



## Working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities.

This Good Practice Guide was developed in collaboration with Carers Victoria and the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria. CMY would like to acknowledge the work and expertise of these organisations in developing this guide.<sup>1</sup>

### About CMY

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. Our purpose is to ensure that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have every opportunity to succeed in Australia. Through a combination of specialist support services, training and consultancy, knowledge sharing and advocacy, we are working to remove the barriers young people face as they make Australia their home.

Our values resonate strongly with a multicultural vision for all. They are our beliefs in:

- Diversity as a cornerstone of Australia's success;
- Respect for everyone's human rights as essential for a fair and equal society; and
- Everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully.

### Purpose

This *Good Practice Guide* explores themes relevant to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities. It discusses strategies to enhance the accessibility and responsiveness of services for supporting good practice when working with this group of young people.

This guide may best be read in conjunction with:

- Carers Victoria, CMY and ECCV's Discussion Paper '*Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What Do We Know?*'
- CMY Information sheet: *Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds*;
- CMY Good Practice Guides: *Culturally Competent Youth Work*, *Youth Work in the Family Context*, *Youth Work with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds* and;

- CMY's *Inclusive Local Government - A guide to good practice strategies for engaging young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in local government services*.

### Background

Young people with caring responsibilities are young people up to the age of 25 years, who provide informal or unpaid assistance to a family member who has a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, is aged, or has a substance abuse problem.<sup>2</sup>

Many young people with caring responsibilities provide a variety of caring duties for family and loved ones, including property maintenance, household management, interpreting English, intimate care tasks, and assisting with the social, emotional, medical and mobility needs of the care recipient(s).<sup>3</sup> Although challenging, many young people report the positive aspects of providing care. While young people with caring responsibilities often experience a sense of fulfilment in their caring duties, these responsibilities may also impact on young people's ability to maintain study, paid work and social relationships. The financial implications of young people fulfilling a caring role for a parent or guardian can result in the continuation of the poverty cycle.<sup>4</sup> Many young people with caring responsibilities are also unaware of the support available to them, or that it is acceptable to seek support.

### Adolescence

For many young people, adolescence can be a challenging time. During this time, they are developing their own identities while negotiating changes in relations with parents and other spheres of their lives. Many young people are also juggling the demands of study, paid or volunteer work, and social relationships. Young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds may also be learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, settling in to a new school and making new friends. These challenges of adolescence can add an additional dimension of complexity for young people with caring responsibilities.

<sup>1</sup> This practice guide will consistently use the terminology of 'young people with caring responsibilities' because evidence suggests that many people do not identify with the label of 'young carer'.

<sup>2</sup> Carers Victoria Inc. (Carers Victoria), Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) & Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), 2011, *Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What Do We Know?* Melbourne: Carers Victoria, CMY & ECCV. [http://eccv.org.au/library/Refugee\\_and\\_Migrant\\_Young\\_People\\_with\\_Caring\\_Responsibilities.pdf](http://eccv.org.au/library/Refugee_and_Migrant_Young_People_with_Caring_Responsibilities.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Carers Vic, CMY and ECCV, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Caring roles and the refugee and migration experience

Refugee and migrant young people are likely to be over-represented in terms of caring responsibilities, due to the higher prevalence of disability and illness in refugee and migrant families.<sup>5</sup> Despite their over-representation many young people with caring responsibilities from refugee and migrant families remain 'hidden'<sup>6</sup> from the community for a variety of reasons. These include community perceptions of illness and disability, lack of knowledge and engagement with services and supports, and the fear of unwanted intervention.

Newly arrived young people may also be negotiating their own settlement issues. Some specific challenges they may face include:

- Negotiating identity in a new cultural context;
- Learning a new language;
- Transitioning from an ESL school to primary or secondary school; and
- Increased significant responsibilities in their family and community.

For young people from refugee backgrounds these issues can be further compounded by:

- Disrupted family roles and relationships;
- Disrupted or very limited schooling;
- Separation from friends and family; and
- The possible effects of torture and trauma. Trauma can result in anxiety; sadness; a sense of having no control over your life; fear and lack of trust.

For more information on the refugee experience see *Good Practice Guide: Youth Work with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds*.

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## Working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities

Services may experience particular barriers in trying to access, engage with, and support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities and their families. Some of these barriers may include the following:

- Young people may not identify as carers, for a variety of reasons. Many may 'normalise' the experience and not see their caring responsibilities as anything out of the ordinary. They may think for example, "I've always done this. This is what daughters do". Understandings and expectations about caring will vary according to each individual family and their cultural backgrounds.
- The person with a disability or health condition may not recognise or accept that they need, or are receiving care.

- The young person may find it difficult to say they are finding their caring responsibilities hard. They may worry about being seen as a failure.
- There may be reluctance to seek or accept support due to a sense of shame in disclosing the illness or disability of a family member.
- Young people and families from refugee backgrounds in particular, may have experienced significant negative interventions from other governments and 'authorities'. They may be anxious about further contact with services.

## Practice response

The practical tips given below are to guide both organisational change and also individual workers.

## Some hints for organisations and managers

Organisations working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities may find that most of the work undertaken will revolve around knowledge building and advocacy. An appropriate organisational response may include the following:

- Undertake a cultural diversity audit, incorporating the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities. For an example, refer to CMY's Inclusive Local Government audit tool available here: <http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/179/2/InclusiveLocalGovernmentWEB.pdf>

Measures outlined include:

1. Planning and evaluation;
2. Information gathering and consultation;
3. Policy development and implementation;
4. Program development and service delivery;
5. Communication;
6. Staffing and human resources; and
7. Reviewing and evaluation.

- All organisations that work with young people should implement policies that will help to establish whether young people have caring responsibilities.
- Develop and support practices that are inclusive of families. Services should examine any assumptions surrounding the young person's role in the family by adopting a whole-of-family approach.
- Support outreach as a method of working. Offering flexible times and home visits may make it easier for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities to engage with the service your organisation is offering.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006, *Census of Population and Housing Australia*, ABS, Canberra.

<sup>6</sup> Carers Vic, CMY and ECCV, 2011.

- Identify one lead worker to co-ordinate support and liaise between organisations. Dealing with different workers regularly may present difficulties for the young person and their family.
- Develop community awareness around issues affecting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities. This could include involving community elders and/or religious leaders. The goal is to build knowledge and encourage community involvement by reducing stigma and barriers.

### Some hints for workers

Tips for working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who have caring responsibilities include:

- An effective practice response relies on your ability to communicate with the young person and their family. Consider whether this may best be achieved by including an interpreter.
- Explain what you do in simple language - avoid jargon and acronyms. Young people and their families might not be familiar with youth workers or community-based services.
- Build trust and connection; young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may be experiencing an array of settlement issues and may be wary of interventions from 'authorities'.
- Adopt a position of not knowing and curiosity. Be open and non-judgemental, allowing the young person to teach you about their family's particular expectations of the caring role. Be curious about cultural understandings and do not assume that all individuals or generations in the family have the same views.
- Don't direct your questions towards identifying and labelling young people as 'young carers', when seeking to establish whether young people have caring responsibilities. This is a label many young people and their communities may find unhelpful. Disclosure isn't the goal in itself. The goal should be to understand what is happening for the young person and their family and what supports would make things better.
- Listen to the young person and believe what they say, as they may offer insights into the most effective way to support them and their families. Ask them about:
  1. Their family situation, and how it impacts on their day to day life;
  2. The services/support, if any, the person they are caring for is receiving, including from other family members, friends, their local community or other services; and
  3. Their priorities and what would help, and do some joint problem solving.
- Seek support from your organisation to continuously improve your cultural and carer awareness. Take advantage of supervision sessions to problem-solve, address challenges and receive support.

- Be flexible and responsive. Consider where and when the young person would like to meet with you, as they are likely to find it difficult to attend appointments. Think widely about a variety and range of supports that may assist the young person, for example, help with school work, cleaning duties, arranging respite or someone to care for the family member.

- Be clear on what you can and cannot offer; the limitations and options for your work with the family.

- Be aware of the other services and support available and discuss the possibility of further support for the person needing care. For example Centrelink, Commonwealth Respite and Care Link Centres, and carer specific services. Explore how the young person and other family members would feel about this and if appropriate, make an active or supported referral to other relevant services. Sometimes this can be the most effective way to help the young person to reduce the extent and impacts of their caring responsibilities.

- Whilst it may be tempting to refer young people with caring responsibilities on, remember that a lot can be achieved by using your listening, engaging, problem-solving and supporting skills with the young person.

- Apply a strengths based approach that values the experiences and skills of the young person from a refugee or migrant background with caring responsibilities. Do not make assumptions about how they might think or feel about their caring role. Many young people feel rewarded by the experience of caring for a family member and the caring relationship should be valued for the positives it brings to the lives of the carer and the cared for persons in the family. Young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities will often be very resilient and have highly developed skill-sets. At the same time, workers should understand and be alert to the possible negative impacts and risks associated with young people providing care.

- Develop practice that is inclusive of families, be they parents, siblings or extended relations; this is particularly relevant when working with young people providing care. See CMY's *Good Practice Guides: Culturally Competent Youth Work and Youth Work in the Family Context*.

- Adopt a broader community development approach. Work with communities to raise awareness about caring in families and explore how young people and families can be better supported.

## OTHER RESOURCES

CMY Information sheet: *Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds*

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/288/4/Refugeeyoungpeopleandresettlement-NOV2011.pdf>

CMY Good Practice Guides: *Culturally Competent Youth Work*

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/1764/1/CulturallyCompetentYouthWork.pdf>

*Youth Work with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Background*

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/2071/1/YouthWorkwithYoungPeoplefromRefugee-andMigrantBackgrounds.pdf>

*Inclusive Local Government - A guide to good practice strategies for emerging young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in local government services*

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/179/2/InclusiveLocalGovernmentWEB.pdf>

*Youth Work in the Family Context*

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/1766/1/YouthWorkintheFamilyContext.pdf>

Carers Victoria Inc. (Carers Victoria), Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) & Ethnic

Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), 2011, *Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What Do We Know?* Melbourne: Carers Victoria, CMY & ECCV.

[http://eccv.org.au/library/Refugee\\_and\\_Migrant\\_Young\\_People\\_with\\_Caring\\_Responsibilities.pdf](http://eccv.org.au/library/Refugee_and_Migrant_Young_People_with_Caring_Responsibilities.pdf)

