on young person.
TC	We're not working with young people as individuals, but within their social context. We have addressed this right after the definition. If I can talk about connectedness, the principles can be put into two categories – overarching principles, then practice principles, so community connectedness is incorporated in this.
RI	Generic interpretation of diversity, why only mention Indigenous, but not other sub-groups?
HS	Indigenous community is unique. Even CLD communities coming to Australia are part of the 'new' (e.g. Greek), whereas Indigenous community were here first. This is an analysis/recognition of power. We need anti-oppressive framework.
BG	What we need to face with Indigenous community is that we have failed over and over again. So it is a generational thing.
JR	As a Human Rights based framework, we wanted to recognise the unique position of indigenous community.
TC	It is a limited definition, which is why we used a Rights-based framework, which allows for diversity.
AA	I work with diverse young people (Indigenous, CLD, Anglo, etc), I use the Western way of working with young people, e.g. how to give handshake, how will the Code take into consideration cultural practices?
HS	Boundaries are a difficult issue. This is a tension. We need to draw on community development approach. We need a dialogue about this, and University curriculum needs to take this into consideration. FOCUS is on dialogue.
CG	Need flexibility, Code shouldn't just be a list of 'no-no's'
TC	This is important discussion, need CLD sector to read the Code and Principles, and give us feedback about whether this is reflective of practice?
DA	Reading the Code, the language is abstract. What does 'social context' mean? Need more detail, e.g. say it is about young person in the context of family, community, broader Australian community.
RT	Guiding principles should be simple, e.g. the Red Cross have seven overarching principles. Working for them, there is constant discussion about these principles, which is what keeps the organisation dynamic. It's the

	discussion that is so important. Generic is more important than detailed.
NB	Key is flexibility.
TC	Feedback we have received suggests that we need to make Code more simple/accessible. We have 7 key principles, so we need to work on how we make these key principles work. The idea is to develop a basic tool/code, then this will be further developed into secondary documents/resources, e.g. 'what does this mean in practice?' (how to use the Code)
KM	Is the aim of the Code to protect the young person, worker, or to make connections between the two? Working within a cultural community, you can follow a Code but you need to stretch the boundaries sometimes to work effectively.
LD	I am indigenous first, and then I am a worker. i.e. if a young person comes to me, I respond to them as a member of community, then as a youth worker.
ST	I don't think multicultural young people should be lumped with Anglo/mainstream. We should recognise the power differential. If we consider Anglo another 'migrant' group, then Anglo/mainstream should defer to Indigenous... but this isn't the case. Also, it should be seen as a tripartite code (guardians, youth, workers), how can it serve all of us?
AA	Depends on organisation you work with. You can say 'have these principles/ boundaries and stretch them', but if you do that and you work with an organisation that is very rigid in terms of structure, it's the worker that gets into trouble.

Group discussion

Question re: Human rights framework. Do you agree with using a Human Rights framework as a base for a Code of Ethical Practice? If not, is there an alternative basis for a Code of Ethical Practice that you would suggest?

- It is foundational principle, and gives foundation for good youth work.
- Maybe remove UN Human Rights, but draw attention to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights.
- This might remove contention at different levels, if it is the Victorian Human Rights Charter as basis.
- I think it's good to include Refugee Young People Good Practice Principles guide. The GPP was developed over so long. Can we incorporate the GPP guide into the Code? So we recognise the work that went into this.
- It gives multicultural youth workers a good reference point [to refer to GPP].
- I think the GPP principles are incorporated into the Code – they are general.
- Yes, but GPP has the wording and knowledge of the sector.
- What about the Service in a Culturally Diverse Community Charter – this also guides our work. These frameworks we also use. How are they incorporated into Code? Access and equity policy is important.
- The GPP has training attached to it. Would be good to have an aligned document, so they incorporate these sorts of practices so that all youth workers can access this/are aware of this.

Question re: Primary Consideration. What are your thoughts on the following section:

Consistent with the CROC Article 1, the "primary consideration" and constituency of the youth worker is the young people with whom they engage. Where conflicts exist between obligations to one young person and another, it is resolved in ways that avoid harm and continue to support the person least advantaged by the resolution (YACWA:4). (Please note: the term 'primary consideration' is not universally accepted. See the following alternatives – Primary client, partner, person, relationship, stakeholder, agent. Also note the CYP are using the term 'active partner' and/or 'Independent stakeholder' to convey similar notions).

Commentary

Youth workers often have a lot of people they answer to: funding bodies, peers, management committees, parents, communities. This clause, which we believe is at the core of the youth work relationship, keeps us in mind of who we are there for. Lots of people working in the field don't have the young person as their primary consideration, but see them as one of many stakeholders. That's OK: it just means they are not a youth worker. But young people need to know that there is at least one player in the game that they can rely on to uphold their interests (YACWA:4).

- Struggle with commentary side of it.
- Don't understand the conflict between two young people section – too open to interpretation, this wording is too confusing.
- I think it's hard when you're running a program that includes youth/parents/leaders/etc, but I guess funding bodies are restrictive anyway.
- Code has focus on partnership approach, so young people are partners in youth work.
- Concern about sentence – "That's okay, but they are not a youth worker" – We **have to** take into consideration different stakeholders in working effectively with CLD young people.
- You have to be flexible.
- You need to have young people as central to role, but doesn't mean the whole organisation needs to focus on young people.
- What we're trying to say is that there are lots of people who work with young people, but they have other stakeholders/considerations. We're not saying you can't work with family, but that you work with family with the primary goal of supporting the young person.
- Is it important to define youth worker in this code?
- Code is an advocacy tool as well – this is what we do and why.
- This is key for those working in bigger organisation where they might not understand/support youth workers effectively.
- If you are a worker with Anglo young people, this section would be clear. But this is not so clear for multicultural youth worker where this role is different.
- It is important that this section **is** included, and that the young person is the focus.
- It clearly defines what a youth worker's role is, and makes boundaries a bit more clear (this is what my focus is)
- Last sentence – "young people need to know that there is at least one..." – this is important for young people to know. This needs to be brought forward a bit more. Sometimes young people think: Can youth workers really advocate on my behalf? So has dual role for young person/worker
- Remove "In the game" wording. Also "where conflict exists" needs clarifying. E.g. if you are working with one young person, there is no conflict. But if you're working with a group, then there may be conflict.