

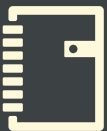
# Settling or Surviving?

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UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG ADULTS

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AGED 18 – 25 YEARS



A CMY  
POLICY  
PAPER



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***“They’re trying to settle - but settling is difficult as they’re not able to prioritise their needs.”***

– Multicultural youth worker, CMY, North West region

## Executive Summary

Increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people, particularly young men, have been granted refugee status in Australia over the past several years through the onshore humanitarian program. Those under the age of 18, referred to as Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs), receive targeted support as a result of their status as minors. However there is growing recognition that once such young people turn 18 years old, and are therefore no longer eligible for these specialist services, they still often require intensive support.

Similarly, young people who arrive in Australia at 18 years of age or older without immediate family members are not eligible for the increased levels of support that UHMs are entitled to – and yet can still be highly vulnerable. Those 18 years and over require services that are sensitive to their needs both as young people at a unique stage of adolescent development without their families present, and as refugees from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This paper was developed in response to a number of concerns being raised by service providers who were working with this group of newly arrived young people, particularly young men who had arrived onshore by boat and later been granted refugee status. It seeks to explore the specific issues facing 18 – 25 year old unaccompanied young adults (UYAs) who arrive onshore, and how their overall settlement can be better supported. It outlines key issues for consideration, guided by the Australian Government’s settlement policy, and highlights positive strategies and recommendations.

Although the young people in discussion have all had experiences of seeking asylum in Australia, this paper focuses specifically on those that have received permanent residency. This is due to the fact that this paper uses the lens of settlement to explore both the range of issues facing this group of young people, and ways forward in terms of developing more effective support structures. Throughout consultations, however, services continually raised the needs of young asylum seekers in community detention or on bridging visas, in addition to highlighting the needs of UHMs. This reinforces that there is much work to be done around the issues of both young asylum seekers, UHMs and UYAs in the community. Given the changeable nature of policy in this area, there is a strong need to continue to pay attention to the needs and wellbeing of these vulnerable groups of young people.

**This paper was written before the federal election in September 2013 and does not reflect any subsequent changes to government policy or departments. CMY is planning to report on future policy changes that may affect this group of young people.**

## About CMY

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. We believe diversity is a cornerstone of Australia's success; respect for everyone's human rights is essential for a fair and equal society; and that everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully. Through a combination of specialist support services, training and consultancy, knowledge sharing and advocacy, CMY is working to remove the barriers young people face as they make Australia their home.

## Definitions

### Young person

According to the UN, 'youth' is defined as being between the ages of 15 and 24 years. In Australia, government and non-government organisations frequently broaden this definition to include 12 – 25 year olds. However this paper focuses specifically on those aged between 18 – 25. It is important to recognise that youth is not a universal concept and differs across cultures according to life stages, roles within the family and other social expectations.

### Newly arrived young person

A newly arrived young person is someone who was born overseas and has lived in Australia a relatively short amount of time. According to the Federal Government, someone who is newly arrived has lived in Australia for five years or less. Other definitions vary according to the length of time it is considered to take to settle in Australia (up to 10 years). This paper refers to newly arrived young people using the Federal Government's definition.

### Refugee

According to the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Australia is a signatory, a refugee is a person who:

- Is outside their country of nationality of their usual country of residence; and
- Is unable or unwilling to return or to seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

The UN's definition provides a restrictive definition based on proving a well-founded fear of persecution. Refugees have fled circumstances that have put their lives at risk and have affected their psychological health and well being. They seek new lives in Australia, not out of a free choice, but in order to be protected. They have often experienced torture and trauma, lost family members, spent years in transit countries or in refugee camps, where access to services such as education and health care may be limited. They have often had minimal information about the country in which they are resettling and the customs of that particular society.<sup>1</sup>

### Asylum seeker:

An asylum seeker is someone seeking international protection as a refugee, who is still waiting for their claim to be assessed.<sup>2</sup>

### Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor (UHM):

Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs) are young people who have arrived in Australia under the age of 18, after being settled through the offshore humanitarian program or being granted a protection visa after having arrived in Australia.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the UHMs referred to are those who have received protection visas after arriving in Australia.

### Unaccompanied Young Adult (UYA)

For the purposes of this paper, CMY has adopted the term 'Unaccompanied Young Adult' to refer to young people from refugee backgrounds who are unaccompanied, but are aged between 18 – 25 years. This is to distinguish this group from UHMs, who are under 18 years of age.

1. Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2005, Refugee and CLD Young People: Definitions - Info Sheet No. 11, CMY, Carlton.

2. UNHCR, [http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54](http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54) Accessed 17.5.13.

3. Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), 2012, Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors in Australia: An overview of national support arrangements and key emerging issues, Carlton, p. 5. <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN%20UHM%20Policy%20Paper%20Sept%202012.pdf> Accessed 2.4.13.

## Methodology

CMY conducted an online literature review, and gathered data available through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)'s Settlement Reporting Facility<sup>4</sup> in order to ascertain the numbers and demographics of unaccompanied young people 18 – 25 on 866 visas.

Additionally, CMY conducted two stakeholder consultations in May 2013, in the South East Metropolitan region and Ballarat. Services in the North West were consulted individually, face to face and over the phone due to an inability to find a suitable time for a group consultation.

In early 2013, CMY held a focus group with unaccompanied Afghan young men in the South East region concerning their views towards active citizenship and participation. Some of the information from this consultation also provided key insights from these young people's regarding their settlement in Australia which has also been incorporated into this paper.

Finally, CMY held a state-wide sector forum in June 2013 on the topic of issues facing 18 – 25 year old young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including service gaps and good practice models. Information raised at the forum also informed the findings of this paper.

CMY is grateful for the time and expertise offered by staff from the following organisations, and would like to acknowledge their contribution:

- Foundation House
- South East Local Learning and Employment Network
- AMES - Education and Settlement
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau – Youth Links
- Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT)
- Life Without Barriers
- Ballarat Community Health
- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council
- CMY staff – Refugee Youth Support Program, Reconnect, Ucan2 and BoysSpace

4. This data was accessed online via the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship prior to the Federal Election of September 2013.

## Background

### Young people from refugee backgrounds

According to The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, the 'refugee experience' is defined as: exposure to political, religious or inter-cultural violence persecution or oppression, armed conflict or civil discord that includes the following key elements:

- A state of fearfulness for self and family members,
- Leaving the country at short notice,
- Inability to return to the country of origin, and
- Uncertainty about the possibility of maintaining links with family and home.<sup>5</sup>

Not all young people from refugee backgrounds enter Australia with a humanitarian visa; some seek asylum once they have arrived onshore. These young people have lived in Australia with the uncertainty as to whether they will be allowed to remain here, and if they have arrived by boat, will have experienced forms of detention during this time. Young people arriving onshore and seeking asylum in Australia may have spent time in multiple locations, living with high levels of trauma and uncertainty. They have also been unable to access pre-arrival orientation information unlike those arriving through the offshore program,<sup>6</sup> and may have encountered multiple services by the time they receive their permanent protection visa and enter the mainstream service system. It is important these experiences are taken into account when working with this demographic, given they can play a strong role in their overall wellbeing, mental health and ability to settle well.

In addition to the experiences young people bring with them as a result of the refugee experience, there are a number of settlement challenges they face upon making their new home in Australia. These may include:

- Learning English
- Recommencing school or education
- Finding employment
- Securing stable, appropriate and affordable housing
- Adjusting to unfamiliar systems and a new culture
- Separation from extended family and friends
- Rebuilding new social networks<sup>7</sup>

5. Coventry, L., Guerra, C., Mackenzie, D., & Pinkney, 2002, Wealth of All Nations, Hobart: National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, p.15.

6. Multicultural Youth Action Network (MYAN), 2012.

7. Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2005, Good Practice Principles: Guide for working with refugee young people, Melbourne: Department of Victorian Communities, p. 7.

Many of these issues are common to all refugees resettling in a new country. Yet for young people, they add a layer of complexity and instability to the fundamental transitions that take place during adolescence and young adulthood.<sup>8</sup> In spite of this, young people from refugee backgrounds are extremely resilient and adaptive, and demonstrate a strong drive to succeed and build a new life in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

### **Adolescent development**

Adolescence is marked by significant changes, including substantial physical growth and brain maturation.<sup>10</sup> In fact, “neurodevelopment continues into early adulthood, especially in regions linked to regulation of behaviour and emotion”.<sup>11</sup> These changes are associated with developing self-control and mature judgement, and continue for more than a decade after puberty.<sup>12</sup> Although adolescence differs greatly across cultures and societies,<sup>13</sup> young people are often confronted during this time with challenges relating to:

- Identity formation
- Gaining independence
- Finding their place in the community
- Exploring religious beliefs
- Developing relationships with peers and family
- Determining life goals, and
- Discovering their sexuality.<sup>14</sup>

For young people from refugee backgrounds, these challenges can be further compounded by both their refugee experience and the challenges associated with resettlement in Australia. According to the UNHCR, “the process of identity formation which is part of adolescence may be particularly complex for young people being affected by the overlay of the refugee experience, cultural adjustment and the practical demands of resettlement.”<sup>15</sup> For those who have arrived in Australia unaccompanied, these challenges can be further exacerbated by the absence of the supportive foundations that parents and family provide. This is particularly pertinent given that

adolescent health and wellbeing has been closely associated with maintaining a strong connection to family.<sup>16</sup>

### **Background and changes to the humanitarian program:**

Australia has two avenues for young people to be granted refugee status in Australia. These include the onshore and offshore humanitarian program. Offshore humanitarian entrants are granted humanitarian visas in advance by the Australian Government through UNHCR’s resettlement program. These people are often living in refugee camps or as undocumented migrants in transit countries. Onshore entrants arrive by plane or by boat, and seek asylum upon or after arriving in Australia.

High numbers of young men seek asylum onshore on their own (frequently sent by their families), often with the hope of reuniting with family once granted protection in Australia. In many instances, young men can be the targets of violence in countries of origin or transit, and thus the obvious choice for families to choose to protect. The Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) is the common avenue for humanitarian visa holders to pursue family reunion. However, the increase in numbers of onshore arrivals, tied with the fact that the onshore and offshore humanitarian programs are numerically linked (with a limited number of spaces allocated each year), means that reuniting with family is an impossibility for many. This has resulted in a significant backlog of SHP applications. For example, “in 2011–12, there were only 700 places available for the 20,000 SHP applicants awaiting a decision, most of whom were ‘split family’ applicants.”<sup>17</sup>

Recently the Australian Government increased the annual humanitarian intake from 13,750 to 20,000, in response to the recommendations of the Expert Panel, handed down on 13 August 2012. This is a welcome change. Despite this, many of these places will be allocated to refugees applying outside of Australia and referred to Australia by the UNCHR, which does not address the current strain on the SHP. “Places for family members of persons in Australia continue to remain extremely limited.”<sup>18</sup>

8. Ibid.

9. Couch, J. & Francis, St. Participation for All? Searching for marginalized voices: The case for including refugee young people, *Children Youth and Environments*, 16 (2): 272-290 (p. 279).

10. Patton, G. & Viner, R. 2007, Pubertal transitions in health, *The Lancet*, vol. 369, p. 1130.

11. Ibid, p. 1133.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid, p. 1131.

14. Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2005, *Good Practice Principles: Guide for working with refugee young people*, Melbourne: Department of Victorian Communities, p. 6.

15. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2002, *Refugee Resettlement – An International Handbook to Guide Resettlement and Integration*, p.264.

16. Patton & Viner, p. 1136.

17. Split family applications are prioritised under the SHP, and are only for spouses/ defacto, dependent children, and parents if the proposer is under 18 years of age; DIAC, 2012, *The Special Humanitarian Program*, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/shp-client-info-sheet.pdf>;

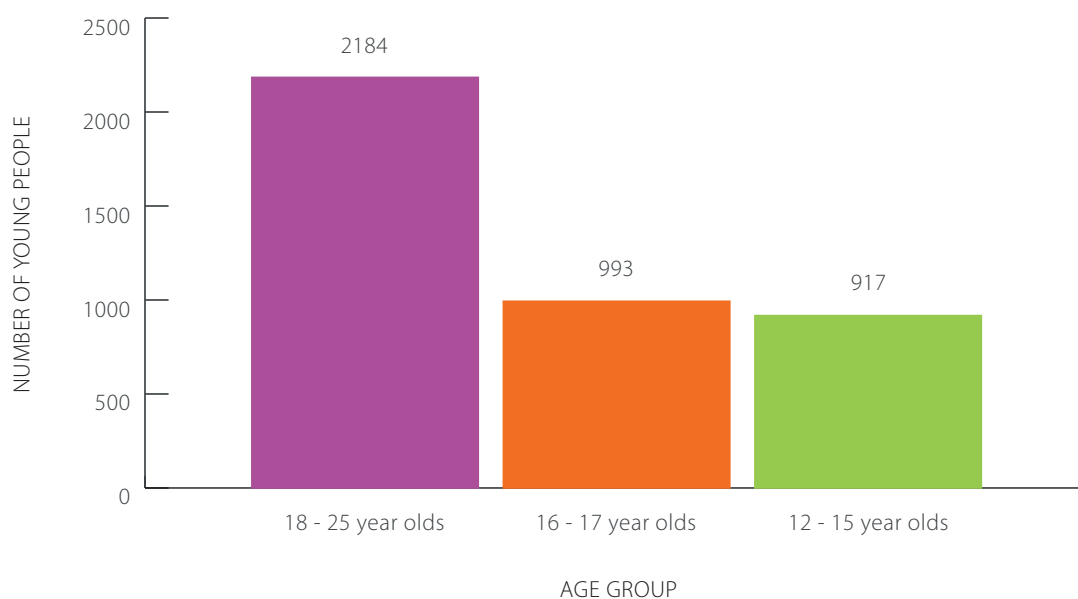
18. DIAC, 2012, *The Special Humanitarian Program*, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/shp-client-info-sheet.pdf>

The Expert Panel report ushered in other changes affecting opportunities for family reunification. After 13 August 2012, refugees including UHMs who arrive by boat are no longer able to apply to bring family members to Australia through the SHP. This means that family reunion is only available through the family stream of the migration program, which is unaffordable for most unaccompanied young people. UHM's who arrived before 13 August 2012 are still able to have their claims for split family reunion assessed, although there are minimal places available through the SHP given the high volumes of applications.

## Demographics and characteristics of unaccompanied young people in Australia

It is difficult to ascertain precisely how many 18 – 25 year old unaccompanied young adults who arrived onshore are currently living in Australia. However, the data that is available helps to build a picture of the characteristics of youth settlement more broadly, and suggests that this is a growing demographic.

Children and young people currently make up just under two thirds of humanitarian entrants in Australia; in 2011-2012, 64.5% of humanitarian entrants were under the age of 30.<sup>19</sup> Those aged 18 – 25 upon arrival make a large component of this demographic; over half (53%) of young people granted humanitarian visas in 2011-2012 were aged between 18-25 years, demonstrated in the graph below.<sup>20</sup>



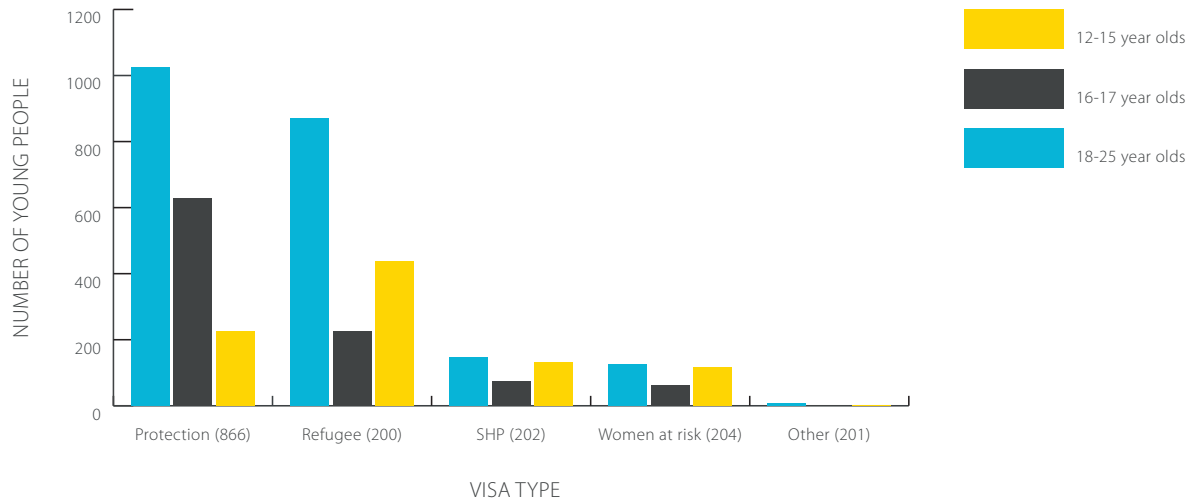
*Figure 1: Youth humanitarian arrivals to Australia in 2011-2012 by age*

19. DIAC, 2012, Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program 2011-2012, p. 31. [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australia\\_offshore\\_humanitarian\\_prog\\_2011-12.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australia_offshore_humanitarian_prog_2011-12.pdf) Accessed 17.5.13

20. DIAC Settlement Reporting Facility, accessed 15 November 2012.

## Visa types

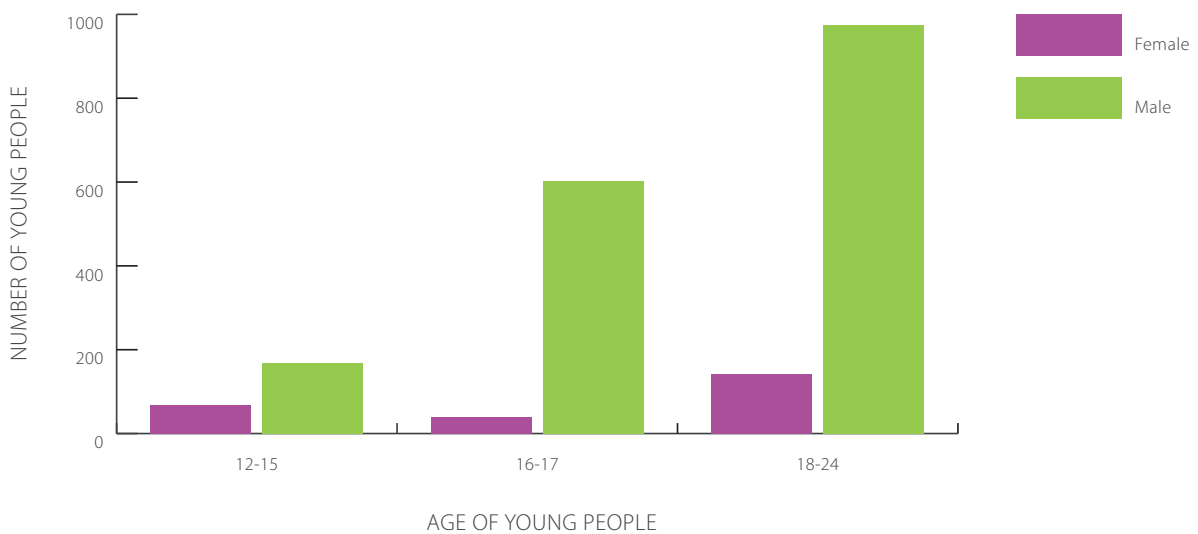
Data from the last financial year also demonstrates that onshore protection visas (866) are the most common form of visa the 18-24 age group received in 2011-12. This is also the case for 16-17 year olds, and reflects the change in settlement patterns occurring given the relatively high numbers of onshore arrivals. In Victoria, the number of young people granted onshore protection visas (866 visas) has increased significantly over the past several years. For example, in 2011-12, 52% of humanitarian youth received 866 visas in Victoria, compared with 29% in 2010-11.<sup>21</sup>



*Figure 2: Humanitarian youth arrivals in Australia (2011-2012) by age and visa type*

## Gender

Young people receiving onshore permanent protection visas are predominately male. As demonstrated in figure 3, 87% of young people granted onshore protection visas in 2011-2012 were young men, whereas only 13% were young women.



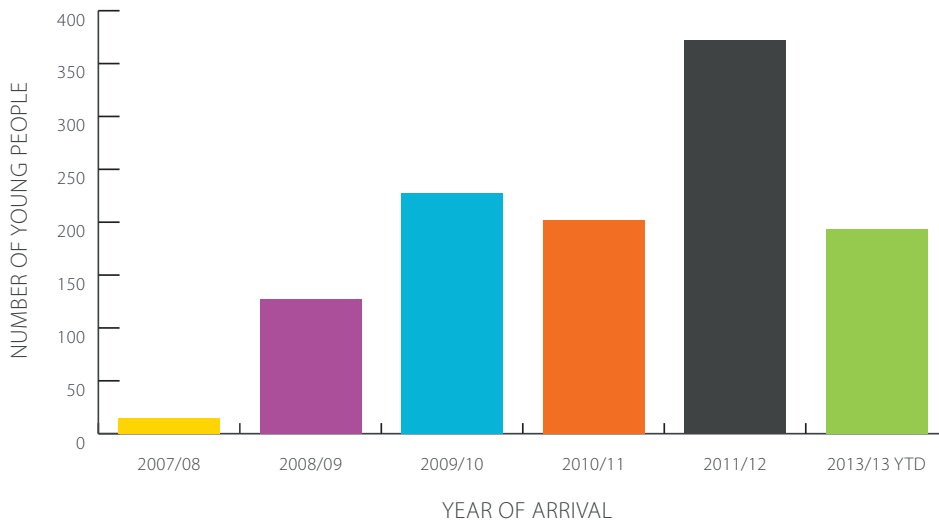
*Figure 3: Onshore protection visas (866) granted in 2011-2012 by age and gender*

21. Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2012, Humanitarian Youth Arrivals to Victoria 2011-12, Carlton: CMY <http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/2283/1/humanitarianarrivals-november2012.pdf> Accessed 20.6.13.



## Numbers of unaccompanied young men (18 – 25)

Although data available through the DIAC Settlement Reporting Facility does not specify whether these young people arriving onshore are unaccompanied or not, anecdotally services report that many young men presenting in this age group who have arrived onshore and been granted protection visas, are here without family. As a snapshot, the below graph indicates the number of young men granted 866 visas over the last five years who are currently living in Victoria (as at 4 May 2013), who were unmarried at the time of receiving a visa.<sup>22</sup> Although this does not necessarily equate with being unaccompanied, it potentially provides a rough indication of the numbers of young men who may have settled in Victoria on their own.



*Figure 4: 18 – 25 year old unmarried males who received 866 visas over the past 5 years, who were living in Victoria as at 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.*

## Countries of origin

The top three countries of origin for Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs)<sup>23</sup> who were granted protection visas in 2011–12 (in descending order) were Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Services consulted with reported that the majority of the onshore unaccompanied young people they are working with are Afghan (predominately Hazara), Iranian and Kurdish. This aligns with data which reveals that over the past five years, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan were the most common countries of birth for 18 – 24 year olds receiving 866 onshore protection visas.<sup>25</sup>

## Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor (UHM) data

Although UHM's are technically under 18 years of age and outside of the scope of this paper, many of these young people turn 18 in Australia whilst they are relatively newly arrived. Due to the large number of split family visa applications lodged through the Special Humanitarian Program, these young people are separated from their family for a number of years – if able to reunite at all. For this reason, the number of current and former UHMs provides an indication of the numbers of young people that will soon be in the 18 – 25 age bracket, without family support. As at 30 September 2012, there were 411 UHMs living in Victoria, which is 44% of the total 936 UHMs currently living in Australia.<sup>26</sup>

22. Data obtained from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Settlement Reporting Facility, May 2013 for the period of 05/05/2008 – 04/05/2013.

23. Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs) is the federal government's terminology for asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

24. DIAC, 2012, Annual report, <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2011-12/pdf/report-on-performance.pdf> Accessed 17.5.13.

25. DIAC, Settlement Reporting Facility, Country of birth by age by 866 visa type, financial years 2007 – 2012. Accessed 12.5.13.

26. Community Support and Children Branch, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012.

## Policy Context

From an international perspective, the UNHCR identifies several goals for good settlement for young people from refugee backgrounds, including:

- To restore security, control and social and economic independence by meeting basic needs;
- To promote the capacity to rebuild a positive future in the receiving society; and
- To promote family reunification and restore supportive relationships within families;
- To promote connections with volunteers and professionals who are able to assist;
- To restore confidence in political systems and institutions, human rights and the rule of law;
- To promote cultural and religious integrity and restore attachments to community, social and economic systems;
- To combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia and build welcoming communities;
- To support the development of strong, cohesive refugee communities;
- To cultivate conditions which support refugees of different genders, ages, family status and past experience.<sup>27</sup>

On a national level, Australia's Multicultural Policy – *The People of Australia* – outlines the federal government's key commitments to multiculturalism, including the settlement of humanitarian young people, with a focus on fairness and inclusion. A key principle of this policy includes:

- Being committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.<sup>28</sup>

The Australian Government's settlement policy, *The Settlement Journey: Strengthening Australia through migration*, similarly emphasises the importance of a socially inclusive society where all Australians are valued and can participate fully.<sup>29</sup> This policy outlines a number of settlement dimensions, with associated indicators. These include

- Social participation (English proficiency; participation in education and training; participation in community life; citizenship);
- Economic well-being (employment circumstances; level of income; level of debt; job satisfaction; satisfaction with accommodation);
- Personal well-being (physical health; mental health; self-esteem; relationships);
- Independence (access to transport; access and use of services; source of income; ability to make life choices; gender equality); and
- Life satisfaction and being connected to the community (sense of belonging in Australia; sense of being treated well by the local community; level of discrimination and cultural religious expression).<sup>30</sup>

On a State level, the Victorian Government's *Vulnerable Youth Framework – Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people* also provides a structure for considering the needs of unaccompanied young adults. This includes a commitment to:

- Supporting young people to engage in education, training and employment;
- Early identification of vulnerability;
- Tailored responses to particular groups, given that "some groups of young people can be particularly vulnerable by virtue of their cultural background, Aboriginal status or economic, social and physical circumstances"<sup>31</sup>;
- Local partnerships, planning and participation – in recognition of the fact that "traditional modes of service delivery do not always enable access to services for those young people who are most in need"<sup>32</sup>; and
- Effective services, capable people.

The Victorian State Government's Youth Statement, *Engage, Involve Create*, also outlines a vision for all young Victorians to "experience healthy, active and fulfilling lives and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential, participate in the workforce and be involved in their community."<sup>33</sup>

27. UNHCR, 2002, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, p. 258.

28. Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011, *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy*, p. 5. [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf\\_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf) Accessed 27.5.13.

29. Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012c, *The Settlement Journey: Strengthening Australia through migration*, Belconnen: Commonwealth of Australia. <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-policy/settlement-journey.pdf> Accessed 9.5.13.

30. Ibid, p. 13.

31. Victorian Government, 2010, *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people: A policy framework to support vulnerable youth*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services, p. 1.

32. Ibid.

33. Victorian Government, 2012, *Engage, Involve, Create: Youth Statement*, Melbourne: Victorian Government, p. 9.

## CMY's experience of 'good youth settlement'

CMY has also developed a framework around positive youth settlement, as a result of extensive consultations with the youth and refugee sectors in Melbourne, including literature reviews and interviews with young people. Many areas overlap or complement the above mentioned policies. According to CMY's model, factors central to positive youth settlement include:

- Material conditions
  - » Stable, long term adequate housing;
  - » Access to culturally appropriate health and other services
- Occupational needs
  - » Stable, adequate income (both individual and family);
  - » Be engaged in appropriate education and training to meet their needs;
  - » Have pathways towards and future opportunities to gain substantial employment
  - » Have a degree of competency in English, adequate for employment and educational advancement.
- Broader environmental factors
  - » Live in a safe environment, free from discrimination;
  - » Be able to access entitlements accorded to all other citizens (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink, etc.)
- Sense of wellbeing and connectedness
  - » Have hope and vision for the future;
  - » Have good support networks and healthy relationships with family, friends and community;
  - » Have a sense of being valued, understood and supported;
  - » Have formulated an identity in their local, own and broader community (e.g. positive sense of self and identity);
  - » Have a positive social life and access to social/recreational options that are welcoming, affordable and accessible;
  - » Have been able to re-establish and maintain relationships with family both in Australia and overseas and negotiate family structures in a new context;
  - » Have a sense of wellness – both physical and emotional;
  - » Have a sense of trust in others.
- Agency – capacity to shape future
  - » Have realistic goals and a clear pathway to achieve them ('I know where I'm going');
  - » Understand social and communication norms in Australia (acculturated);
  - » Be managing the shift from dependence to interdependence (independence with connectedness to family/community);
  - » Be managing both independence and responsibility;
  - » Have confidence in accessing and navigating services, including having knowledge of systems, roles and possibilities.<sup>34</sup>

Although CMY's framework and the Australian Government's Settlement Policy share similar features, it is worth noting that CMY's framework has a particular youth focus. Therefore, there is a more explicit emphasis upon the transition from adolescence to adulthood in terms of identifying settlement outcomes, acknowledging the impact of this transition upon identity, relationships, educational and employment pathways, and future goals. Also of significance is that both CMY's and the UNHRC's identification of settlement goals includes the primacy of family relationships, which is not highlighted in the Australian Government's policy.

These policy frameworks provide a useful lens for exploring the needs of unaccompanied humanitarian young people aged 18 – 25 years who arrived onshore, in terms of assessing how they are faring against settlement indicators. The Australian Government's indicators of 'good settlement' will be used throughout this paper to explore key issues facing this group of young people, in order to explore their current settlement outcomes. The indicator of family relationships will be incorporated under the broad umbrella of 'relationships' according to federal settlement policy.

34. Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), 2006a, *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*, Melbourne: The Centre for Multicultural Youth, p. 16.

## Key settlement issues

Throughout the stakeholder consultations, a number of key issues affecting this group of young people were raised, that directly relate to the Australian Government's settlement goals.

### Settlement dimension 1: Social participation

#### Education and Training

According to Victoria's Vulnerable Youth Framework,

*"Education is the most effective means to enable young people to thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life. It is also an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage and a powerful way to reduce exposure or harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime."<sup>35</sup>*

Additionally, the framework acknowledges that "the transition into young adulthood and the transition to post-school study, training or employment can be a time of significant change and increased vulnerability."<sup>36</sup> The Victorian Youth Statement similarly recognises that successful transitions to adulthood are undermined if young people lack qualifications.<sup>37</sup> Access to education and training is therefore critical for young people from refugee backgrounds in order to enable them to build better lives in Australia and become productive members of society.

Despite this, engaging with and navigating educational and training pathways can be challenging for many young people from refugee backgrounds. For those who have arrived in Australia at a later age, however, there are further barriers in terms of attempting to integrate into a system that is designed to build on key educational milestones. There is limited time for this group to catch up on critical literacy and numeracy skills that others who arrive at a younger age may be able to acquire through the schooling system, before having to move into further educational pathways. Home tutoring could potentially provide part of the solution to strengthening the literacy and numeracy for this group. Services reported that several young people had made significant academic progress with the one on one attention and support of a home tutor.

Unless already enrolled at school, at 18 years of age or over a young person is forced to pursue alternative educational institutions such as TAFE or University, which often do not have the same supports, structure or extracurricular activities as secondary schools. Apprenticeships are also an option, but can be complex to understand and navigate, and after the age of 21 can be difficult to acquire.

*"If you were going to map high risk vulnerability, one of the factors would be arriving just before you're 18 – you haven't had enough time to get a pathway into education."*

*– Senior partnership broker, South East Local Learning and Employment Network*

Even for those who were able to enrol at school, turning 18 is a risk factor in terms of completing their studies. At 18 years of age young people are deemed 'independent', which places a huge amount of pressure on those who lack the supportive structure of family. This results in unaccompanied young people having to find affordable housing, manage household budgets, and live independently whilst trying to remain engaged in education.

*"They might have been in a carer arrangement where they're in a house with rent and utilities paid, meals cooked, and then they hit 18 – they have to exit... They're in the middle of year 10 or 11, and now they're living on \$202 a week from Centrelink and have to find a house - and they just drop out of education because it's impossible. We're seeing that all the time – young people who could have done quite well disengaging. They could have done VCE – but they're dropping out due to the lack of support."*

*– Senior partnership broker, South East Local Learning and Employment Network*

The lack of financial support to continue education places such young people in a difficult dilemma. In addition to covering the costs of living and education, they are in the challenging position of being relied upon to send money home to their families, or to pay off debts incurred from their travel to Australia. This places enormous pressure on a young person's limited resources. In many instances, young people are disengaging from foundational English language study due to financial pressure, which has long term ramifications for their overall settlement and future opportunities.

35. Victorian Government, 2010, p. 11.

36. Ibid, p. 3.

37. Victorian Government, 2012.

*"I think there's a tension for a lot of these guys  
"Should I just leave education and go and find a  
job?" – that tension between optimising their own  
opportunities in a new place, and looking after the  
livelihood of themselves and their families."*

– Team leader, Community service, Ballarat

*"One young man I recently met, his mother just had a  
heart attack [in Pakistan] so there's suddenly \$2,000  
worth of medical bills, so that creates a need to find  
work and leave education."*

– Senior partnership broker, South East Local  
Learning and Employment Network

To add to the financial burdens, increases to Victorian TAFE fees introduce another barrier for young people who are living independently with limited financial resources. For many who wish to complete VCAL, VCE or further study, TAFE is the only option, and the fees associated are often prohibitive. Although provisions have been made for waiving TAFE fees for young people under 21 who have exited care or who have been under guardianship,<sup>38</sup> which would seemingly apply to former Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors who are now 18 years or over, anecdotally these waivers do not appear to be available to this group of young people.

There is also a strong need for career pathways planning and accurate information for this particular group. Instances of young people not understanding their rights with regards to education, and having to navigate complex service systems on their own may result in missing out on the opportunities education presents. As some young people disengage from English study or education to find work, they can be encouraged by Centrelink to undertake short courses, without necessarily a long term goal or strategy. Not only is this counterproductive for the young person, but it wastes government resources in the process.

*"There's a real need for career pathways and  
vocational training... they need clear, honest  
information about their strengths - career counselling  
that's individualised" - Senior partnership broker,  
South East Local Learning and Employment Network*

The challenges faced with regard to education for this group of young people will have serious ramifications for both the individuals concerned and the broader community. The ages of 18 – 25 are a critical time for young

people to engage in educational or training pathways in order to set themselves up for the future, enabling them to make a positive contribution to society. Some are struggling with foundational levels of literacy and numeracy due to interrupted education, which if left unaddressed will inhibit future opportunities. Others have had strong educational backgrounds in their countries of origin or transit countries, and although highly committed to their education, are disengaging due to financial pressure. Many are being forced to sacrifice their own future for both their own and their families' day to day survival.

### Participating in community life

Having opportunities to participate in community life is a key element to good settlement. Sport, recreation and social activities play an important role in assisting young people to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Not only this, but targeted sport and recreation programs can promote trust, facilitate settlement and transitional support, build social networks, serve as a diversion approach, be a pathway to other forms of participation, and provide young people with the chance to develop skills that can assist them in other parts of their lives.<sup>39</sup>

*"It makes us happy. We believe we will grow up if  
we participate and join in (sport) – that's why we  
feel happy."*

– Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background

*"I often hear them say that's [playing sport] the only  
down time they have from all the stress that goes on  
in their head."*

– Counsellor, South East region

However there are barriers that often exist that make it challenging for such young people to participate, particularly when looking at joining formal sport clubs. The financial cost, and at times the culture of the group concerned, prevents them from being able to get involved. There is both the need to create informal recreational opportunities, whilst also supporting those interested to engage with formal clubs. Initiatives such as CMY's 'BoySpace' aim to address these issues.

39. Oliff, L. 2007, *Playing for the Future: The role of sport and recreation in supporting refugee young people to 'settle well'* in Australia, Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, p. 2. <http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/185/1/PlayingForTheFuture.pdf> Accessed 10.4.13.

38. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Fee waiver and exemptions*, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/learners/vet/pages/feeexemptions.aspx> Accessed 23.5.13.

## Case study: Multicultural Youth Sports & Engagement Program ('BoySpace')

*CMY employs a Multicultural Youth Sports and Engagement worker to engage young male Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHMs), former UHMs and unaccompanied young people aged between 18 – 25 in sport and recreational programs, funded by Portland House Foundation in 2012.*

*This has resulted in over 80 young men participating, and has contributed to improved mental health, improved sleeping patterns, stronger connections to others, improved confidence, and greater connections to the Australian community for the young male participants.*

*Over half of these young people have wanted to join a local sporting club. Many of the young men have been provided with individual support to access particular sports of interest, such as martial arts. Some of the young men have been supported to complete training in the sports area (first aid, life saving, coaching). Two of the young men are now employed in the sport and recreation industry; one works full time at the local sports and aquatic centre, as a life guard and pool attendant.*

*The project has been very successful in making positive contribution to a better settlement for newly arrived unaccompanied young people. Participation in sport has assisted them to manage their stress and anxiety better. It helps them to eat better, and to sleep better. The young men are almost universally interested in the program, and place a high value on the opportunity to play sport. Sport gives them a sense of achievement. It provides them with a chance to make friends, and develop links with the broader Australian community.*

## Settlement dimension 2: Economic well-being

### Employment

A core settlement integration goal of the UNCHR is to restore "economic independence"<sup>40</sup>, which is closely related to gaining meaningful employment. In a similar fashion, Victoria's Vulnerable Youth Framework highlights a commitment to assisting vulnerable young people to access "better personal, social and economic outcomes."<sup>41</sup> It similarly highlights the need to "provide these young people with pathways to skills and qualifications to make a successful transition into education and training or into the labour market in order to achieve positive life outcomes."<sup>42</sup> Additionally, CMY's definition of 'good settlement' around occupational needs identifies the importance of having "pathways towards and future opportunities to gain substantial employment."<sup>43</sup>

Despite the recognised importance of employment and supported transitions to work, it can be very difficult for unaccompanied young adults to enter the Australian workforce.<sup>44</sup> This can be due to a combination of limited English skills, interrupted education, not holding a drivers' licence, and a lack of formal qualifications, social networks and work experience in Australia. Additionally, racism and discrimination can be additional barriers that some encounter when trying to enter the workforce.

However employment is particularly critical for this group of unaccompanied young people, many for whom are the sole provider for their family back at home or in transit countries.

40. UNHCR, 2002, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, p. 258.

41. Victorian Government, 2010, p. 11.

42. Ibid.

43. Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2006a, p. 16.

44. Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2006b, *Late Arrivals: The needs of refugee young people who resettle in later adolescence*, Melbourne: CMY, p. 13.

*“Often the older male child is the one who comes, and they bear the responsibility for the whole family. And the family has borrowed money or they’ve sold land for that person to travel. Then he faces that pressure of earning – not only to send money back home for his family, but also to repay the loan or whatever money they’ve borrowed” – Youth team leader, Settlement Service, Northern region*

The immense pressure to earn money at almost any cost can leave many unaccompanied young people vulnerable to exploitation in the workforce. There are numerous accounts of the following amongst services working to support these young people:

- Cash in hand jobs and lack of insurance/work cover
- Limited understanding of occupational health and safety and general work rights
- Being asked to sign contracts without understanding what they’re agreeing to
- Not being paid for work undertaken, and
- Misunderstandings or being misled around what constitutes an apprenticeship.

There are also reports of young people turning 21 and being fired and replaced by younger workers. This is in the context of the frequently low skilled, cash-in hand jobs such as car washing, dish washing and pizza delivery that these young men occupy.

*“The exploitation comes into play where employers are saying it’s an apprenticeship, or the young person thinks it is, so the employer just agrees with that – there’s all kinds of really odd, dodgy stuff that’s going on under the surface.”*

*– Youth worker, Community service, South East region*

*“The thing with cash in hand is they’ve got no work cover. The worst case I saw was a young man working as a security guard for cash in hand. He was in his early 20s and I said ‘Are you crazy? That’s insane. Every night you go out there and you could be punched by someone who’s drunk, and you could be in hospital for weeks. And then how will you send the money back to Pakistan? You need to get on the books.”*

*- Senior Partnership Broker, South East Local Learning and Employment Network*

There is a strong need for education around rights and responsibilities in the workforce with this group of young people, in addition to job readiness training. This is particularly so for those transitioning from education to work, or who are vulnerable to disengaging from education due to financial pressures. Combined with this is the need for numeracy and literacy training tailored to the needs of these young people who are wanting to enter the workforce.

*“The labour market is different now... There’s no low end jobs any more – you need to have a certain level of numeracy and literacy skills to be able to secure work.*

*– Coordinator, CMY, South East region*

Pre-employment programs that integrate a combination of literacy and numeracy, skill based training, preparation for employment, and practical support with actually securing work would be extremely beneficial for this group. Similarly, there needs to be greater resources allocated towards supporting young people to find legal, part-time or casual work to enable them to remain in education for longer periods of time.

## Level of income

Unaccompanied young adults often experience financial difficulties for a number of reasons, including debt from travel loans and difficulty finding employment to meet the requirements of both their debt and their living costs. Although all refugees can face financial pressure, it appears to be particularly exacerbated for this group of unaccompanied young adults, given there are cultural and familial expectations to provide financially, particularly if they are often the oldest male in the family.

Given the limitations on applying for family reunion for those who arrived at 18 years or over and those who arrived on or post 13 August 2012, some unaccompanied young people may also be attempting to save money to sponsor family through the family migration stream, which further adds to their financial difficulties. As Waxman found, the heavy financial burden on those looking to sponsor family members “has forced a number of educated humanitarian entrants to accept unskilled work and forego attendance at English language classes, thus delaying their plans for further study or upgrading qualifications.”<sup>45</sup>

45. Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), 2012, Humanitarian Family Reunion: The building block of good settlement, p. 4.

If young people do disengage from education due to financial pressure, this can impact on their Centrelink benefits, which exacerbates their financial issues if they are unable to find work immediately.

*“The issue of Centrelink payment is tied to attending the English class. As soon as they drop out, then their payment is affected – so it’s like a catch 22 situation. What to do? I have the pressure to work and earn money – but I also have to go to class. If I don’t go to class I don’t get the Centrelink money. If I don’t get the Centrelink money, how do I sustain myself? It’s a very difficult situation for them.”* – Youth worker, Settlement service, Northern region

Budgeting and financial management is also an essential life skill that takes time to develop, which may be new to many young people separated from their parents. For those arriving onshore, they have gone from living with family who may have taken care of these areas of life, to living in detention arrangements, where rent, bills and food are provided, whilst some UHMs have also gone on to live in carer arrangements. Once they receive their visa, it can be a difficult transition to suddenly have to budget, develop financial independence and acquire overall life skills such as cooking, navigating bills, rent and contracts. Consultations conducted by the Refugee Council of Australia for Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2013-14 similarly highlight the financial challenges that young people encounter in the transition from care arrangements once they turn 18, including the difficulty of remaining in education.<sup>46</sup>

Many newly arrived young people, but particularly those without family, are also highly vulnerable to entering into financial agreements without understanding the full implications. Often young people are unfamiliar with and do not adequately understand their rights and responsibilities with regards to contracts, such as mobile phone companies. Consequently, it is all too easy for them to accrue substantial debt.<sup>47</sup> This highlights the need for both proactive education around legal issues with this client group, and having responsive support services available as they require help.

Financial pressures create high levels of anxiety and negative outcomes for this group of young people. These include:

- potential disengagement from education and training
- limited and inappropriate housing arrangements, including extreme overcrowding
- vulnerability to exploitative work and employment conditions; and
- limited ability to engage and participate in social and recreational opportunities with the broader community.

### Suitable Accommodation

An inability to find suitable housing can be one of the most significant challenges young people from refugee backgrounds encounter upon settling in Australia. Research suggests that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are six to ten times more likely to be at risk of homeless compared with Australian born young people.<sup>48</sup> Both local and international research recognises that affordable, stable and appropriate housing is fundamental to good settlement; unsuitable housing significantly impacts on poor settlement outcomes.<sup>49</sup> If adequate support is not provided, such young people are at a high risk of homelessness, inhibiting their ability to settle well.<sup>50</sup>

For young people who have arrived in Australia unaccompanied, these risk factors are exacerbated, given they are forced to find independent housing without the supportive structure of their family. In the case of UHMs turning 18 years of age and exiting programs to independent living, parallels can be drawn with other Australian young people exiting out of home care. Australian research highlights that for young people living in out of home care in Australia, the transition points of moving to independent living at 18 years of age is a time of increased vulnerability to homelessness.<sup>51</sup>

There is real concern amongst services that not all unaccompanied 18 year olds are necessarily equipped to go straight into independent living arrangements, and that there can be inadequate time to undertake transitional planning, provide support or find appropriate housing options. Some of the young people concerned may have only recently arrived in Australia, and may still be developing critical independent living skills in the Australian context.

46. Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), 2013, Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2013-14: Community views on current challenges and future directions, Surrey Hills: RCOA, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2013-14-IntakeSub.pdf> Accessed 15.4.13.

47. CMY, 2006b, p. 15.

48. Coventry, et al. 2002, p. 50.

49. Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), 2010, Finding Home in Victoria: Refugee and migrant young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – Executive Summary, Carlton, p. 1.

50. Ibid.

51. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), 2010, Pathways from out-of-home care, *AHURI Policy Bulletin*, Issue 131.



As a result, a one size fits all approach to housing is inadequate for this group. However there are a real lack of housing options to suit the various needs of unaccompanied young people aged 18 years and over. Both services in Melbourne and regional Victoria have identified the importance of having a suite of housing options to accommodate this group of young people and their various needs.

*“All these young people are exiting into private rental. But in an ideal world there would be a menu, because different young people have different needs. We also need lead tenant type models for young people, there should be some specific targeted housing support programs for young people that can live in private rental but just need that extra support, and there should be some transitional properties for young people who really have no idea, who need a lot more support and someone to teach them.”*

- Youth worker, South East region

The most common housing arrangements for unaccompanied 18 – 25 year olds appear to be shared private rental, or in some instances, boarding with a family. Reports from regional areas indicate that many unaccompanied young people relocate to Melbourne upon turning 18, due to both their cultural ties to the South East regions of Melbourne and no longer being supported with accommodation in Ballarat as they were when considered a minor. However some young people do wish to return to or remain in regional areas, viewing them as places conducive to supporting their education and due to having established connections with the community. Yet the lack of suitable, available housing often prevents them from remaining in regional areas.

*“They often want to come back if we or someone can find an Australian family for them to live with. But for an Australian family, it’s not always so appealing to take on an 18 – 19 year old who still needs a lot of support – but who in other ways can be quite independent.”*

-Team leader, Community health organisation, Ballarat

The strong reliance on the private rental system also requires young people to have solid social networks in order to identify peers to share with for affordability, yet not all unaccompanied young people have such connections. Services at times have attempted to facilitate these

relationships between young people who could potentially share housing, but have reported this approach is for the most part, ineffective. This highlights the importance of supporting this group of young people to develop strong social networks.

For those that lack these networks, there is minimal support available through crisis, transitional or public housing. The housing system is under serious strain, pushing the majority of these young people into the private rental. Although it is positive that some young people have been able to access the private rental market, there are significant systemic barriers that young people from refugee backgrounds face in terms of accessing long-term, appropriate and affordable housing.<sup>52</sup>

*“There’s no point going to a housing service because a 19 year old single male won’t get any help. ... Housing services aren’t set up to deal with young men. They’re a low priority. I rang one housing service and they had 30 young men on the list already just in this area.”*

- Youth worker, Settlement service, Northern region

As a result of the difficulty of finding affordable housing, and the financial constraints many are living under, issues of overcrowding are also highly prevalent. It is not unusual for three to four young men to be sharing one bedroom in a private rental house.

*“You can have 12, 13, or 15 young people live together in a 3 bedroom place. They say ‘It’s the only way we can survive and have some money left to send home’”*

- Youth team leader, Settlement service, Northern region

The issue of overcrowding creates real cause for concern, particularly around the potential vulnerability of young men sharing rooms with peers or older men from their community. These situations render such young men vulnerable to potential exploitation or abuse. It also highlights the potential negative implications that can arise from placing vulnerable peers and community members who are all in similarly challenging situations together; they are separated from family, often unemployed, and suffering from trauma as a result of the refugee experience and journey.

<sup>52</sup>. CMY, 2010.

*“It is the lack of inspiration. If you live in the situation where all of you are jobless – what are you learning from one another? Just complaining – oh there is no job, no job.”*

*- Youth team leader, Settlement service,  
Northern region*

There are also reports emerging that established share houses of unaccompanied young adults are taking in young asylum seekers who have arrived since 13 August 2012. These young adults have been granted bridging visas, and are thus unable to work and are living on reduced Centrelink payments. This will impact not only on the stability and overcrowding in these houses; it also raises concerns that already vulnerable young men are now beginning to play support roles to others who are in an even more vulnerable situation.

Research conducted by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) identifies several factors that help young people leaving care successfully transition to independent living. Several of these factors could equally apply to all unaccompanied young people who have arrived onshore. These include independent living skills; increased and better accommodation options; social relationships as a resource for housing; and effective leaving care plans.<sup>53</sup>

53. AHURI, 2010.

## Settlement dimension 3: Personal wellbeing

### Physical health and safety

Numerous services identified that physical health, including sexual health, is an area that needs more attention with regard to unaccompanied young men. Feedback from some services indicates that some of these young men have limited understanding of human physiology and overall physical health. Physical health impacts greatly upon mental health and overall wellbeing, thus opportunities for physical exercise, healthy eating and health education are particularly important for this group of young people.

Services report that many of these young people are sexually active, yet are still in the process of acculturating to Australian society, and don't have the support framework of relatives who may have traditionally provided guidance or information around these topics. There are also emerging accounts of some young men in this demographic being charged with sexual harassment, flagging an urgent need for information and mentoring with regard to healthy relationships and sexual conduct in the Australian context.

Due to the unique cultural backgrounds of the young people concerned, services have identified the need for gender specific (in this instance male) refugee health nurses to support these young people in meeting their health needs – who are both culturally relevant, youth focussed and available to outreach and work with this population. These health nurses could play a critical role in general health education and support, including sexual health.

It is also important to consider the physical safety of these young people, given their specific vulnerabilities. Anecdotally, there are reports of unaccompanied young people being the victims of assault and being extremely vulnerable to exploitation from other members of the community.

*"There's discussion with police in the area that there are things happening and they're very worried – whether it's exploitation or sex work, or other issues. I think we haven't quite unpacked it, but I would suspect there is some high vulnerability for these young men."*

– Youth worker, Settlement services,  
South East region

*"I had a young man involved with a family where all his resources were being exploited – his money, his car, his goodness... He ended up in emergency accommodation to get out of the situation. It was awful. There was domestic violence, gambling, drug use..."*

– Counsellor, Community organisation,  
South East region

## Mental health

Mental health is a key issue facing many unaccompanied young people who are 18 years or over in Australia. This is situated in the broader context of the fact that overall, "young people of refugee background are at increased risk, when compared with immigrant or indigenous children and young people, for psychological symptoms and psychiatric disorders because of forced migration, traumatic events and resettlement in unfamiliar environments."<sup>54</sup> Despite this, mental health services are underutilised by many young people from refugee backgrounds.<sup>55</sup>

Three types of trauma are particularly significant for this particular group of unaccompanied young people:

1. The trauma of realising it will either take many years before family may be able to join them in Australia - or that family reunification is in fact extremely unlikely;
2. The ongoing trauma associated with having family living in prolonged, dangerous circumstances, without the ability to protect or adequately provide for them; and
3. Widespread misconceptions, perpetrated by negative media representation, about asylum seekers who arrive by boat – especially given the link between the SHP and onshore program.<sup>56</sup>

54. Colucci, E., Szwarc, J., Minas, H., Paxton, G., and Guerra, C. 2012a, The utilisation of mental health services by children and young people from a refugee background: a systematic literature review, *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health*, 1-23, p. 1.

55. Colucci, E., Szwarc, J., Minas, H., Paxton, G., and Guerra, C. 2012b, Barriers to and facilitators of utilisation of mental health services by young people of refugee background, Foundation House, Melbourne University, Centre for Multicultural Youth and Royal Melbourne Children's Hospital, <http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Barriers+and+facilitators+pdf+final.pdf> Accessed 27.5.13.

56. Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors in Australia, September 2012, p. 11.

*"You've got layers of pre arrival trauma – you then have the journey and detention experience and the stressors and trauma there, and then the policy and systemic implications of prolonged separation from family, so that grief is ongoing – as well as the ongoing danger for family overseas."*

Counsellor, Community organisation, South East region

Prolonged separation from family members who are often still living in dangerous and precarious situations causes significant grief and anxiety for many unaccompanied young people. This is supported by numerous studies that highlight the negative impact family separation has upon the psychological health and wellbeing of people from refugee backgrounds.<sup>57</sup> According to the Refugee Council of Australia,

***'Research suggests that family separation can be the most pervasive source of emotional distress for refugees who have been resettled, and that concern about family is the most common issue associated with depression, anxiety and somatisation. Separation from family has also been shown to compound or exacerbate trauma reactions.'***<sup>58</sup>

Young people's maturation is forced to accelerate under these circumstances, and in many instances these responsibilities can be overwhelming for them to manage. Yet at the same time, CMY's work reveals that many of these young men have held large amounts of responsibility prior to arrival, such as working in countries of origin or in transit countries. Although they are young and may struggle with the level of responsibility they hold, they are also often resourceful and motivated, and frustrated by the challenges they encounter in Australia. Unaccompanied young adults are often unable to fulfil family expectations of earning money, finishing their education, and bringing their family to Australia, and thus there is often an underlying guilt and a potential loss of status within the family context.

57. McDonald-Wilmsen, B. and Gifford, S. 2012, Refugee Resettlement, family separation and Australia's humanitarian programme. *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Research Paper No. 178, UNHCR, p. 4. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b167ae59.html> Accessed 2.4.13; RCOA, 2012, Humanitarian Family Reunion: The building block of good settlement, p. 3.

58. RCOA, 2012, p. 3.

*"Most of them that have come out are the first born son of the family – there's a lot of cultural expectation that comes out of that. They're the future of the family, and they have to provide and send money back. A lot of the fathers are deceased... Their mother still depends on them. So they're getting phone calls from their mother crying or asking for help- it's really difficult and really hard going for them."*

*– Team leader, Community service, Ballarat*

In a focus group with unaccompanied Afghan young men, they highlighted the centrality of their families and their ongoing anxiety for their welfare:

*"Everyone wants to live with their parents... a big thing is that we always worry about our family, about our people you see. What's their fault? They didn't make any fault but without any reason they kill them. They do suicide bombing... that's why people they leave their country. We don't want to leave their parents... the main thing is that our lives are in danger."*

*- Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background*

This trauma induced by family separation and fear for their wellbeing is an added layer to the trauma they may have experienced in their country of origin, as a result of the refugee experience, or through detention in Australia. This makes recovery and moving on from these experiences to focus on the future extremely difficult, as they are still in the midst of unresolved trauma. For example, despite the fact that these young people have received permanent protection visas, the news of other asylum seekers and broader policy issues can still significantly impact on their own wellbeing and anxiety.

*"It hurt us [following the news]. It very hurt us because the situation in our country is very bad. So if they sell their home and spend their money to come here, and they go to Nauru, they will be crazy there. We will be so hurt because they are our nation, our people, so we're always thinking about them. It's not fair – half the boat they will send in here, and the other there. It's not fair. I think everyone in our community is hurt and think about this."*

*- Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background*

Mental health is also undermined by their current circumstances, including unemployment, housing instability and financial pressures. A wide gap can exist between their expectations of what life would be like in Australia and the reality of the opportunities that are actually available to them.

*"They came to Australia with expectations, and their expectations do not match. They get frustrated, they get depressed."*

*– Team leader, Settlement Service, Northern region*

## Relationships

### Peers

In many instances, the peer relationships of unaccompanied young people are particularly strong – given their shared cultural backgrounds and experiences in seeking asylum, living in detention, through to building new lives in Australia. These relationships can prove critical to providing one another with social and emotional support, forming shared housing arrangements, providing information and linking one another to services or useful resources.

*“We always help each other.”*

– Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background

However, the strong reliance on peers, without the protective scaffolding of family, can create pressures of its own. The very fact that these young people can identify so strongly with one another due to their shared experiences is also potentially the source of relationship difficulties, given their shared levels of vulnerability and the distinct challenges they face. It is evident that although their peer relationships can provide a real source of strength and support, these alone are not adequate, and they may at times need the support of professionals or adult mentors who can assist them to navigate these relationships. The important role that adults can play is supported by adolescent research on resiliency, which highlights that “a caring nonparent adult is the most common protective factor amongst resilient youth.”<sup>59</sup>

*“When it works they can become a surrogate family to each other, and it is wonderful the support they can offer to each other, but then we see a lot of that breaking down because the relationships are quite fragile also... The hard thing is that their peers are carrying similar burdens. That’s the hardest thing”*

– Counsellor, Community service, South East region

59. Serido J, Lynne M. and Perkins D. 2011, Moving Beyond Youth Voice, Youth and Society, 24, p. 47.

### Family

Under the key ‘good youth settlement’ indicators developed by CMY, the goal of a ‘sense of wellbeing and connectedness’ includes both having good support networks and healthy relationships with family, friends and community; and being able to re-establish and maintain relationships with family in Australia and overseas.<sup>60</sup>

The UNHCR promotes family reunion in the context of resettlement, and the United Nations recognises the crucial role of family as a fundamental human right, enshrined in UN conventions to which Australia is party to.<sup>61</sup>

For young people, connection to family is critical, particularly as they navigate key transitions through adolescence to adulthood. Not only is it critical for refugee young people, but research suggests it is a fundamental to good settlement of refugees overall. As Staver describes,

*“the precariousness of the refugee experience makes family relationships particularly vital. The family can be an important anchor in a social world turned upside down, sometimes remaining the only stable social structure in an otherwise disintegrated society.”<sup>62</sup>*

Inability to reunite with family has serious ramifications for good settlement. Research highlights that without it, people are caught in between wanting to build a new life for themselves, whilst being absorbed in the welfare of family members. Thus reunion facilitates ‘good settlement’ by enabling people to look ahead to the future in Australia, whilst providing a critical scaffold and support network that is lacking in their absence. “The presence of family members facilitates the difficult process of moving on; one is no longer fixated on the object of reunification and anxious about the safety and whereabouts of loved ones.”<sup>63</sup>

*“There’s a split between looking forward, but also their family is back home. Their focus goes in both directions and I think that’s a big challenge for many of them. They have to look after what was left, while trying to move forward and create their own future. It’s a lot of pressure for a young person to have to deal with that.”*

– Team leader, Community health organisation, Ballarat

60. CMY, 2006a, p. 16.

61. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 16 (3): ‘The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.’

62. Staver, A. 2008, Family Reunification: A Right for Forced Migrants? Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper Series no. 51, University of Oxford, p. 6.

63. Ibid.

Some of the impacts of family separation include:

- Feelings of anxiety around family's safety; guilt that their family has been left behind; feeling responsible for the wellbeing and safety of family overseas.
- Feelings of grief, loss and powerlessness, often leading to depression and isolation.
- Focus on finding immediate (often low-skilled or 'cash in hand') work at the expense of foundational education (such as English Language acquisition) in order to financially support family overseas or apply for sponsorship.<sup>64</sup>

The all-pervasiveness of family separation can colour even positive experiences in Australia at times, as one youth worker explained:

*"It affects even some of the positive work you're doing with them – for example the boys we're working with got to the soccer grand final and one of the boys had a meltdown because his family weren't here and he had no one to share it with. So something that was very positive for him suddenly became very negative."*

*– Sports and recreation officer, Centre for Multicultural Youth, South East region*

Creating increased opportunities for family reunion would lay the critical foundation for providing these young people with the support needed to enable them to move forward and 'settle well' in Australia, reducing a reliance on government funded services, and enabling the young people to focus on education in order to make successful transitions to adulthood. In the meantime, supporting young people to maintain strong connections with family members overseas is fundamental to their overall wellbeing.

64. MYAN, Submission to Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC): Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2013-2014, p.4.

## Settlement dimension 4: Independence

### Access and use of community and government services

Victoria's Vulnerable Youth Framework has an important focus on the early identification of vulnerability. "Research tells us that intervention early in life in the emergence of a problem can give young people better life outcomes. For effective intervention to occur, systems must be in place to identify vulnerability and respond to it."<sup>65</sup>

Despite the recognition of the importance of early intervention, there is an unmet demand for support services for newly arrived, unaccompanied young people who are 18 years and over, particularly given 18 is often a cut off point for many youth programs.<sup>66</sup> For many UHMs, there is a noticeable gap in support available once they turn 18. For those that arrive at 18 years old and above, there are often limited options in terms of flexible, generalist, culturally relevant and youth friendly services available.

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network identified a number of issues related to the service system for Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors, many of which also apply to unaccompanied young adults. These include:

- An unfamiliarity with working with unaccompanied young people amongst both mainstream and settlement services, with limited capacity to meet their often complex needs;
- Mainstream youth services often assuming that the support of these young people lies with settlement services, when in reality, settlement services can be relatively limited in the level of support they can provide;
- Limited partnerships and collaboration between the settlement and youth sectors to support coordination;
- A service system that is designed predominately to meet the needs of off-shore humanitarian entrants – a significant 'transition' is occurring amongst the service system in adjusting to meet the unique needs of this group of young people; and
- Keeping up with policy changes and the impact of this upon this group of young people, including they type and way that services are delivered.<sup>67</sup>

65. Victorian State Government, 2010, p. 15.

66. CMY, 2006b, p. 9.

67. MYAN, 2012, p. 13.

Additionally, there is a lack of generalist youth services that provide case management and drop in models, which may be more suitable for this older group of unaccompanied young people. Anecdotal feedback suggests that at times, this particular group of young people are frequently misunderstood by mainstream services. These organisations can be unaware of the pressures and experiences such young people bring with them, including the long road they have walked through various service systems before being granted a visa.

*“Some of the mainstream agencies are not as culturally prepared and that worries me a little bit – how that’s going to go. There’s a hell of a lot of work to be done in the broader community.”*

– Team leader, Community health organisation, Ballarat

Many workers are also identifying challenges with working with unaccompanied young adults given the different levels of support available in community detention and post the program. “These challenges are mostly associated with managing young people’s (high) expectations of the service system/levels of support they can access upon exit from the community detention program.”<sup>68</sup>

Knowledge can be drawn from both local and international research with regards to the transition from ‘care’ arrangements to independent living. Such research highlights that young people leaving care constitute an extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged group in society.<sup>69</sup> “Compared to most young people, they face particular difficulties in accessing educational, employment, housing and other developmental opportunities.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, the transition from care “needs to become a gradual and flexible process based on levels of maturity and skill development, rather than simply age.”<sup>71</sup>

This emphasis on early intervention and need for flexibility around age has similarly been highlighted by services:

*“You may need more time. The system can fail these young men by saying for everyone that at 18 ‘you’re an adult and you can do this on your own’. It may need to be until these people are at least 21. If they’ve arrived at 17 - it can be hard to build social capital when you don’t have language, you’re highly traumatised, [and] there are trust*

*issues. It’s about giving them the time to re-establish trust in people and in systems, so they can engage, and maybe build that over the next 3 or 4 years...”*

– Counsellor, Community organisation, South East region

However, despite the fact that many of these young people have come from being in care, there appears to be a discrepancy in terms of what support former UHMs are able to access in comparison to other mainstream young people exiting care. This has serious ramifications on their future, such as impacting on education, employment, and their overall wellbeing, reducing their chances of making successful transitions.

Overall, the current strain on the service system makes it challenging to build a supportive scaffold around these young people, who lack the broader support of family or established networks. Stakeholder consultations consistently raised the challenge of housing and employment, and the difficulty of referring young people through a complex service system where there is often a lack of resources and capacity to respond. Yet as research highlights, a flexible, youth-focussed, culturally relevant and early intervention focussed service system is critical to enabling these young people to make successful transitions to independence.

### Ability to make life choices

The ability to make life choices is critical for all people from refugee backgrounds, but especially so for adolescents as they transition to adulthood during their settlement process in Australia. For unaccompanied young adults who have arrived onshore however, this indicator can be severely undermined by the fact that they are often presented with impossible choices – to pursue education or find low-skilled, often ‘cash in hand’ employment in order to support vulnerable family members; to move forward and seize opportunities available in Australia, or to focus on immediate needs of covering their own living costs and that of their family.

The broader political and policy context these young people have arrived in Australia is undermining the achievement of this goal. They are caught between re-establishing their lives and looking to their future, whilst simultaneously attempting to provide for vulnerable family members who are often in protracted and desperate situations either in their homeland or in transit countries such as Pakistan. Without the possibility of family reunion or a change in the political landscape, it is difficult to see that these young people have real choices available to them that are not being compromised in some way, with long term ramifications for both the individuals concerned and for broader society.

68. MYAN, Submission to Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC): Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2013-2014, p.4.

69. Mendes, P., Johnson, G. & Moslehuddin, B. 2011, Effectively preparing young people to transition from out-of-home care: An examination of three recent Australian studies, Family Matters, no. 89, p. 62.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid, p. 61

## Settlement dimension 5: Life satisfaction and being connected to the community

### Sense of belonging in Australia

Having a sense of belonging to the broader community in Australia is critical for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in terms of their overall sense of identity, wellbeing and being able to access opportunities and contribute to the community around them. Sadly, however, young people from refugee backgrounds do not always experience this sense of welcome and belonging in their day to day lives.

For unaccompanied young adults who have arrived onshore, there are further challenges in addition to general racism that can exist towards those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The broader policy context and debate within Australia surrounding those that arrive onshore, including a fixation with the mode of arrival (e.g. 'boat people') creates a hostile environment, undermining this group of young people's ability to feel they belong in mainstream Australian society. The political and media discourse trickles down into people's every day experiences, affecting whether young people experience acceptance as part of the broader community.

*"Some people or friends say 'I'm against the people coming by boat.' I say - Why? They say 'Well we are working, we are paying our taxes, and you are eating our food'"*

*– Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background*

At times, observing the treatment of others from their cultural backgrounds can also create fear and anxiety for their own future, impacting on their sense of belonging. This is despite the fact they have received permanent protection visas.

*"We listen to someone being deported to Kabul, and we think why did they do that? How is he? When we listen inside of face book, we see they will send asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea. We are a little bit scared that we are also like refugee, will they also send us there?"*

*– Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background, permanent protection visa holder*

There is evidently a strong need for education in the broader community, to increase understanding around the backgrounds and experiences of these young people, whilst reducing discrimination and promoting mutual learning and respect. The political and media discourse is central to setting the tone for how community members respond to these young people from refugee backgrounds.

*"I also think the connection needs to go both ways. Where that cultural diversity and acceptance is present in the community – it makes it a lot easier for those kids to make those connections. So it's a two way street." – Team leader, Community Health organisation, Ballarat*

CMY's experience demonstrates that newly arrived young people can have a strengthened sense of belonging through opportunities to participate and to develop broad social networks. For example, this can be achieved through sport, recreation and the arts, or programs that bring diverse groups of people together with the explicit aim of building social cohesion.

### Sense of being treated well by the local community

There are mixed reports as to how unaccompanied young people who have arrived onshore are being received in the community. In the regional area of Ballarat, services reported strong community-based support to assist these young people, with the involvement of many voluntary groups, churches and community members working together to fundraise, raise awareness and explore housing solutions. Services in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional areas have also reported that the young people they work with express a strong desire to make connections with the local community, to develop friendships with 'Australians', whilst at the same time valuing their peers and the friendships developed amongst their own communities.

However there have also been reports that these unaccompanied young adults are finding it difficult to gain acceptance from their own cultural communities, who are often more established in terms of their settlement in Australia. There is much work to be done to support the building of connections between unaccompanied young adults and their own cultural communities. This could include strategies such as employing cultural liaison workers and ensuring that a broader community development approach is adopted, rather than providing only individualised case management services.



On the other hand, there have been some positive reports of community members demonstrating real acts of kindness and generosity towards these young people.

*“I’ve heard amazing stories of Afghan families supporting young people, giving them their second car that’s all roadworthy and in good condition to drive, or lending money and saying pay me back over time, over years, and not putting any pressure on them in terms of paying it back or interest ...”*

– Senior case worker, CMY, South East region

Supporting connections with the broader community appears critical to assisting these young people to develop a sense of belonging and access the social capital that exists within the community. Examples of young people forming connections with members from the broader community through sports, mentoring programs or carer relationships appear to have the potential to reap real rewards. These relationships appear to potentially enhance unaccompanied young adult’s ability to have a sense of family, reduce social isolation, develop new networks and open up future opportunities and access to resources. Many of these relationships are facilitated through volunteer or mentoring programs.

*“They get all that cultural capital that Anglo-Australian families have – yes you can borrow this car, I can help you get your licence, I know someone who might be able to give you some work or work experience”*

– Youth worker, South East region

*“Mentoring has been really key – young people who’ve been able to form a mentoring relationship with people through sport or programs or through the community. Really that seems to be the big main factor in them being able to settle really well and have a sense of belonging to the community...”*

– Youth worker, South East region

## Ways forward

There is clearly much work to be done to effectively support unaccompanied young adults to settle well in Australia. However, there are also positive examples of effective practice emerging amongst services that are working with this group of young people. There is also much knowledge that can be drawn upon from other sectors, such as the research that exists for young people leaving state care. These insights are extremely applicable to UHMs turning 18, but also highlight important conditions that need to be present to assist those 18 years and over who have not entered through the UHM program.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) research around successful transitions from state based care to independent living found several factors that appear highly applicable to this group of unaccompanied young people. These factors include:

- Supporting young people to obtain “high quality, well located, appropriate and affordable housing”<sup>72</sup>. This provides young people with a stable base to develop social networks and move into education, training and employment;
- Having long-term, consistent, meaningful and supportive relationships (those that can provide material, emotional and informational resources and support), that act as a scaffold if problems are encountered;<sup>73</sup>
- Having positive interactions with services who could offer practical resources and assistance; and
- Having broad social networks, beyond peers and those in similar vulnerable situations.<sup>74</sup>

These elements resonate strongly with stakeholder feedback. Services raised a number of key factors as being effective in terms of supporting this group of unaccompanied young people:

72. AHURI, 2010.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

## Early intervention

Despite the real vulnerabilities of this particular group of young people and the enormous challenges they face, it is important to recognise that they have genuine strengths, including strong motivations and desires to develop independence and make Australia their home. If there is adequate, early intervention support provided, these young people have the potential to achieve extremely positive things - not only their own lives but also in terms of their contribution to broader society. However, this requires resources at the 'front end' to ensure that they are able to make successful transitions into education, housing, employment and are supported to develop strong community connections. Direct service workers with this group of young people overwhelmingly remarked on their strong resilience, determination to study or find work, and the real contributions they have to offer to the community if provided with adequate support in these critical years.

*"Because we can see people for a number of years where needed, we're seeing that for many of them who arrived at the age of 15 or 16, by 19 or 20 they don't need us in the same way. Some really are doing better, especially if they get some employment... they've got enough English language, they understand the service system, they know who to go to. To have that confidence in using the system and the resources - that takes time. Many services are limited and restrictive in terms of age of eligibility and amount of 'service time' - it's wrong to assume that if they arrived at 17 at 18 they're ready to do it on their own.. some young people may need some support from time to time and need to be able to go away and come back when they are 18 or 19 or 20."*

– Counsellor, Community organisation,  
South East region

*"With this population, if we can get in early and have that targeted intervention, the trajectories for their futures are so positive for them."*

– Youth worker, South East region

## Flexible, generalist case work support up to the age of 25

Programs that have the potential for intensive or ongoing case work support appear to be essential for this group, particularly once the supports that may have been available for those under 18 years of age are removed. Federally funded programs such as Complex Case Support (CCS) and Reconnect appear to go part of the way to meeting the needs of more vulnerable unaccompanied young people, although both are time limited. Specialist Reconnect is also only able to work up until the age of 21, and has an explicit focus on re-engaging young people with family, which is not always appropriate for this group of young people.

There is the need for ongoing, generalist case work relationships for many of these young people, where they can engage and disengage as need be, depending on their level of independence and their given circumstances. One youth service working effectively with this group of young men highlighted the importance of flexibility and consistency in supporting this group of young people:

*"We can work with them up until age 25. We're trying to create spaces for them to land that are not going to go away. We're there for the long term, as they need us"*

– Youth worker, Settlement service, South East region

*Providing adequate support at these critical times of adolescence and transition creates a safety net, enabling them to settle and find long term housing, educational and employment pathways, encouraging greater independence in the long term.*

## Drop in youth spaces

Multiple agencies in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria highlighted the increased need for youth drop in spaces that can be accessed outside of the 9 – 5, Monday to Friday office based model. Youth drop in spaces have the potential to create a sense of community, increase accessibility, and enable young people to access support in a safe and youth friendly environment. This is particularly important for unaccompanied young adults who lack the support network and community that family can provide. Incorporating activities, and providing practical support and information that the young people desire is key to this kind of effective engagement. One service in the South East that uses this model reported highly positive outcomes in terms of engaging unaccompanied young adults.

*“If we weren’t drop in, we wouldn’t see these young men...”*

– Youth worker, Settlement service, South East region

## Collaboration and coordination amongst services

Coordination and collaboration amongst services is fundamental to ensuring positive outcomes for this group of young people. In both the South East and Ballarat, networks have formed around collaborating to support this particular group of unaccompanied young people, creating a space for coordination and planning. There is acknowledgement that the needs of these young people extend beyond the capacities of individual services, and that leveraging resources and coordinating support where possible creates far more effective outcomes for the young people concerned.

*“All the agencies in Ballarat are too small to do anything on their own, so I think there’s more of a sense of cooperation now amongst the agencies that’s made a big difference in terms of the changes going on in the community. As a collective we’ve got a lot better opportunity to make a difference than trying to work in isolation – I think that’s what’s making the difference. Everybody’s trying to do a little bit, and I think it’s starting to amount to quite a bit.”*

– Team leader, Community service organisation

## Mentoring and building connections with the broader community

In the absence of family, having strong community connections, mentors and friendships can go part of the way in attempting to fill the large gap that can exist for unaccompanied young adults. It also acknowledges that services, although critical at points in the journey, are also restricted in the role they play to holistically support young people for the long-term; services cannot take the place of a family or friends.

In this sense, strong and broad social networks can play a vital role in supporting good settlement outcomes for unaccompanied young adults. Services viewed these connections as critical in terms of supporting successful transitions to independence, as well as supporting overall wellbeing, reducing social isolation, and opening up future opportunities.

*“[What has worked is] where young people have really connected with the community, whether it be through education, socially, recreation – where they can build strong connections beyond their peers. For example, those who have managed to moved in with an Australian family and connect with a broader cohort beyond their immediate community – there have been some amazing outcomes”*

– Team leader, Community health, Ballarat

Supporting the establishment of peer relationships between these refugee young people and the broader Australian community is one positive way of building connections, highlighted by programs such as UCan2, delivered by Foundation House and CMY. The friendships developed between young people and mentors can often remain intact years after the program itself has ended, expanding the young persons’ social networks beyond their immediate circles.

## Case study: UCan2

UCan2 is a joint initiative of Foundation House and the Centre for Multicultural Youth. Ucan2 aims to facilitate and support the social inclusion of newly arrived young people of refugee background (16-26 years) in all aspects of community life by strengthening:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social connections and networks
- Access and engagement in education, training and employment
- Cooperation between providers of education, social support, training and employment.

The Ucan2 project recognises the need to provide additional support for young people (16 – 25 years) who are newly arrived to Australia from refugee backgrounds, as they make their transitions through the post compulsory school, training and tertiary sector, and aims to contribute to their recovery and integration.

The volunteer component is extremely important and supports all aims of the Ucan2 project. CMY and Foundation House have adopted a volunteer model that focuses on connecting young people together from different cultural backgrounds, and providing role modelling, sharing of experiences and social connectedness. Volunteers are actively encouraged to share their experience, actively participate and build relationships with the young people offering support, friendship and fun in a sensitive manner.

Although peer relationships are important, there is also a critical role for older members of the community to play in the lives of these unaccompanied young adults. There is an absence of 'uncles' and 'aunts' and parental figures in their lives, which mentoring programs could go a small part of the way to addressing. Some services had observed successful mentoring programs where young people were connected with an Australian family, and five years on are still invited to their home for dinner and welcomed into their homes as a family friend.

*"They need both – peer mentors and youth workers – but also older adults that can tell them to do the right thing. Sometimes they do want to be told. That's adolescence – finding their boundaries."*

*- Youth worker, Settlement service, South East region*

*"I've sometimes thought with these boys – you know how there is the big brother big sister program – well you almost need a big auntie or uncle program. And it's not always a peer or someone who's a few years older. It's an older auntie or uncle that can listen to them, provide advice or discipline."*

*- Youth worker, South East region*

It is worth considering how community resources and the voluntary sector could be drawn upon to a greater extent to help provide the social capital and connections that these young people desperately need. Services identified that there is strong interest from the broader community to support these young people, and that community goodwill could be utilised to a greater extent.

*“Australian families really want to be involved – particularly with this client group of unaccompanied young people. How can we strengthen those relationships? And how can the young people benefit from the goodwill of the community as well?”*

– Youth worker, South East region

*“That’s what we want – community. That’s what these boys don’t have. It keeps coming back – relationships, community and their families here.”*

– Coordinator, CMY, South East region

### **Using social media to strengthen social connections and share information**

Social media was identified as an area that could be explored in greater detail in terms of building social connectedness, maintaining connections with family overseas and increasing unaccompanied young people’s access to accurate information and support. For instance, the UCan2 program has a Facebook page that allows young people to communicate outside of the weekly program, and build connections with other participants and mentors.

*“It gives you access to people when you’re feeling like you need to speak to someone, and people do respond at all times of the day and night – so it’s a nice extension of the community created [through the program].”*

– Manager, Educational service, South East region on the UCan2 facebook page

Similarly, the South East Local Learning and Employment Network is developing online platforms to specifically engage this group of young people in terms of information around education and employment pathways, in an attempt to combat some of the exploitation and confusion that can exist surrounding employment rights and educational pathways.

### **Case Study: South East Local Learning and Employment Network – Internet project**

The South East Local Learning and Employment Network (South East LLEN) has employed an Afghan woman as a part-time project worker to develop up an internet resource in several languages to specifically target unaccompanied young people in the region. Most probably the project will take the form of a blog and Facebook page. Initially it will provide information around education, training and employment pathways. With time, subject to funding, SELLEN hopes it could also include other topics such as health and housing and legal issues. The aim is to develop an interactive platform where young people can post questions, discuss issues and obtain accurate information.

So far the South East LLEN has held focus groups with unaccompanied young people in the region to develop the idea. They have observed 100% internet and Facebook use amongst the young people consulted. The South East LLEN intends to trial this approach, with the idea of obtaining further funding to expand the sites beyond just education, training and employment to meet the multiple needs this group of young people face.

Social media and access to the internet is also crucial for unaccompanied young adults in terms of maintaining contact with family members overseas. Access to Skype and Facebook are therefore extremely important in providing holistic support, which could be facilitated through ensuring that free access to internet and computers are available through community hubs or youth drop-in spaces.

### **Sport, recreation and the arts**

Sport, recreation and the arts provide a critical vehicle for young people to engage in activities that promote health and wellbeing, build trust and social connections, and provide valuable skills that can be applied in other areas of life. Multiple services cited sport, recreation and camps as being an effective way of engaging and supporting this group of young people. Sport and recreation can also can be an avenue for meeting other critical needs of the young

people concerned, such as providing mentoring, employment pathways, and building a sense of belonging.

*"We find that through our sport programs, the coaches often play a mentor role – we support the coaches so they can play a support role as an older male in the young men's lives... We're trying to make it about more than sport... So we've got 12 young men doing their soccer referee qualification which means they can earn legal cash in hand as it's classed as a hobby. They're covered by insurance by the Football Federation Victoria and the refereeing organisations, so creating those pathways, those coaching qualifications so... at least there's an opportunity."*

*Sport and recreation officer, CMY, South East region*

The costs of participating always need to be taken into account for refugee young people, but particularly for those under significant financial stress. Free, regular and unstructured opportunities for young people to play sport and participate are extremely important in creating accessibility. Similarly, opportunities to enter formalised clubs and teams need to be created, that account for young people's financial limitations or allow for a varied fee structure according to individual circumstances.

*"We can find clubs but it is very expensive. I asked my youth worker to help me join an indoor soccer club, but she said it was very expensive for me. I said I can't afford the money with my payments of Centrelink – I can't go there."*

*- Unaccompanied young man, Afghan background*

Stakeholder consultations also raised the idea that more could be done using music and the arts to support and engage this group of young people, but staff were clear that programs needed to be tailored to their cultural needs. For example, the young men concerned are often passionate about music and dance, but have a preference for their own cultural influences in contrast to many 'mainstream' youth arts programs that may focus on rap or hip hop.

## Recommendations:

1. Increase the opportunity for unaccompanied young adults to reunite with family through:
  - » Removing the numerical link between the SHP and the onshore program.
  - » Reviewing the restriction placed on family reunion through the Special Humanitarian Program for young people arriving onshore post 13 August 2012, given the negative impact it has upon emotional, financial and educational wellbeing of unaccompanied young people, and their subsequent increased reliance on government funded services.
  - » Increasing opportunities for family reunion through the Migration Program, by waiving the visa application fees and lifting the bar on access to social security for people sponsored by unaccompanied humanitarian young adults.
2. Increase the effectiveness of government funded youth services to meet the needs of unaccompanied young adults by:
  - » Increasing the age cut off of government funded youth services such as Youth Connections and Reconnect to 25 years;
  - » Ensuring any future youth-specific programs that support young people in education, training and employment pathways, fund specialist programs that meet the specific needs of young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds. This would mirror the Reconnect Specialist program funded – a demonstrated model achieving good outcomes for this client group.
  - » Investing in youth drop-in models in areas with large numbers of unaccompanied young people, built around activities and support that the young people view as valuable. This will assist in strengthening overall engagement, provide place-based support, reinforce early intervention approaches, and provide a ‘safety net’ where young people can reconnect as needed. Successful models of engagement for this group of young people have involved spaces that provide sport and recreation activities, legal advice, computer and internet access and employment assistance.
  - » Facilitating stronger partnerships between mainstream youth services and settlement services, to better meet the needs of unaccompanied young people aged 18 – 25 and leverage the potential support available. This could involve:
    - ◇ Localised partnership responses, such as Local Action Plans, focussed on this specific group of young people; and
    - ◇ Training and building the capacity of mainstream agencies to better understand the unique needs, experiences and cultural backgrounds of these young people.
3. Increase the funding of the youth stream within the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) to specifically target this group of young people, in order to meet their often intensive needs and enable them to gain the independent living skills they need, as noted in in David Richmond’s Review of Humanitarian Settlement Services.<sup>75</sup> This should involve both intensive case work and community development approaches, with an open door policy that allows young people to access support as needed up to the age of 25.
4. The Federal Government coordinate and facilitate planning mechanisms for collaboration across the three tiers of government to assist smoother transitions into and out of settlement services such as Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (HSS) and Settlement Grants Program (SGP).

75. Richmond, David. 2011, Review of Humanitarian Settlement Services: Performance Measures and Contract Management, p. 10 – 11. <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/find-help/hss/review-of-hss-richmond.pdf> Accessed 27.5.13.

5. Pilot and resource pre-employment programs in areas with high numbers of unaccompanied young adults, which integrate literacy and numeracy training, career pathways counselling, introduction to workplace culture, information regarding rights at work and practical support with actually securing employment.
6. Develop targeted health responses in regions with high numbers of unaccompanied young adults that are refugee, youth and gender specific, including:
  - » Establishing male youth refugee health nurses to address both physical and sexual health needs, in response to the high numbers of young men that fit this demographic. This builds on the success of existing refugee health nurses in Victoria;
  - » Resourcing youth mental health providers, such as Headspace, to more effectively engage and work with unaccompanied young adults from refugee backgrounds. This requires time and resources, including training, capacity building, and potentially restructuring service delivery models to overcome existing barriers.<sup>76</sup>
7. Investigate and pilot new approaches to mentoring that connect 'aunt and uncle' mentor figures with unaccompanied young adults over a sustained period of time. This will require adequate screening, training and ongoing support for the volunteer mentors, with the aim of building an informal family around the young person, whilst increasing both social networks and social capital.
8. Increase opportunities for unaccompanied young people to access sport and recreational opportunities, by:
  - » Continuing to work with State Sporting Associations to increase local clubs/ associations inclusiveness of young people from refugee backgrounds;
  - » Advocating for federal and state government sport and recreation departments to support State Sporting Associations to develop multicultural sports and recreation broker positions, to increase access for refugee young people; and
  - » Creating targeted funding for multicultural youth arts based programs, to encourage broader participation, development of social connections and overall wellbeing.
9. Develop longitudinal research and data collection on onshore unaccompanied young people (both UHMs and those aged 18 – 25) in order to measure settlement outcomes and inform good practice.

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76. Colucci et al. 2012b, p. 29.



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