

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

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

Updated 2020



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Purpose

This *Good Practice Guide* explores themes relevant to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities¹. It discusses strategies to enhance the accessibility and responsiveness of services for supporting good practice when working with this group of young people. This document was developed through a collaboration between the Centre for Multicultural Youth, the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and Carers Victoria.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

Carers Victoria is the state-wide voice for family carers, representing and providing support to carers in Victoria.

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak policy advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural organisations and communities in Victoria.

Background

Young people with caring responsibilities are young people up to the age of 25 years, who provide unpaid assistance to a family member or friend with a disability, mental illness, terminal illness, chronic illness, or an older person with care needs². Ten per cent of Victorian carers are under 25 and in 2018, there were over 71,600 young carers.³

Many young people with caring responsibilities provide a variety of caring duties for family and loved ones, including property maintenance, household management, interpreting English, intimate care tasks, and assisting with the social, emotional, medical and mobility needs of the person receiving care. Although providing care can be challenging, many young people report positive aspects. While young people with caring responsibilities often experience a sense of satisfaction with their caring duties, these responsibilities may also impact on young people's ability to maintain study, paid work and social relationships. There are financial implications for young people fulfilling a caring role for a parent or guardian. Many young people with caring responsibilities are unaware of the support to which they are entitled, or that it is acceptable to seek support.

- ¹ This practice guide will consistently use the terminology of 'young people with caring responsibilities' because evidence suggests that many people do not identify with the label of 'young carer'. However, 'young carer' is a term commonly used within the community sector.
- ² Department of Health and Human Services, 2018, *Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22*, p.7.
- ³ Department of Health and Human Services, 2018, *Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-22*, p.10.

Caring roles and the refugee and migration experience

Refugee and migrant young people are likely to be over-represented in terms of caring responsibilities, due to the higher prevalence of disability and illness in refugee and migrant families⁴. Second generation young people are slightly more likely to provide unpaid assistance to someone with a disability (six per cent), compared with five per cent of other young Victorians⁵. Young women are also slightly more likely to be in an unpaid caring role, with three per cent of both third-plus generation and overseas-born young women providing care, compared to two per cent of their male counterparts⁶. Despite their over-representation, many young people with caring responsibilities from refugee and migrant families remain 'hidden'⁷ from the community for a variety of reasons. These include community perceptions of illness and disability, lack of knowledge and engagement with services and supports, and the fear of unwanted intervention.

The challenges of adolescence can add an additional dimension of complexity for young people with caring responsibilities. In addition to the demands of commitments such as study, volunteering and employment, young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds may also be negotiating their own settlement issues. Some specific challenges they may face include:

- Negotiating identity in a new cultural context;
- Learning a new language;
- Transitioning from an English as a Second Language (ESL) school to primary or secondary school; and
- Increased significant responsibilities in their family and community; young people may have had to adopt adult roles and responsibilities during the resettlement process which in turn impacts the family dynamic.⁸

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

- Disrupted family roles and relationships;
- Disrupted or very limited schooling;
- Separation from friends and family; and
- The possible effects of torture and trauma. Trauma can result in anxiety; sadness; a sense of having no control over your life; fear and lack of trust.⁹

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2006, *Census of Population and Housing Australia*.

⁵ ABS, 2016 Census, *Unpaid Assistance to a person with a disability by Generation and Sex:15 to 24-year-old Victorians*.

⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth(CMY), 2016, *A Young and Multicultural Victoria: The 2016 Census*, p.47-48.

⁷ CMY, Carers Victoria and Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), 2011, *Discussion Paper: Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What Do We Know?*

⁸ CMY, 2015, *Good Practice Guide: Youth Work in the Family Context*

⁹ For more information on the refugee experience see Good Practice Guide: *Youth Work with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds*. <https://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Culturally-Competent-Youth-Work-2016.pdf>

Working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities in the family context

“Coming from a different cultural background, I think everyone should be treated equally, and not different. It doesn’t matter where you come from. I care for my parents, I care for my family. I learn from my caring experience. I am grateful and happy to have workers support me and offer me choices.” – Tenzin, 12, was born in Australia but identifies as being from a Tibetan background

Barriers to engagement with services

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

- Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may not identify as carers, and remain a ‘hidden’ group for a variety of reasons, despite being over-represented in statistics on young carers¹⁰. Many may ‘normalise’ the experience and not see their caring responsibilities as anything out of the ordinary. They may think for example, “I’ve always done this. This is what daughters do”. Understandings and expectations about caring will vary according to each individual family and their cultural backgrounds.
- Some families may be reluctant to allow their young person to engage with services that are not familiar within their cultural context. As service providers it is important to adopt an approach that is respectful of the family dynamics and of the unique culture within each young person’s family.¹¹ The person with a disability or health condition may not recognise or accept that they need, or are receiving care.
- The young person may be reluctant to say they are finding their caring responsibilities difficult.

10 Carers Victoria, 2017, *Young Carer Facts*, <https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/media/1150/young-carer-facts-february-2017.pdf>.

11 CMY, 2015, *Good Practice Guide: Youth Work in the Family Context*.

- There may be reluctance to seek or accept support due to a sense of shame in disclosing the illness or disability of a family member. It is important to take time in the engagement process to establish trust and rapport and to use a range of engagement approaches with the aim of building an effective working relationship with the young person and their family.
- Young people and families from refugee backgrounds in particular, may have experienced significant negative interventions from other governments and ‘authorities’. They may be anxious about further contact with services. It is also important not to assume that young people and their families are fully aware of how day-to-day systems operate in Australia such as public transport, education and Centrelink.

Practice response

Being a carer is draining, and it feels isolating at times when you feel like what you are doing is something “normal.” I never wanted to share with my peers, and would cry during school because of bottling everything up. Since having someone work with me, I am more confident to ask for help when I need it. Being understanding and open to listening as a worker is so, so important to me, and would be for hundreds of young carers going through difficult times at a young age. – Branidi, 19.

The practical tips given below are to guide both individual workers and organisations.

Some tips for workers:

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

- Listen to the young person and believe what they say, as they may offer insights into the most effective way to support them and their families. Young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities will often be very resilient and have highly developed skill-sets.
- Ask them about:
 - Their family situation, and how it impacts on their day-to-day life;
 - The services/support, if any, the person they are caring for is receiving, including from other family members, friends, their local community or other services; and
 - Their priorities and what would help, and do some joint problem solving.
- Avoid directing your questions towards identifying and labelling young people as ‘young carers’, when seeking to establish whether young people have caring responsibilities. This is a label many young people and their communities may find unhelpful. Disclosure isn’t the goal in itself. The goal should be to understand what is happening for the young person and their family, and what supports would make things better.

- Be open and non-judgemental, allowing the young person to teach you about their family's particular expectations of the caring role. Be curious about cultural understandings and do not assume that all individuals or generations in the family have the same views. Each individual's caring situation, and how they might think or feel about their caring role, is unique.
- Build trust and connection; young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may be experiencing an array of settlement issues and may be wary of interventions from 'authorities'.
- Clear communication is critical to relationship building. Consider using an interpreter where appropriate and avoid using jargon and acronyms when describing the services sector.
- Be clear on what you can and cannot offer; the limitations and options for your work with the family.
- Workers should be alert to the potential barriers, challenges and risks for young people providing care and should seek supervisory support.
- When working with clients under 18 years of age, be cognisant of Child Safety principles.
- The young person's wellbeing and developmental potential must be paramount in decision making processes, in line with the Children's Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005.¹²
- Be aware of the other services and support available and discuss the possibility of further support for the person needing care. Explore how the young person and other family members would feel about this and if appropriate, make an active or supported referral to other relevant services. Sometimes this can be the most effective way to help the young person to reduce the extent and impacts of their caring responsibilities.
- If the person needing care has a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan, be aware that it will be centred around their supports and the carer is often not recognised or supported within the plan. This can create a barrier for ongoing support of young people with caring responsibilities so it is important to help them access supports that are available for them.
- Be flexible and responsive. Consider where, how and when the young person would like to make contact with you, so that you can help them maintain engagement with services. Examples may include phone meetings, online video calls, meetings at their school, outreach at an external venue, or home visits.
- Think widely about a variety and range of supports that may assist the young person, for example, help with school work, cleaning duties, arranging respite or someone to care for the family member.
- Seek support from your organisation to continuously improve your cultural and carer awareness. Take advantage of supervision sessions to problem-solve, address challenges and receive support.

¹² State Government of Victoria, 2017, *The Best Interests framework of vulnerable children and youth*, p.7, retrieved from <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/the-best-interests-framework-for-vulnerable-children-and-youth.pdf>

- Develop practice that is inclusive of families and communities. This is particularly relevant when working with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who are providing care. Be aware that 'family' may have many meanings; parents, siblings or extended relations. See CMY's Good Practice Guides: Culturally Competent Youth Work and Youth Work in the Family Context.
- Adopt a broader community development approach. Work with communities to raise awareness about caring in families and explore how young people and families can be better supported.

Some tips for organisations and managers:

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

- Undertake a cultural diversity audit, incorporating the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities¹³. Measures should include:
 1. Planning and evaluation;
 2. Information gathering and consultation;
 3. Policy development and implementation;
 4. Program development and service delivery;
 5. Communication;
 6. Staffing and human resources; and
 7. Reviewing and evaluation.
- All organisations that work with young people should implement policies that will help to establish whether young people have caring responsibilities.
- Develop and support practices that are inclusive of families and communities. Services should examine any assumptions surrounding the young person's role in the family by adopting a whole-of-family approach.
- Support outreach as a method of working. Offering flexible times and home visits may make it easier for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities to engage with the service your organisation is offering.
- Identify one lead worker to coordinate support and liaise between organisations. A consistent approach is vital for the young person and their family and for organisational good practice.
- Develop community awareness around issues affecting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with caring responsibilities. This could include involving community elders and/or religious leaders. The goal is to build knowledge and encourage community involvement by reducing stigma and barriers.

13 For an example, refer to CMY's Inclusive Organisations audit tool available here: <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/inclusive-organisations-good-practice-guide/>

Resources

CMY 2016 *Good Practice Guide: Inclusive Organisations*

<https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/inclusive-organisations-good-practice-guide/>

Carers Victoria, 2017, *Young Carer Facts*

<https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/media/1150/young-carer-facts-february-2017.pdf>

CMY, 2019, *A young and multicultural Victoria: the 2016 census*

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Carers Victoria Inc., Centre for Multicultural Youth & Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria 2011, *Refugee and Migrant Young People with Caring Responsibilities: What Do We Know?* Melbourne: Carers Victoria, CMY & ECCV

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https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ECCV-NDIS-Policy-Issues-Paper_final_27062019.pdf

Deakin, ECCV, 2015, *Intergenerational Relations in Newly Arrived communities*

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b0fd5e6710699c630b269b1/t/5bee19690ebbe86725cf1e45/1542330738210/ECCV_Intergenerational-Report_Final.pdf

Victorian Refugee Health Network, 2018, *Service responses for people with disabilities from refugee backgrounds in northern Melbourne*

<http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/service-responses-for-people-with-disabilities-from-refugee-backgrounds-in-northern-melbourne/>

Diversitat, *Disability Findings Report*

<https://diversitat.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Diversitat-disability-findings-report-updated-APRIL-2019.pdf>

Department of Social Services, *Supporting Carers*

<https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/carers>

Support

Young Carers Network

<https://youngcarersnetwork.com.au/>

Carers Victoria Young Carers Online Resources

<https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/be-informed/young-carers#online-resources>

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