

Forging futures:

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE SETTLING
IN VICTORIA ARE FARING



Summary

Ten years ago, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) published a paper titled *Settling In*. This report explored definitions and meanings of 'good settlement' for newly-arrived refugee young people making their home in Victoria. The authors of the paper reported that:

*"In the absence of early and adequate settlement support, the risk that young people will require assistance in the future to address issues such as homelessness, family breakdown, poor health, crime, drug and alcohol use and other social problems, is magnified."*¹



¹ CMY. (2006). *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*. Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth., p. 8

A lot has changed in the ten years since this report was published. The percentage of Victoria's population who are 12 – 24 years old has shrunk slightly but grown more diverse – with more Victorians now born overseas than a decade ago. Technology and globalisation have brought substantial economic, security and socio-political changes to Australia, our region and the world. These changes significantly transformed our daily lives – from education and work to travel and migration – and have fundamentally shifted how we think about security, immigration and our borders.

All of this is influencing the make-up of Australia's Migration Programme and national conversations around settlement, citizenship and multiculturalism. These are changes that are impacting upon the settlement supports, experiences and outcomes of young people settling in Victoria.

In this paper, we take a look back on the settlement experiences of young Victorians who arrived in Australia in the preceding five to ten years. Using the *National Youth Settlement Framework* as a guide to what successful youth settlement looks like, this paper explores a range of indicators to examine the settlement outcomes of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Victoria.

The paper explores the intersecting domains of settlement and how young people are experiencing the services and supports that are available to them, and provides insight into how services and supports are meeting the needs of young people settling in Victoria. A range of recommendations from young people for improving services and supports in each of these domains are documented.

What did we do?

We asked young people, in an online survey and face-to-face consultations, to tell us about their experiences during their first five to ten years in Australia. We asked them a range of questions about their social, economic and civic participation and physical and mental wellbeing.



We also asked them to tell us about their lives now – whether they feel like they belong in Australia, can access the services they need, and if they are confident to achieve the goals they have for the future.

We then looked at the results to see if there were any patterns and links between particular negative or positive experiences during a young person's first five to ten years after settling, and how they reportedly felt about their lives in Australia (their settlement outcomes) today.

What did we find?

Overall, what we found was that young people who faced significant negative experiences or barriers to settlement during their first five years in Victoria were much less likely to feel confident about the goals they had for the future or like they belonged in Australia ten to fifteen years post-settlement.

There were some factors or experiences during the first five years of settlement that appeared to negatively impact upon the outcomes of the young people we spoke to. Most evident were housing instability, financial insecurity and poor mental health. All three of these factors were related to poorer settlement outcomes for the young people we surveyed.

We also found that poor engagement with education and challenges finding work during the first five years in Australia were also more likely among young people who reported poorer settlement outcomes. This was also the case for those young people who reported poorer social connections during their first five years in Australia.

Factors (or experiences) during the first five years of settlement that appeared to positively impact upon the settlement outcomes of participants included higher English language proficiency and engagement in volunteering and community life. Reported 'sense of belonging' also increased with length of time in Australia among those we surveyed, with those who reported they felt comfortable expressing their culture or religion also more likely to report that they feel like they belong in Australia.

Where to from here?

The provision of accessible and timely support to young people, their families and communities during the early years of settlement is critical to supporting their full and equal participation in life in Australia. This paper provides a detailed insight into the interconnectedness of a range of factors that impact upon the settlement experiences and outcomes of young Victorians from refugee and migrant backgrounds. From the consultations, we have delved into these experiences to hear from young people about what they think can and should be done to better enable young people to settle well in Victoria. The paper draws on these suggestions and the survey findings to make a series of recommendations for government, services and the community. The recommendations aim to improve the settlement experiences, and long-term outcomes, of young people settling in Victoria.

Recommendations include:

- invest in the service system, including the development of a national youth settlement strategy;
- invest in the community, through targeted supports and programs that promote successful youth settlement;
- invest in young people, when they first arrive and over time, by strengthening multicultural youth work practice in Victoria.

Key findings

Seven out of ten young people report that they are doing well across all settlement outcome measures, but one out of four young people settling in Victoria do not feel that people from their own (or similar) cultural backgrounds are valued.

The young people we surveyed identified the following as protective factors (factors that promote settlement outcomes) during their first five years in Australia:

little or no experience of discrimination



English language proficiency



engagement in volunteering and community life



During their first five years in Australia, of the young people we surveyed:

76%

had a good or very good relationship with their family



60%

had friends who were there for them when they needed them (always or most of the time)



60%

had someone to go to when they needed help (always or most of the time)



20%

were volunteering



47%

rated their mental health as OK or poor



42%

experienced some housing insecurity



28%

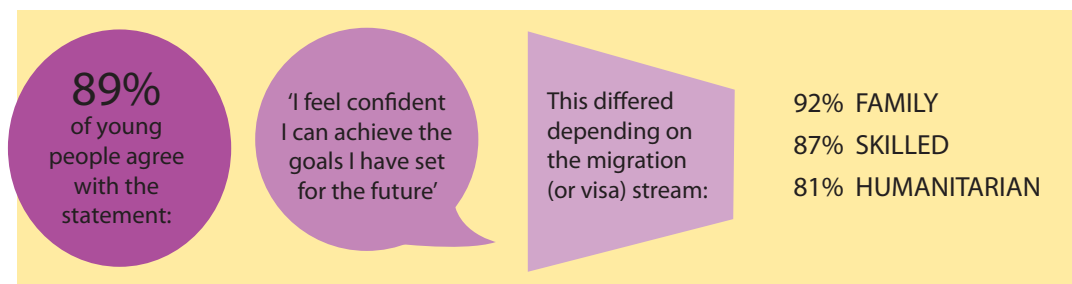
sometimes or rarely had enough money to pay for the things they needed





Housing instability and poor mental health were the two key factors that had the greatest negative impact on settlement outcomes. Young people who experienced these were also more likely:

- to not feel confident to achieve their goals for the future
- to not feel like they belong in Australia
- to feel as though people from their own (or similar) cultural backgrounds are not valued in Australia.



Length of time in Australia appears to impact upon outcomes on the settlement markers related to sense of belonging:

