

“The people they make us welcome”

A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR NEWLY ARRIVED YOUNG PEOPLE



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Key author: Faorligh Hunter

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The Centre for Multicultural Youth

CMY is a Victorian not for profit organization supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. CMY believes 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. This is reflected in CMY's 25 years of working with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, in order that they might become connected, empowered and influential Australians.

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Introduction

Australia has a long history as a settlement destination for migrants and refugees. Our population is now one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse in the world. This paper explores how well newly arrived young people are settling by exploring their sense of belonging in the Australian community.

The task of 'finding one's feet' and place in a new country is often focused on assisting newly arrived families and young people to access tangible supports, such as enrolling at school, learning English, accessing income support, and finding stable housing. The less tangible aspects, such as building social connections and a sense of belonging in a new country, can sometimes be overlooked as significant elements to settling in well. However the degree to which newly arrived young people are able to build a sense of self and social connectedness in Australia has a profound impact on other aspects of their settlement and overall wellbeing.

As a result of the migrant and refugee journey, young people's established social networks that previously provided a sense of belonging and connectedness, are disrupted. At the same time, their attachment to place is affected. For those from refugee backgrounds, their sense of belonging has come under threat as a result of the refugee experience, impacting on connection to family, peers, local community and country of origin (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett, 2010). Yet a sense of belonging has been strongly associated with health and wellbeing, and its absence, with negative health and social outcomes (Gifford, Correa-Valez & Sampson, 2009; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). An individual or community's sense of belonging also has benefits for the wider Australian community as it contributes to community cohesion, economic outcomes and purposeful multiculturalism. Thus finding a sense of belonging for young people in their new home is a significant element of settling well, supporting the ability to make successful settlement transitions.

For newly arrived young people, finding a place in the wider community can be influenced by a range of factors, including the public discourse on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers both locally and globally. The public discourse on a global 'war on terror', combined with exclusionary discourses around Australian identity have created a challenging set of conditions for newly arrived young people to feel welcome in their new home (Mansouri and Skrbis 2013). It is in this context that young people must navigate multiple identities and attempt to carve out a sense of self and belonging in the Australian community.

The findings in this paper come from surveys with 15 young people, focus groups of 25 young people, and three interviews with service providers that were conducted in late 2014. They indicate that newly arrived young people are fairly positive about their experiences of belonging in Australia, though it's not without its challenges. Although the sample size is relatively small, it provides an important building block in understanding the way in which a sense of belonging impacts on young people's settlement overall. The young people consulted identified key contributing factors that both support and inhibit a sense of belonging and provide insights into the ways in which they navigate their place in the Australian community.

Key Findings

The key findings in this paper are divided into two sections. Firstly there are findings about the factors that contribute to a sense of belonging - things that help newly arrived young people with a migrant or refugee experience feel that they belong. Secondly, there are findings about the factors that undermine or diminish their sense of belonging. It is important to note that this paper focuses on young people who have recently arrived in Australia which may differ from the experiences of young people who have lived in Australia for more significant amounts of time. A sense of belonging, along with a range of other skills and knowledge, may change over time. However it should also be noted that several of the focus group participants had lived in Australia for seven or more years, which allowed them to reflect back on their experience when they were more recently arrived.

Factors that support a sense of belonging include:

- Experiences of welcome or practical help provided by members of the broader community
- High levels of cultural diversity in their local community or school environment
- A sense of safety
- A sense of freedom – the ability to exercise choice and agency in their lives

Factors that diminish a sense of belonging include:

- Experiences of racism and intolerance, particularly religious intolerance
- Stereotypes and ignorance towards their homeland and their experiences
- Experiencing partial belonging - not achieving a sense of belonging in both family/ culture of origin and the broader Australian community

In terms of contributors to belonging, warm and helpful interactions with members of the public is an important aspect for newly arrived young people in feeling welcomed and accepted in their new environment. Additionally, being in a culturally diverse environment (such as a school or local neighbourhood) serves as a key factor in the experience of belonging. The consultations conducted for this paper indicated that the more culturally diverse the environment, the stronger the sense of belonging felt by newly arrived young people.

Multiculturalism, in terms of being able to maintain one's cultural identity whilst embracing a shared commitment to a new homeland, has a very real meaning in newly arrived young people's lives. It directly relates to the ability to belong multiple spheres – such as with family, peers, a cultural and/or religious community and the broader community. In reality this can be a complex and challenging process. Young people must at times navigate competing expectations that can exist between cultural and family expectations with that of their own, their peers and the broader community. In many instances a gulf can develop between young people's desire for 'freedom' and personal agency versus meeting family expectations and obligations. This is all in the context of the significant changes that occur both in adolescence and during the process of acculturation, as they adapt to a new country, language and new set of cultural values.

Findings also highlight the way in which exclusionary behaviour that inhibits young people from being able to express their (multi)cultural and religious identity can have an eroding

effect on belonging. Young people explained that stereotyping and racism made them feel they did not belong, and identified that it occurs across a range of spheres from within their peer groups, to the school environment, the media and broader community. Stereotyping and racism also directly impacts on a sense of safety – a key factor that young people identified as helping to build a strong sense of belonging. The more young people from newly arrived backgrounds experience these kinds of exclusionary behaviours, the less safe they feel in their environment. Young people of Muslim background (particularly young women) raised this as a key concern, in terms of public anti-Muslim sentiment negatively impacting on their sense of safety and belonging.

The key arenas of school and family were also identified as playing particularly important roles in newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging. This echoes several key agents of socialization, being that of family, school, peers and media (Furze, Savy, Brym & Lie, 2011). Findings also suggest that the local neighbourhood is a significant site related to young people's sense of connection or exclusion, supported by Jacobowicz's (2014) research that local spaces and the neighbourhood provide a bridge between home cultures and the broader world, "contributing to a range of positive aspirations and fluid identities" (Jacobowicz, 2014, p5).

Belonging and settling well

A sense of belonging has been defined as the perception of being indispensable and of value to a social system, and of being a recognised and accepted member of that community (Anant, 1966 in Tovar, 2013). Other definitions centre upon the importance of relationships; the need for ongoing relational interactions that reinforce an experience of being a part of something greater than the individual (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The desire to belong is a "powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995 p497).

Establishing a sense of belonging is essential for newly arrived young people's settlement in a new country, and is strongly linked to health and wellbeing outcomes (O'Sullivan & Oliff, 2006; Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson, 2009). A sense of wellbeing and connectedness is a key measure of successful settlement (O'Sullivan, Oliff & Francis, 2006, p15). Research highlights that predictors of wellbeing for migrant and refugee youth in Australia are "those that can be understood to promote a sense of belonging, becoming at home, being able to flourish and become part of the new host society" (Coreea-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010, p.1406). Having a supportive, reciprocal social network has been associated with strong health protective factors, such as feeling cared for, loved and valued (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003 in VicHealth, 2005). Additionally, experiencing exclusion is known to have negative impacts upon health, adjustment and wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

For young people from refugee backgrounds, establishing a sense of belonging in their new country is especially important. The very nature of the refugee experience is one of being excluded, where a sense of belonging to family, community and country has come under significant threat (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010). Positive settlement in Australia for young people then is inextricably connected to a sense of belonging amongst family members, peers, their own cultural community and the broader community. In this context, newly arrived migrant and refugee young people's experiences of belonging are unique. Not only are they navigating the significant changes that occur during adolescence, but are doing so in a new country, culture and language, with the need to establish new

supportive relationships and a sense of place. Despite this, research around young people's experiences of belonging are limited; although we "know a lot about youth transitions ... we know less about how young people belong" (Wyn, in O'Sullivan, Oliff & Francis 2006, p27).

The notion of belonging is complex and multidimensional for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and is intricately connected with issues of identity. Individual and group experiences of belonging and identity can be shaped by the formal and informal networks young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds build in a variety of different contexts (Mansouri and Skrbis, 2013). It informs the way young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds choose to connect with others:

"Feelings of belonging had a huge impact on the types of networks young people wanted to be involved in and the ones they actually participated in. Making friends and meeting people with similar interests were important" (Parides, 2014, p13).

Everyday expressions of belonging for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds – such as making friends, claiming space to engage with these friends, and participating in specific cultural or religious events – reveal a multiplicity of identifications from upon which to draw (Moran, 2012). The identities of migrant and refugee young people are both fluid and hybrid. These multiple identifications can at times result in newly arrived young people experiencing a strong sense of belonging in one sphere of their lives, whilst feeling displaced in another. Alternately, they can become quickly adept at fluidly navigating different contexts and feeling equally at ease in diverse settings. As described by the WA Office of Multicultural Interests (2009),

"Young people can have "multiple belongings" that allow them to participate in the wider community in a multitude of ways, and are influenced by their cultural background, age group, religion, location and friendships" (WA Office of Multicultural Interests, 2009, p17).

Other literature highlights the relationship between belonging and attachment to place, a sense of safety and issues of public perception. Youth-centred views of social capital include experiences of belonging as a key dimension, and highlight its connection to place:

"Schaefer-McDaniel (2004) in her review of social capital has argued that for youth three dimensions are crucial: their social networks, interactions and sociability; their levels of trusts and reciprocity in peer and community relations; and their sense of belonging and attachment to place" (Hill & Bessant, 1999, in Jacobowicz, 2014, p7).

The association between belonging and feeling safe has also been raised by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in both consultations for this paper, and in other contexts. There are many indications that safety is a foundational element to belonging:

"You know when you belong because you feel safe, and no matter where you are you know that there's a place where you can go to and people will like you for who you are." (Young person - Department of Social Services, 2011).

In addition to these aspects, newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging can be significantly impacted upon by broader factors, such as public perception.

"For young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, however, their sense of belonging and ability to participate in the wider Australian community can be affected by the perceptions of its members. This can manifest in stereotyping and is a major contributing factor to experiences of marginalisation" (Office of Multicultural Interests, 2009, p17).

A Melbourne based study amongst newly arrived young people in Australia revealed relatively high levels of belonging (Gifford, Correa-Valez & Sampson, 2009). However throughout the course of the study, experiences of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or colour in Australia increased over time, negatively impacting on how young people view their place in the community (Gifford, Correa-Valez & Sampson, 2009). Follow on studies reveal that perceived discrimination still has powerfully negative impact on young people's subjective health status and happiness eight years after settlement (Correa-Valez, Gifford & McMichael, 2010).

Similarly, a 2009 report in Australia concluded that for young people, being a newly arrived migrant was the strongest predictor for experiencing racism and social exclusion (Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan & Taouk, 2009). This research highlighted a strong relationship between experiencing racism and exclusion with a sense of not belonging in Australia, fear of being verbally or physically attacked, not wanting to attend school and having very low levels of trust with anyone who is not a family member (Mansouri, et al. 2009). Experiences of discrimination such as these can result in social exclusion, representing a powerful form of structural violence that threatens the successful integration and settlement of young people in Australia (Gifford, Correa-Valez & Sampson, 2009). Experiences of marginalisation have been shown to often result in withdrawal or antisocial behaviour (Mansouri, et al., 2009).

Related to the notion of belonging, the media has a significant influence over the way in which young people view their place in the community, and their experience of belonging; "In the main, media images of people of ethnic, cultural, and/or religious diversity are associated with those of social conflict and social problem" (Reid et al. in DEECD, 2011, p103). Research by the Foundation for Young Australians highlights that more than one in five (21%) respondents experienced racism in the media (FYA, 2009). Additionally, the negative portrayal of African Australians by mainstream media has been highlighted as a major obstacle to acceptance and integration within the broader Australian community (The Australian Human Rights Commission in CMY, 2014).

Currently, the public discourse and focus on Muslim young people is of particular concern. Research suggests that Australians of Muslim background experience high levels of racism and discrimination in Australia, along with those from Middle Eastern, African and Asian backgrounds (DEECD, 2011, p77). The Scanlon Foundation Survey found a distinct increase in negative views towards Muslims in 2014 survey data, with negative attitudes being five times higher towards those of Muslim faith compared with Christian and Buddhist faiths (Markus, 2014). In addition, reported experiences of discrimination on the basis of 'skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion' is on the increase (Markus, 2014, P19).

Newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging are important not only to the individual, but also to broader society. In a global context that at times questions the value and success of multiculturalism, it is important to develop a more nuanced understanding of how young people acculturate (Mansouri and Skrbis, 2013). Recent research conducted amongst young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds highlights the fact that a sense of belonging is a critical aspect of social cohesion (Mansouri and Skrbis, 2013), as does the Scanlon Foundation (Markus, 2014, p13). Similarly, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants (2003) recognizes the important link between good settlement and social cohesion:

"While settlement outcomes for most migrants are generally improving, there is a need for earlier, more focused, whole-of-government intervention to improve settlement outcomes for the settlement services target group (especially for newly arriving humanitarian entrants)"

and to support community harmony over the longer term" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p8).

A sense of belonging is clearly a complex, yet critical aspect of newly arrived young people's overall settlement in Australia. It speaks to identity, health and wellbeing, social connectedness, a sense of safety and a sense of place. Not only do experiences of belonging or exclusion impact upon young people as individuals, but they are intimately connected with broader issues of community harmony and social cohesion.

Methodology

A triangulated methodology was used to discover the experience of belonging for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. However it is important to keep in mind that the research represents a small sample which is not representative of all newly arrived young people. A sample group of young people (16) were surveyed with a consistent set of questions to establish potential trends/areas to focus on. Three focus groups were held (with a total of 25 participants) to flesh out the key concepts and areas related to belonging. Finally, targeted service provider interviews were held with services that work with significant numbers of migrant and refugee young people.

Literature Review

Both Australian and international literature was reviewed to construct a clear picture of existing understandings of belonging, how belonging interacts with other key social cohesion indicators, and why belonging is important. A detailed reference list can be found at the conclusion of this paper.

Survey

A survey was designed to assess key domains of belonging and trust. The participants in the survey were identified through CMY's networks. Using Survey Monkey, participants were able to complete the questions anonymously. Due to the time of year, the response rate was low. Additionally, several respondents chose to skip a number of questions. In response to this challenge, the survey sample was used as a tool to measure the consistency of themes arising in the focus groups, although there are still several areas of interest the survey highlights. The survey was structured to measure respondent's answers about levels of belonging, where they felt excluded, domains of trust, and several other aspects of belonging.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held in three different geographic locations in metropolitan Melbourne: a homework support group within a Secondary School in the Inner North, a homework support program in the West and a social soccer group that meets in the South-East to play in a 'pop-up' soccer field. The focus group discussions were guided by a set of consistent questions and transcripts were analysed for themes as well as unique observations/comments.

Service Provider Interviews

Service Providers were interviewed to ensure the small but in-depth samples used to inform this paper were consistent with larger numbers of young people accessing their services. These interviews also provided valuable insight regarding young people and belonging. The Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Whittlesea Community Connections and the Refugee Council of Australia were interviewed using semi-structured interview methods.

Survey Findings

The following section presents the survey findings on young people's experiences of trust and belonging. Although the sample numbers were extremely limited (16 young people responded), and not all questions were always answered by all participants, the survey provides a very brief snapshot as to how newly arrived young people experience belonging and highlight certain areas for further exploration.

Survey Demographics

The 16 survey respondents were aged between 11 and 26, with the majority falling between the ages of 19 and 24 years of age. The majority of respondents were male (82%) compared with females (18%). Respondents were very newly arrived, with 92% having arrived in Australia less than two years ago, compared with 8% having arrived between 2-5 years ago.

A sense of belonging

The majority of respondents identified with a strong sense of belonging. Over two thirds (71%) agreed with the statement 'I have a strong sense of belonging to the Australian community', whilst just under a third (29%) of respondents answered 'unsure' or 'strongly disagree'.

Similarly when asked to respond to the statement 'It is important to me to feel like I 'belong' to the Australian community', 71% again answered agree with a total 29% responding either strongly disagree or unsure. This is consistent with the focus groups, with a slightly higher percentage of focus group participants identifying that belonging was important.

Most of the young respondents (71%) felt like the Australian community has a positive image of newly arrived young people. This is contrasted with their responses to the statement that 'I feel like the Australian community is welcoming to newly arrived young people and their families', with over half (56%) of respondents reporting they were 'unsure', 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'. Focus group participants supported these findings; although they were happy overall with the way Australia has treated them, they did identify a significant number of exceptions to this.

The sites where young people noted they experience a lack of belonging were somewhat surprising. Over two thirds (71%) of participants identified the neighbourhood being the place that they don't feel they belong, despite this being a place that many focus group participants identified as a site that helped them feel like they belonged. This perhaps suggests that the neighbourhood is an important site – as a place that can foster either a sense of belonging or exclusion.

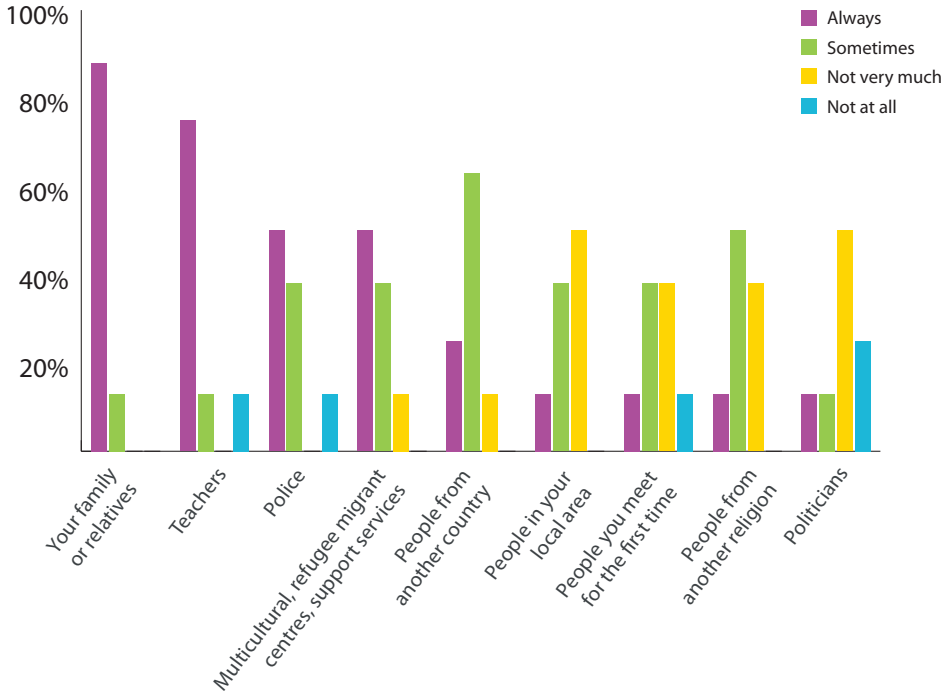
A little less than half the respondents (43%) also reported that the workplace was a place where they feel they don't belong. In addition, a smaller yet concerning number (29%) of respondents reported they did not feel like they belonged with their family – indicating these areas require further exploration.

Figure 1 below is perhaps the most interesting of the survey results. It indicates high levels of trust in family, teachers and multicultural/refugee/migrant support staff, as well as the police. The groups that elicit the least amount of trust are 'politicians', 'people from another religion', 'people in the local neighbourhood', and 'people you meet for the first time'. This finding was supported through the focus group discussions, where young people identified teachers and family as significant facilitators of a sense of belonging, with peers being potential sources of both positive and negative contributors towards belonging.

Figure 1

Q 11. Can you tell me how much you trust each of these groups?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 8



Summary

Although the survey attracted a small sample size, the results suggest that many newly arrived young people do have a sense of belonging to the broader Australian community, and that this broader sense of belonging is important to them. However it is worth noting that even amongst this small sample, some young people also experienced strong feelings of exclusion or uncertainty as to their place in the Australian community. Although most respondents felt that the Australian community has a positive image of newly arrived young people, they were less certain that the Australian community was welcoming of newly arrived young people and their families. There are also particular places young people may experience a stronger or weaker sense of belonging. Feelings of 'not belonging' were most likely to be experienced in the local neighbourhood, followed by places of work and to a smaller degree, with family.

The survey also highlighted that newly arrived young people have varying levels of trust in those around them. Family/relatives and teachers rated most highly in terms of young people's trust levels, while politicians, new people, people in the local area and people from another religion rated lowest. This suggests that there is much work to do in terms of building trust amongst people in local neighbourhoods and with those from a different religious background.

Focus Group findings

Demographics of focus group participants

Over the three focus groups, in depth discussions were held with 25 young people from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Ethiopian, Afghan, North Sudanese, South Sudanese, Malaysian, Fijian Indian, Somali and Burmese. The majority of young people who participated in the focus groups were between 16 to 17 years of age. There were also a significant number of young people aged 18-20, and two young people who were aged 22 to 25 years old.

The gender breakdown was almost even, with slightly more young male participants than female participants.

Approximately 50% of focus group participants had been living in Australia for between two and seven years, with several participants (16%) having been in Australia for less than a year. A number (36%) of participants had been in Australia for longer than seven years, which allowed for retrospective input from their more settled experience on what it was like to be newly arrived.

Focus group findings: factors that support a sense of belonging

The focus group discussions with young people identified a range of factors that support belonging. For the purpose of this paper, these are categorised into core contributing factors. Four key contributing factors were identified and are detailed below.

1. Receiving help or welcoming gestures

"Some say it's being part of a certain school or community program. Others say it's the kindness of one person. When young refugees are asked what has most helped them to settle in Victoria it is often one, or both, of these things" (Ryan, 2012).

When asked the question 'what makes you feel like you belong?', focus group participants articulated the importance of face-to-face interactions with the public. For example, one young person stated "I don't know, probably just like when you talk to somebody and they are nice to you ... yeah probably that type of stuff". Another explained "like being on the road and people smile at you".

Focus group participants identified situations where gestures of help, support and welcome had made all the difference:

"Australian people ... when you don't understand the language ... they help you. Like with the tram I went past the stop and I was lost ... I got off in Docklands ... I ask the lady ... I don't know, only a few words ... she helped me, she showed me how to get where I need to go ... that time I felt comfortable because I know people will help me ... the people they make us welcome."

Research confirms the importance of individual responses from general members of the public in terms of welcoming behaviour (Ager & Strang, 2008). Saberi (2014) emphasises that interacting positively with newly arrived young people and developing trust is one of the best ways to support them.

Another participant when asked if they had experienced racism reported "no I didn't find one like that ... people say, just say welcome, welcome to our life, welcome to our country". Other young people compared the different experiences they had on arrival in Australia with experiences in transit countries:

"I thought it was easier actually cause I started to learn and I started to adapt ... learn new things obviously about how people live ... culture, the multiculturalism that we have here, where I came from ... I lived in Egypt ... but I was a foreigner there, I was not accepted, but here I'm accepted."

Participants were also asked if they thought having a sense of belonging was important and the unanimous response across all three focus groups was "yes – it is important". This is supported by the overall survey findings. Focus group participants placed a great deal of significance on belonging, illustrated in comments such as "it's important because if you belong whatever you do would be good reason, if you know where you belong you got identity" and "without belonging you probably feel isolated".

2. Living and studying in culturally diverse environments

A significant contributing factor that arose in each of the three focus groups was the importance of a being in a culturally diverse environment, while some responses highlight the discomfort often felt in spaces where cultural diversity was lacking. For example, one young person commented, "when I came during my primary school I didn't see people the same as me ... yeah I felt different". This is supported by Paridies' research on racism where young children commented in relation to a given scenario, that having other people with the same skin colour might help because "he won't be teased and he won't be the odd one out" (Paridies, 2014, slide 11). Other comments simply reflected that cultural diversity in general was important, such as they type experienced at English Language School: "most of the people here are from different countries ... like German, England ... in the first six months or so you feel at home, like you belong". A follow up question was asked in this focus group "so being in a multicultural environment helps you feel like you belong?" and the answer from the group was "it helps, yeah".

Young people in the focus groups also noted that "when we look at the big picture Australia everywhere we go we see different type of people. So it's better if we involve every kind of culture". Other young people talked about the importance of looking forward in terms of engaging with the multicultural communities they live in, "if he thinks he belongs to Kenya, then he'll be thinking "back then" and not be thinking that the communities here are any community".

Multiculturalism appears to be an important element of the lived experience of newly arrived young people, certainly in metropolitan areas, and can contribute significantly to their sense of belonging (ECCV, 2010). Research by Collins, Reid and Fabiansson (2011) amongst migrant youth in southwest Sydney reinforces this point. They suggest that taking "a more cosmopolitan approach to multiculturalism would assist in valuing the globalised, fluid, hybrid identities of immigrant youth and assist in relieving the nationalist anxieties about Australian cultural, linguistic and cultural diversity" (Collins et al., 2011, p92). Thus by building a strong multicultural community, we place greater value on the identities, skills and experiences of migrant and refugee young people, contributing to their sense of

belonging. Living in a culturally and religiously diverse society that celebrates what is both shared and different appears to be a contributing factor to newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging.

3. Feeling safe

The theme of feeling safe emerged through much of the focus group discussions, particularly with male focus group participants. Comments such as "safety you know, everywhere you go you don't have to scared someone is going to come and kill you or something, you know, more safety" remind us that profoundly traumatic experiences are often part of many young people's refugee journey. Young people spontaneously raised the issue of safety in response to questions about what made them feel like they belonged, suggesting this is a complex but important aspect of belonging. One young person commented, "In Australia we can find easy to [make] friends, no fighting ... it's good to be safe you know. I don't like this country for no reason, I like it because safety."

This resonates with findings from the recent Building a New Life in Australia longitudinal study with humanitarian migrants, which emphasised the importance of safety in settling well (AIFS, 2014). 'Feeling safe' was identified by over 70% of respondents as a key factor to their settlement in Australia (AIFS, 2014).

For some young people, a sense of belonging and safety was linked to feelings of confidence to engage with the broader community; "Yeah I think it is important [to belong] cause then they feel more confident". Some young people voiced the level of fear they had when they were very newly arrived simply when engaging in the world outside of their home: "When I go outside I am very scared. Scared of people on the bus, on the train". The same young person went on to reflect that now things are different: "The first time I was scared and after two years later I am happy. I got a lot of friends. The are very friendly." Another young person described this fear of the world outside as a form of imprisonment: "Felt like you were in prison ... you couldn't get out like you used to ... because you were scared ... you didn't know how to engage with people."

4. 'Freedom': A sense of agency

Throughout the consultations, young people highlighted the fact that having a sense of 'freedom' or personal agency helped them experience a greater sense of belonging. This perhaps relates to the fact that previously, particularly for young people from refugee backgrounds, this may have been absent in their lives. This notion of 'freedom' appears to relate to a sense of basic rights, opportunity, and freedom of movement that comes with being part of the Australian community.

Some young people suggested this was about freedom to be yourself - "expressing yourself" - while others related it to the level of equality in the broader community: "More freedom... more dignity and respect here, opportunities equal". Other comments reflected the ability to have freedom of movement, "you can travel wherever you want", and others described how that experience of freedom grew over time: "When you live here longer so you feel more freedom you can do whatever you want, nobody care about you."

Service providers also highlighted the important role of spirituality in many young people's lives in terms of providing a sense of agency:

"She has a strong personal belief in her faith and in her right to speak and she seems to bounce back well. People just feed off that and respond positively. Faith can be a really powerful force to give young people that confidence." - Refugee Council of Australia

This notion of freedom as a contributing factor to belonging is also related to achievement; "I feel like whatever you put your mind to you can achieve." In some ways it echoed normal adolescent desires for greater agency in their own lives; "... I just want to be free, like in the air, I want to do what I want to do rather than be told what to do."

However young people identified that this personal 'freedom' also had to be juggled with the need to also comply with family wishes. Family were considered key people in fostering a sense of belonging for young people in both the survey and focus groups, suggesting these are critical relationships; "family help you feel like you belong." In CMY's exploration of young people's attitudes associated with social networks, 'family expectations and family values' were identified as a significant factor (Mansouri & Skrbis, 2013). These aspects were also identified in the focus group discussions. Young people discussed the fear and anxiety of their parents when they first arrived as a consideration they had to manage; "your parents would not let you out ... the only way you could go out was with them ... isolated ... I wanted to get out, but they were scared for me so I had to stay with them".

Focus Group Findings: factors that undermine a sense of belonging

This section of the paper outlines factors that were identified as hindering a sense of belonging. These are:

1. Racism and discrimination

Young people in the focus groups raised the issue of racism in response to the question of 'what makes you feel like you don't belong?'. As outlined by Parities (2014, slide 20), newly arrived young people "suffer racism to a much greater extent than other youth, including a compromised sense of belonging and absence of representations of national identity". Correa-Velez et al.'s (2015) research amongst refugee youth in Melbourne revealed that experiences of discrimination have a negative impact on the wellbeing of young people, not just in the initial years of settlement, but over longer periods of time. Racism and discrimination can be

"a key barrier to social inclusion, as it can diminish a young person's sense of connection and belonging to their community and broader society, reinforce the experience of marginalisation and isolation, and inhibit participation in education, employment or recreational activities"(Liddy, 2011, p8).

Despite its significant impact upon young people, many of the participants minimized their experiences with racism, saying things like "just things like cause I'm brown you know ... and sometimes comments about religion ... it's alright, you know, cause I'm Muslim but it's alright now" or "not thinking about that".

Several young people were specific about examples of interpersonal racism they or their families had experienced:

"Me and my family went on tram and we were speaking in our own language. And there was this random guy "Can you guys shut up! You are in Australia, speak English!"

"I was with a family ... they have their two kids ... the kids don't know nothing they are just walking ... they laughing and they happy ... and the people [walking past on the street] they say 'oh you are Muslim' ... and you don't know how to respond ... we don't talk to them, we don't even listen ... [but] the family start to think 'oh the kids are there' ... and they don't feel comfortable to go shopping or whatever"

"You see people on the train when they look down ... I don't sit next to them ... I just keep away."

Focus group participants identified that often it is other students who are the source of racist comments that undermine their sense of belonging. One young person highlighted the racism they observe at school: "there's a lot of racism ... like at my school ... people just stay in their ethnic groups, so there's a lot of racism ... I don't know why but they hate other groups, like they don't even know them, it's kind of weird." These findings are supported by previous CMY youth consultations where young people asserted that sometimes the main perpetrators at schools were other students (CMY, 2014a).

Young people also highlighted the impact of negative media commentary upon racism and discrimination in the community: "I think the media changed the people" and "like an American terrorist attack is given way more coverage here than a lot of other things and I don't really understand that people ask you to explain but you don't feel like you should have to explain yourself". The media can play a powerful role in shaping people's perceptions of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and thus their experiences of belonging:

"Experiences of racism can be explicit, including racial vilification and abuse, and implicit, including community attitudes and the representations of migrant and refugee young people in the media. The media commonly fails to recognise diversity or the achievements and strengths of multicultural young people and their communities" (Liddy, 2011, p7).

In one of the focus groups where the discussion of racism generated strong engagement from the focus group participants, a follow up question was asked – 'do you think things have changed at all?' They all agreed that instances of racism and discrimination had gotten much worse, commenting that it is a "major difference to six months ago".

Some of the focus group discussions emphasised that experiences of racism and discrimination can be painful and difficult to talk about; "I experienced a lot you know [racism?] yeah [can you tell us a bit more about that if it's ok with you?] I don't wanna think about that. Skip it." More than simply minimizing the impact (as described above) this response indicates that there is a deeper impact for some young people. These discussions were at times difficult for the participants, given that notions of equality and acceptance (components of belonging) are fundamental to our wellbeing.

Young people also articulated that the freedom to practice your religion without judgement or discrimination is related to a sense of equality and belonging:

"If they do something for certain people but not for you, you feel you didn't belong because you aren't treated equally to those people or like if you have your own religion but the country doesn't support that religion you feel like you don't belong there."

2. Stereotyping

In a similar vein to the experiences outlined above, stereotyping is a more subtle form of discrimination or exclusion and can undermine a young person's sense of belonging. In response to discussions about 'what makes you feel like you don't belong?', focus group participants raised the issue of stereotyping, particularly in relation to Muslim young people.

Generalisations or stereotypes based on an individual's appearance or cultural background can often be made by young people's peers or other students from their school; "they think whole of Asia is China". Mistaken identify was common among participants; "even me, everyone thinks I'm from Somalia but I'm from Ethiopia ... they don't know the differences between all the Africans". Some participants noted that even their friends can fall into making stereotypes or asking insensitive questions; "even my friends they judge me because I'm Muslim. They have no idea so they sort of ask me 'why are you wearing that scarf?"". Other responses revolved around the perception of Africa as a country and the limited view presented through the media of starving children and negative stereotypes "so people ask questions like 'do they have houses in Africa?"". One participant described being singled out because she was identifiably Muslim:

"I had a class at University where they were showing video on terrorists ... and then the teacher picked me asking how does it affect me because there were ladies in niqab, terrorists. I was like 'does it look like I'm wearing niqab? I don't have the same mindset so I don't know."

Several young people talked about taking a role in supporting tolerance, whether that be within their own friendship group, with other groups (in the school environment) or explaining aspects of their culture and religion to their friends. One young Christian participant talked about religion as a vehicle of peace and connectedness. Other young people talked about responding to their friend's frustrations in relation to both racism and stereotyping; "If I'm with my friends, I just try to keep them calm and ... we try to work with it, we try to encourage everyone ... if they want to speak, they speak with their foot [in the soccer]."

3. A partial sense of belonging

A strong feature of the discussions with service providers about what undermines belonging was the notion of partial belonging – young people who felt they belonged in one context, yet felt out of place in another. All three service providers consulted with highlighted this feature of 'multiple belongings' when describing examples of young people who were either at ease or who appeared to struggle with belonging. Those who had a strong sense of belonging appeared to experience it both within their own cultural group (whether this was a peer group, culture more broadly, or family unit) and within the broader Australian culture. In a sense, they were described as having the ability to navigate and belong in multiple worlds:

"He's happy he knows where to go to get support. He's very dedicated to his English, very well liked and with support services for example linked with us, with his teachers, he knows where to go. He's from an Afghan background and found a group of other members of the Afghan community to live with." - Whittlesea Community Connections

"He achieved in terms of lots of those markers in the broader community but also co-exists with that being essentially Ethiopian in his family relationships." - Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma

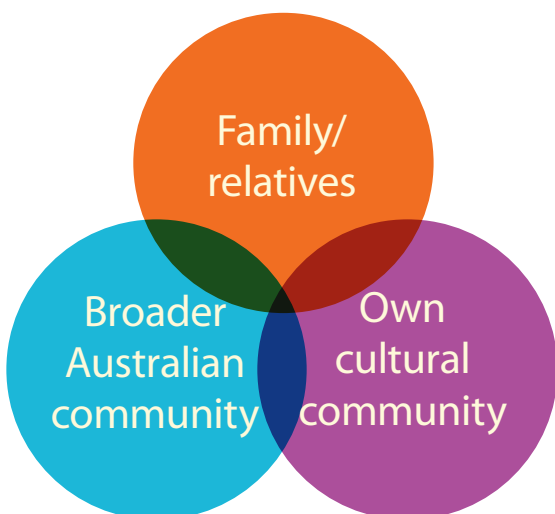
As identified by Yfoundation's paper on youth homelessness, "A physical house may not represent a home, however a young person's Home and Place may instead be represented by a particular place within Australia or belonging to a specific cultural group, defined by characteristics like language and religion or spirituality" (YFoundation, 2014). This notion of home and place appears to be influential in terms of newly arrived young people's sense of belonging. Those that have a weaker sense of belonging and struggle as a result, often appear to have only achieved a partial belonging – belonging in one sphere or another.

Some young people also expressed the importance of multiple belonging: "for me ... like it helps you if you belong just in your own group but then it doesn't help you with other people, you have to belong with everyone". Additionally young people identified different spheres of belonging, such as family, with their own cultural community and then the broader community. This is reminiscent of recent research that highlights the importance of connections with ethnic community, the broader community and the family/ neighbourhood as some of the key predictors of wellbeing for refugee youth in Melbourne after eight years of settlement (Correa-Velez, Gifford and McMichael, 2015). Several young people explained that having a sense of openness and positive connection with all of these spheres made for the strongest sense of belonging. This also supports the findings of Ager and Strang's (2008) around the importance of social connections and a sense of 'belonging' to understandings of integration – that both bonding (relationships with family and cultural community) and bridging (relationships with those in the broader community) are essential.

Of course, not all these spheres are present for all newly arrived young people. For example, unaccompanied minors lack the support and connection of family in Australia. Additionally, although it was not the subject of the discussion, it is worth noting that young people's international relationships (such as friends and family overseas) may also constitute another sphere where newly arrived young people experience a sense of belonging and connection. This may be particularly the case when family members are not present in Australia.

Figure 2 is a visual representation the three main spheres that focus group participants identified as being important to a having strong and holistic sense of belonging in Australia.

Figure 2: Young people's explanation of different spheres of belonging.



Sites of belonging for newly arrived young people

1. Family

Family was emphasised through the survey and consultations as playing a critical role in helping newly arrived young people feel accepted and secure. In terms of people who could be trusted, family members and relatives were rated highest by survey participants. Focus group members stressed that 'family' helped them feel like they belonged, and was identified as a core 'sphere' in terms of belonging. Despite this, the expectations and values of family members were sometimes experienced as restrictive by newly arrived young people (such as not being allowed to go out without parents), hindering their sense of personal agency and potentially impacting on their sense of connection with others. Thus navigating these competing needs and important relationships was highlighted as both a challenge and necessity.

This highlights the importance of family in terms of newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging, including the recognition that 'family' may constitute a broader set of relationships than may be present in the Western interpretation of the 'nuclear family'. Supporting young people to build and maintain strong connections to family must be integrated into service and program delivery that work with newly arrived young people.

2. The role of schools and education providers

This discussion highlights the important role that schools and educational institutions have to play in fostering a strong sense of belonging for newly arrived young people. Teachers were identified by focus group members as playing a very important role in supporting experiences of belonging; "my teachers make me feel comfortable". The survey also revealed that teachers were ranked second highest after family in terms of people that could be trusted. Additionally, schools were one of the only places not identified when young people were asked to name sites they felt they did not belong, suggesting that this is generally a space where they feel at ease.

Despite this, educational settings were discussed as sites where young people experience racism and stereotyping. This included individual interactions with other students, teachers or lecturers, and also peer group inter-cultural conflict between different ethnic groups. This suggests that schools and educational settings are critical spaces for newly arrived young people that can either contribute to or erode a sense of belonging. Teachers also have a very important role for helping newly arrived students feel welcome and accepted.

3. The local neighbourhood

The local neighbourhood also appeared to be a theme that emerged throughout the survey and focus group discussions. For survey respondents, this was cited predominately as an area they felt they did not belong. This contrasted with many focus group participants who identified the local neighbourhood a place they felt at ease. Research suggests that the local neighbourhood is an important site for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds; "In particular it is the neighbourhood and locality that provides the bridge between their home culture and the broader world, contributing to a range of positive aspirations and fluid identities" (Jacubowicz, 2014, p.5). Connection to place also was emphasized in recent research with refugee young people in Melbourne, with those who

had moved house at least once in the previous year reporting lower levels of subjective health status (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). For this reason Correa-Velez et al. (2015) advocate the importance of stable connections to place and community to refugee young people's overall wellbeing.

This also relates to findings from the Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) project in Victoria, which highlighted the importance of shared, local public spaces in addressing racism and discrimination (Vic Health, 2014). These findings indicate that the local area is a potential space to focus on to strengthen newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging.

Conclusion

This paper's findings indicate that a sense of belonging is an important aspect of newly arrived young people's positive settlement in Australia. It seems that many newly arrived young people do have a sense of belonging and believe this to be important, although they also experience exclusion at certain times and in particular contexts.

There are a number of factors that can contribute to newly arrived young people's sense of belonging, including the responses of members of the public towards them; being in a culturally diverse environment; having a sense of safety; and having a sense of 'freedom' or personal agency. Family and educational settings were also highlighted as playing an important role in helping newly arrived young people to feel they belong. Thus these are sites and relationships to build upon when working to strengthen newly arrived young people's sense of acceptance and connectedness.

Conversely, there are certain times and places where newly arrived young people report feeling excluded or like they don't belong. Factors that contribute to a lack of belonging include racism; stereotyping; and not being able to build strong connections both with family/culture of origin and the broader Australian community – experiencing only a partial sense of belonging. Some young people appear to be at greater risk of experiencing some of these negative contributors. For instance, young women of Muslim background in particular stressed the everyday reality of racism and stereotyping on their day to day lives. The survey findings also suggest that the places of work and the local neighbourhood are contexts that may require more attention. Additionally, trust may need to be built with people in local neighbourhoods and with those from different religious backgrounds.

These findings point to key areas for future focus on in terms of helping to strengthen young people's sense of belonging. Public discourse (including the media, politicians, and the broader community) with regards to refugees, asylum seekers and terrorism has a strong impact on young people's sense of place in the community. Simplistic and negative reporting can lead to stereotypes and breed fear and intolerance. This translates into newly arrived young people potentially feeling singled out, misunderstood, judged and ultimately like they don't belong in Australian society.

Addressing issues of racism and discrimination are critical to ensuring newly arrived young people feel welcome and that they are an important part of the Australian community. It is important to hold particular groups in mind who are known to be at greater risk of experiencing racism, such as young Muslim women, when designing interventions. Additionally, supporting young people to build stronger connections with their family and cultures of origin, whilst also building relationships with those in the broader community is important in developing a holistic sense of belonging – being able to integrate and inhabit multiple identities and belong in numerous spheres.

These findings strongly resonate with recent research around supporting the the settlement of young people from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne:

"Policies and programs that foster refugee young people's self-esteem and positive feelings towards their ethnicity (Mann et al., 2004), minimize relocation and support stable connections to place and community, promote social inclusion through tackling racism and discrimination (Fazel et al., 2012), and promote multiculturalism and support a strong sense of belonging to one's ethnic community are likely to enhance health and wellbeing of refugee youth over the longer term" (Correa-Valez et al., 2015).

In addition, this paper identifies a number of components of belonging for newly arrived young people that warrant further exploration. These include the role of safety, trust, and intra and inter-cultural relationships as they relate to young people's experiences of belonging. Further research could also be conducted into the particular arenas that appear to be important to newly arrived young people's experiences of belonging, including family, educational settings, and the local neighbourhood.

The way in which globalisation impacts upon newly arrived young people's sense of belonging would also warrant further exploration. Relationships with family and friends overseas have often a significant impact on the wellbeing of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Experiences of belonging in Australia may be increasingly dependent on their degree of connectedness with family and friends internationally.

Overall, there is a strong need for public education campaigns that address negative stereotypes and racial discrimination, to harness existing good will within the broader community, to celebrate multiculturalism, to build trust across diverse groups, and to support each member of the community to fulfill their potential. Newly arrived young people have a wealth of experience and potential to offer, and make significant contributions to their new home. Ensuring that they feel welcomed and like they belong is a great investment in the future health and wellbeing of our entire community.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen social cohesion by promoting the positive community benefits of welcoming and inclusive environments for all Australians

- a) That State Government scope and resource initiatives that promote stronger helping behavior within local communities, drawing inspiration from community-based initiatives such as 'Welcome to Australia'.
- b) That State Government conduct a public education campaigns around 'What does it mean to be Australian?', and the importance of inclusive and welcoming behaviour.

2. Recognise cultural diversity as a strong contributor towards a sense of belonging for newly arrived young people

- a) That State and Federal Government's strengthen multiculturalism by requiring government-funded programs to demonstrate engagement with culturally diverse populations and culturally inclusive practice.
- b) That local governments in areas with low levels of cultural diversity promote meaningful and genuine engagement with culturally diverse populations.

3. Resource youth-led anti-racism campaigns

- a) That local governments build on the success of public education campaigns, such as Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD)'s 'See beyond race' initiative, with young people's leadership and guidance.
- b) That State Government, in partnership with bodies such as Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, create media and other opportunities for young people to combat stereotypes and be heard by mainstream audiences.
- c) That State Government resource bystander action programs designed to equip and skill community members to challenge racism on a day to day level, including building a climate of visible support for bystander action (as advocated by VicHealth).

4. Invest in programs that focus on young people and community safety

- a) That Federal Government review how issues of community safety are addressed through settlement services with newly arrived young people and their families.
- b) That settlement, youth and family services integrate understandings and issues of safety when working with families and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This includes exploring notions of safety within Australia and the local area, support for parents to feel more confident with their children engaging in the broader community, and building relationships with key services that can protect and promote safety.
- c) That State Government identify and resource positive examples of youth-focused community safety programs.

5. Support newly arrived young people's sense of personal agency and freedom

- a) That State and local government strengthen and increase culturally relevant youth leadership opportunities, including training, forums, skill building and supported

youth-led initiatives.

- b) That State and Federal Government resource culturally relevant programs that effectively support parents and guardians in parenting adolescents in a new culture.

6. Support newly arrived young people's connection to their family and culture of origin

- a) That State, Federal and local governments resource initiatives that help young people strengthen their connections with their families and own cultural communities. This could include youth-led, arts based projects that allow for dialogue and increased understanding.
- b) That all levels of government and community services (particularly youth and family services) recognise the importance of working from a family focused and culturally informed framework when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, including the importance of supporting young people's connection to family and culture of origin. This should be in the form of professional development and training for staff, and organisational responsiveness in terms of policies, practices and procedures.

7. Build inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding

- a) That State and local government resource youth-led programs that work to build inter-cultural and inter-faith networks between newly arrived young people, and Australian born young people
- b) That State and local government resource whole-of-community and place-based approaches to strengthening intercultural relationships and celebrating cultural diversity.
- c) That State Government supports intercultural knowledge and understanding into the school curriculum.

8. For universities, government and services to conduct further research into:

- a) Newly arrived young people's experiences of trust and safety in the community as a core component of belonging, including successful models of how these can be strengthened.
- b) Initiatives that build positive intra and inter-cultural relationships amongst young people at the local community level, supporting a 'holistic' sense of belonging and strengthening social cohesion.
- c) The role of family, educational settings, 'place' and the local neighbourhood in migrant and refugee young people's experience of belonging.

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(03) 9340 3700
304 Drummond St
Carlton VIC 3053
cmy.net.au