

VOICES OF YOUNG AUSTRALIA

STORIES OF STRONG, INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

cmyji centre for
multicultural
youth issues



AFIFA

“ I am passionate about the power and value of sport. It can be a vehicle for enhancing understanding and for giving young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds a sense of belonging and identity. ”



SPORT AND RECREATION

Afifa is a twin and the youngest of 13 children. Her parents migrated to Australia from Lebanon in 1973. Afifa is a passionate and dedicated young woman whose approach to life has been shaped by her parents' experiences, growing up in a family of 13 children, and being a part of the Australian Lebanese community. Afifa has a passion to make her mark and to empower other young people to be their best.

Afifa's passion and commitment to sport is clear – she has a double diploma in Sports Development and Sports Recreation and is completing a Bachelor of Education majoring in Physical Education. At just 17, Afifa was a striker with the South Melbourne Women's Soccer Club in the Victorian State Women's League and was involved in a wave of controversy when a referee refused to start a game until she removed her hijab (head scarf). Afifa is also a recipient of the Young Moreland Citizen of the Year Award.

Creating opportunities through sport

I grew up with older brothers who involved me in sport and this gave me a sense of belonging and some great memories. Sport has definitely always been a part of my life. Playing sport with kids from different nationalities in primary and high school was fantastic. I loved it.

These early experiences also shaped the way I see sport now. I think sport is important for building character and as way to connect with others. Playing sport and soccer helps to build up important attributes, like being polite, respectful and patient. With soccer, you've got to respect the player, no matter what their nationality, their gender or how they look.

Sport is a particularly effective way to engage with young people and one of my goals has been to provide sporting opportunities that include young people from a diversity of backgrounds. I want to create opportunities for other young people, especially those from refugee backgrounds, and sport is one of the best ways to interact – it encourages you to get to know other people and it develops understanding.

The value of sport

Through a number of community organisations and as a motivational speaker, I want to help

to inspire, connect and empower 'at risk' young people through telling my own story. My work as a motivational speaker is all about getting to other young people to give them hope – especially females – that you're not limited, you can do whatever you want. I want to convey to them that I'm here, I'm a Muslim, I'm doing business, I'm doing coaching, I'm giving speeches and nothing is stopping me.

I am passionate about the power and value of sport. It can be a vehicle for enhancing understanding and for giving young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds a sense of belonging and identity.

I mean, we're all people. We're all equals, regardless of gender, regardless of culture, regardless of belief. We're all human beings. I think that showing hope and confidence in myself has given hope and confidence to others.

**SPORT AND RECREATION
CONTINUED...**

Establishing space for understanding

I think it is important to have dedicated and appropriate sporting venues for diverse communities. I have started my own personal training business and am really trying to encourage women – especially Muslim women – to feel comfortable getting active and involved.

Ideally, it would be great if there was a multi-function sports centre that was accessible to diverse groups. It would be a great community space generating peace and harmony with one another. That's what you want – a peaceful world, a peaceful community.

WHAT CMYI DOES

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are under-represented in formalised sport and recreational activities. Research suggests that opportunities for newly arrived young people are limited due to barriers such as the high cost of membership, registration and uniforms; perceived fear of racism and discrimination; lack of parental support and access to transport; and, a lack of knowledge about the structure of sport in Australia.

CMYI's Multicultural Sport and Recreation Project works to connect young people and their organisations with sporting bodies and

competitions, as well as providing direction and links between relevant sporting and community groups.

CMYI's Program Team provide direct support to refugee and migrant young people, using sport and recreation as tools for engaging with young people. For example, CMYI staff in Melbourne's Southeast delivered a sport and recreation program at the English Language School as a means of building relationships and developing trust, enabling them to work further with the young people to address settlement issues such as housing, education, employment and family conflict.

NADIA

“ Many refugees are in transit for years and they build up a sense of anticipation, of hope for the future. Their hope is for a wonderful new life that awaits them at the end of the road. ”





REFUGEE YOUTH RESETTLEMENT

Twenty-two-year-old Nadia fled the civil war in Somalia with her family when she was just six years old. Together they spent five years in Kenya before being granted visas to come to Australia.

Nadia is now well settled in Melbourne and is an active member of the community. She is a qualified youth worker, has established a website dedicated to publicising events for young Muslim people (noorevents.com.au), and participated in the National Muslim Youth Summit. Nadia has also received a Victorian Refugee Recognition Record for her remarkable contribution to the Victorian community.

Journey to a new land

I remember that my mother was particularly clear about the need for us to leave Somalia and was the driving force behind my family fleeing. My mother was pregnant at the time and living in Somalia was a constant stress. The civil war was escalating to the point where bullets were coming through the house. Even I was struck in the shoulder by a stray bullet.

I remember my mother and father discussing what we should do. My mother said, 'We have to go, we cannot stay here.' My father thought and hoped that things would improve. He had a good job and wanted to ensure that our family didn't take what he saw as the soft option of leaving. My father was kidnapped and threatened on a number of occasions. Thinking about it now, I believe the problems

in Somalia come down to greed and power and it simply wasn't the right place for us to stay.

Family members in Australia sponsored me and my family to seek asylum in Australia and I arrived here to complete the last term of grade 5.

Disconnection

A real challenge for me in moving to Australia was the feeling of personal disconnection; of not being in contact with my siblings and relatives overseas and the disconnection I felt from my culture – from my language, music and food. These are things that I am now working hard to re-establish.

That was difficult as a teenager, understanding what is your culture and your place in the world – it's those sorts of things that give you

meaning and a sense of who you are. As a newly arrived young person, I just had a desire to fit in and to feel connected to the broader Australian community.

When I think about what would have helped, I come to the conclusion that my older siblings could have supported me through a lot of the hardship that I experienced as an adolescent who is new to a country so different from where they come from.

I have great admiration for my mother. Growing up, she was fantastic. I felt like I could pretty much tell her anything. It was this connection with my mother and other members of my family in Australia that made re-settling easier, despite the disconnection I felt in other ways.

REFUGEE YOUTH RESETTLEMENT CONTINUED...

Language and personal connections

When I arrived in Australia I knew two English words – yes and no. I learnt English pretty quickly, though, because we felt lonely without speaking the language.

I talked my head off in the beginning and I eventually made a new friend, Kenny. He was the only person who made the effort to communicate with me, and I really wanted to make that connection with another person my age. This connection was such a valuable experience for me.

Kenny used to ask all sorts of questions and made me question my faith and things I'd taken for granted. I remember he'd just keep asking me questions... 'Why do you wear the scarf? What do you think about this? Why do you do that?' I consider myself an inquisitive person and am constantly searching for answers, so I enjoyed my discussions with him and the personal connection definitely helped me to learn English.

Racism

I think that a significant issue for young people settling in a new country is how welcome they feel. I feel very much at home now, but I remember a time when I felt like the odd one out. This feeling of being an outsider intensified when I experienced racism. I remember being spat on by people in a passing car and seeing an old woman clutch her bag a bit tighter when I walked past. I feel sorry for people like that, because here I am a good person and yet they feel they have to live in such fear.

I don't dwell on my experiences of racism, as I feel very lucky. However I do think that racism can have such a negative impact on young people who are newly arrived and are just trying to fit in.

Hopes and reality

I think one of the hardest things newly arrived refugees have to come to terms with in re-settling in a new country is when the reality of their life doesn't match the high expectations they may have built up. Many refugees are in transit for years and they build up a sense of anticipation, of hope for the future. Their hope is for a wonderful new life that awaits them at the end of the road. However, re-settling in a new country is generally not all they imagined and this can come as a shock. For example, one of the things refugees don't take into consideration is whether there will be discrimination against their race or religion in their new country.

Before coming to Australia, my family discussed all the positives that awaited us in our new country – education, health, peace – but I remember the difficult reality of life when we got here, of settling in a new country, a new culture, a new language. It's really hard, that whole social aspect of it.

When it comes to refugee youth resettlement I think family connections and support, a sense of welcome from your new community (from neighbours and other groups whom you may interact with regularly), and support to adjust to the reality of life in your new country, are all critical in smoothing the bumps in the road.

WHAT CMYI DOES

CMYI addresses issues relating to refugee youth resettlement by working directly with newly arrived young people as well as providing policy advice and capacity building initiatives to government, service providers and refugee youth organisations.

CMYI works directly with refugee and newly arrived young people in the Northwest and Southeast regions of Melbourne. Our service supports young people to talk about their needs and develop positive strategies to assist them in feeling more connected with family, school, friends and community. This includes providing both one-to-one support and group activities.

CMYI also undertakes capacity building to support youth and settlement workers to work more effectively with refugee young people. CMYI provides state-wide training around good practice principles for working with refugee young people, undertakes research and develops resources, holds policy forums on emerging issues for refugee young people, provides secondary consultation and data analysis around humanitarian youth arrivals.

A significant component of the refugee youth resettlement work at CMYI involves supporting refugee youth groups to create and sustain their organisations. We resource and assist youth groups and encourage connections between youth groups and leaders to share ideas and support one another.

MILA

“ While I was studying English, I was exposed to people from a range of cultural backgrounds and found the whole experience really exciting. It gave me a sense of being a part of something ‘big’.”



EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Mila is 23 years old. She arrived in Australia five years ago. She speaks Russian and Hebrew and her family is originally from the Ukraine. Her story and personal experiences mirror those of many newly arrived young people – having to deal with language difficulties, disconnection, lack of confidence, and difficulty accessing services and resources.

Mila's journey highlights how one young person has faced the challenges, learnt ways to adapt and now uses those experiences to help others faced with similar circumstances.

Mila is passionate about youth participation initiatives and now works helping other young people at a city council youth service in Melbourne. She is also undertaking a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies.

Growing up in a time of change

My family left the Ukraine in 1990 at a time when there were a lot of issues within the Republics in the former USSR and the whole idea of communism had started to collapse. There were a lot of political and economic problems in our homeland so my family moved to Israel. One month after we arrived in Israel the first Gulf War started. That was a big shock to the system. We didn't know why we migrated anymore. We thought Israel was going to be a place where we could build our future and be secure.

As a young person in a new country, going to school was a real challenge for me. I couldn't

understand a word. Socially, I didn't feel like I fitted in, so I think from grade two to five I was pretty much sitting there not having any idea what was going on. It took a while but I slowly started to pick up the language, made friends and grew in confidence.

When I was 12 my parents divorced and my father moved to Australia. My sister and I visited him when I was 16, and when I finished secondary school I came to Australia to live with my father.

Language and isolation

When I was undertaking further education in Australia I experienced a similar sense of disconnection to how I felt in my early years in Israel. I felt like I was on the outside, didn't have the language and needed to establish friendships and social and cultural connections.

While I was studying English, I was exposed to people from a range of cultural backgrounds and found the whole experience really exciting. It gave me a sense of being part of something 'big'. I really enjoyed learning about new countries and cultures and I thrived on the diversity and the support

that the newly arrived groups provided. It also sparked my interest in international affairs, cultural differences and diversity, and led me to undertake a Bachelor Degree in International Studies.

Educational challenges

I think that a large number of refugee and migrant families strive very hard for educational outcomes because they have worked so hard to get to Australia and want to make the most of the available opportunities. However, the different requirements of the education system also provide a big challenge. Newly arrived families have to adjust and adapt to a system that they might not be used to.

The system here expects you to understand the bigger picture; it expects that you deliver results as you strive for a certain focus, but many young people who are new to Australia don't have that focus and that ability to aim at something precise. For example, they might not understand that you need to do a certain course to then do something else, or that one subject needs to be completed before another. So they might not know these things that will

have a big impact on how they then progress through the system.

Guidance and support

I believe that newly arrived young people need a good mentor; someone who can provide support and guidance to help them navigate the education and employment systems in Australia. Many young people rely on friends who might not be fully informed and can, unintentionally, lead them down paths where they don't want to be. Parents can also influence in a way that might not help in the longer term, encouraging a young person to pursue a profession that is not appropriate or realistically attainable.

I think that the relationship between parents and their children's school is also very important. Many culturally and linguistically diverse communities have language and confidence issues that mean they don't approach schools and this can lead to problems.

Choices and accessing information

I think that many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are challenged by the number of choices on offer. Some come from countries where there are more defined paths for young people from education to employment; where there are family traditions or family careers. The lack of a specific path and the number of choices in Australia can be overwhelming and makes things very complicated for these young people.

As well as the wide degree of choice, many young refugees and migrants come up against the problem of needing to use the internet to find information. The perception by service providers

is that making information available on the internet is good for information flow, but for many young people who are coming to terms with a new system, new culture and new language, navigating websites and the vast amount of information available is a big challenge.

Transitions and cultural issues

I have found that there are a number of issues at play for young people when moving from education or training to employment, including confidence issues and the expectation that you 'sell yourself'. This provides real challenges to women from some refugee and migrant backgrounds, who may have been encouraged to be modest and the idea of 'selling' your skills and talents is completely new. In addition, this has an impact on the way they are perceived by a prospective employer who sees their modesty and shyness as a negative rather than a positive attribute.

Attitudes and support

I have seen a range of issues relating to employer attitudes – including stereotyping, racism and the negative media representation of young refugees and migrants – that contribute to difficulties for young people in accessing employment.

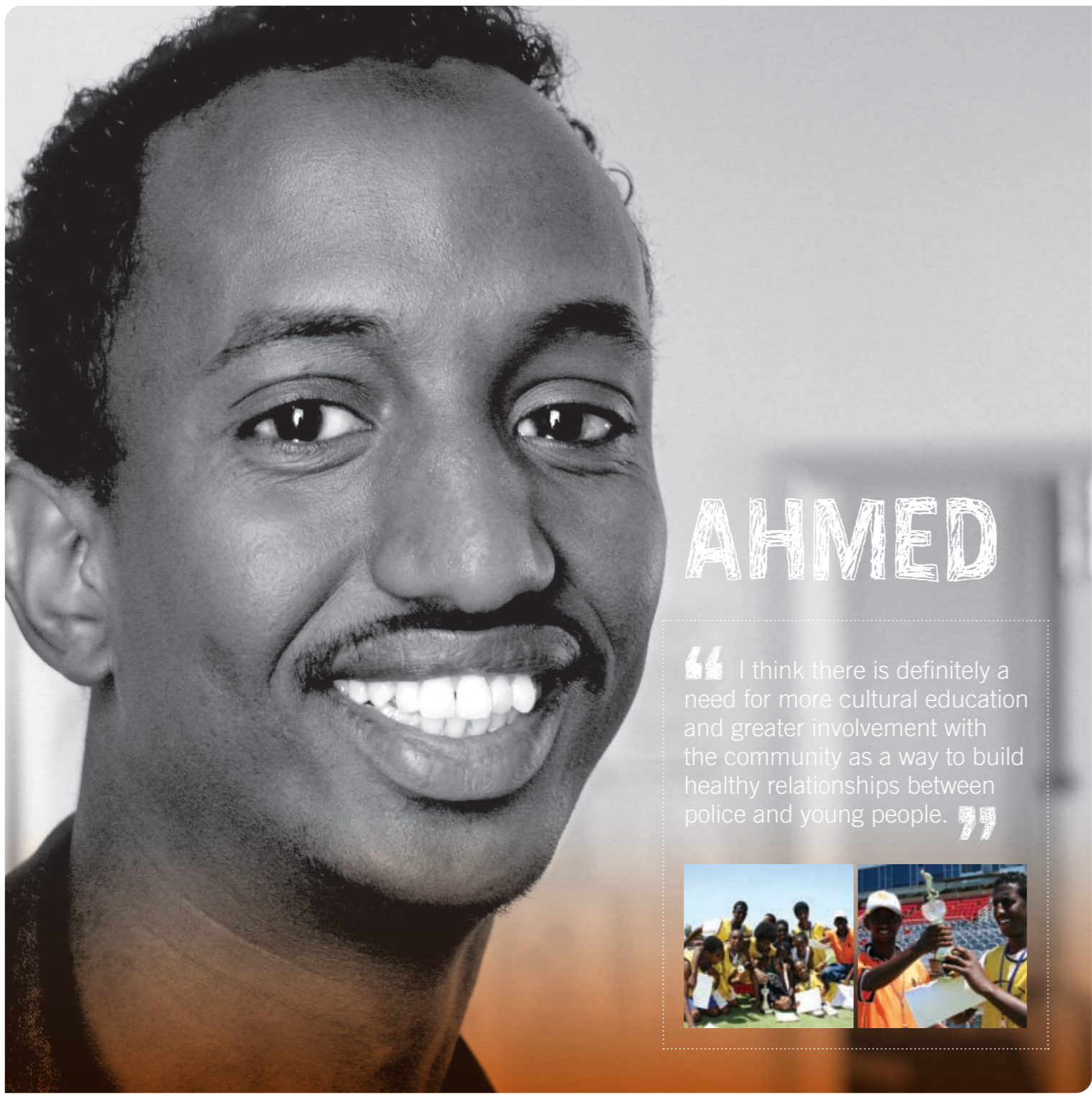
I think there needs to be cross-cultural training for employers and schools and young people need to feel confident when they are challenged by older generations who might have preconceived ideas about what they should be doing.

More work needs to be done to educate both the wider mainstream public as well as migrant and refugee job seekers about employment, education and training, so they know how the system works and how they can best access it. This can be a common ground for culturally and linguistically diverse young people, service providers and employers to raise concerns, learn from each other, share experiences and strengthen our community.

WHAT CMYI DOES

CMYI provides individual support to young people attempting to access or maintain a connection with education, training and employment. Our multicultural youth workers build trusting relationships with young people and work together with them on compiling resumes, sticking with or getting back into school, training or employment. Our team also take on an advocacy role, providing information and support to schools, training and employer bodies about the needs of refugee and migrant young people.

CMYI also provides advice to government and produces publications for a range of audiences relating to education and employment. We have developed a resource kit for schools on how to engage parents, a multilingual guide for families introducing them to the education system and the choices available, and a number of research and policy documents addressing education-related issues for refugee young people.



AHMED

“ I think there is definitely a need for more cultural education and greater involvement with the community as a way to build healthy relationships between police and young people. ”



POLICE AND JUSTICE

Ahmed grew up in Egypt after fleeing war-torn Somalia with his sister at a young age. He was a teenager when they arrived in Australia seeking a better life. His broader family still live in Somalia and they speak regularly on the phone.

Ahmed works hard and is active in addressing issues affecting other young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Ahmed has experience working as a security guard and at an English language school, and has seen young people from similar backgrounds struggle to adjust to Australian society. In particular, Ahmed has observed their sometimes fraught interactions with the legal system and police. Ahmed is currently employed as a youth worker supporting newly arrived young people and their families in Moonee Valley (Melbourne).

Cultural issues and the legal system

I think there are a number of underlying problems facing refugee and migrant young people when it comes to the legal system and police. I've seen too many cultural misunderstandings that then lead on to other problems.

As a newly arrived young person, no one really gives you tips or ideas; you're just dropped in the country. There's no help in terms of saying you are supposed to do this or that. This is particularly important for people coming from

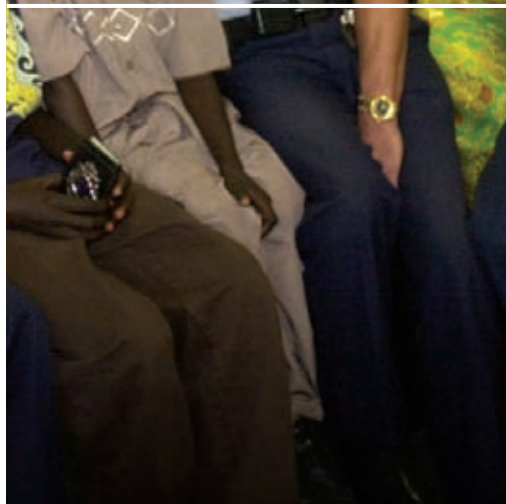
a background where people are afraid of the police. The police are the enemy back where we are from, but in Australia it's quite different. No one actually tells you that, you've just got to find out.

I can think of lots of examples of misunderstandings – or experiences of culture clash – between newly arrived young people and police. For example, a young person who might not speak English and is pulled over on their bike for not wearing a helmet. Thinking they've been found guilty of something far

more important, they'll retreat and stay away from school. It's these sorts of things that can have significant flow-on effects.

Education is the key

I think there is definitely a need for more cultural education and greater involvement with the community as a way to build healthy relationships between police and young people. I think the good intentions are there, but the thorough education is not.



POLICE AND JUSTICE CONTINUED...

Many times I have heard police say something like, 'Hey, come down to the police station and teach me about African culture!' But it's not that simple. It's like someone saying: 'Hey, teach me about your European background!' You can't, as they're all different. You can't just teach European culture.

Taking the time to understand people and their culture is critical. There is a simple way to help with issues. Rather than just spending time going up and down chasing kids and trying to control things, it would be better to choose a good time, two hours only, after school, and do something with them. Soccer matches and other ways to bring people together can make real inroads.

Representation in the media

The issue of negative media representation of young people, and Muslims in particular, is a significant issue that needs to be addressed. Using 'Muslim' as a descriptor is a significant problem in the reporting of events in the Australian media today. If a story involves a Christian or Jewish person, that's not how they're identified. But if they are Muslim, then the media will say 'Muslim'.

I was recently selected to attend a Muslim youth summit and media representation of young people was a significant issue that came up there. Most participants identified the uneven use of cultural and religious descriptors in the Australian media as one of the most significant issues and one that was leading to further problems.

Finding solutions within communities

I think there is a need to involve members of the community in finding solutions to the issues facing young people in the area of justice, the legal system and police. There's a number of social and community workers, or even academics, that have their qualifications and their certificates, but they don't really understand what's happening in the community.

When refugee and migrant young people have issues with the justice and legal system or police, it is fundamental to find the solutions within the community and rely on the knowledge and understanding of people within that community.

WHAT CMYI DOES

CMYI advocates for the rights of young refugees and migrants in relation to police and justice issues. This has included working in partnership with Victoria Police and the justice system on a number of initiatives, including police and youth forums, advice and training to workers in juvenile justice, and participating in research that resulted in the publication of *Ethnic Youth Gangs: Do They Exist?*

CMYI has been a member of the Police and Community Multicultural Advisory Committee (PACMAC) for over 10 years and is an active member of the OzGangs Research Network.

Since 2004, CMYI has been responsible for the implementation of the Youth Referral and Independent Person Program (YRIPP). Funded by Crime Prevention Victoria (Department of Justice), YRIPP provides trained volunteers to support young people through police interviews where a parent or guardian is unavailable. YRIPP also refers young people to culturally appropriate health and welfare support services to reduce their chances of future offending.



TRAN

“ I believe it’s very important to engage with your broader community and with family to provide the support to ensure young people can achieve what they want. ”



Newspix, Tran Sui, Photo by John Casamento

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

On completing high school, Tran was awarded the Victorian Certificate of Education Achiever of the Year Award for his tireless contribution to establishing more choices for young people in Victoria. The media release announcing his award, which was presented at Parliament House in Melbourne, read:

‘Tran helped to improve recreational opportunities for young people in the western suburbs through his work with the Brimbank Council Youth Advisory Committee and successfully campaigned for a public basketball facility in the west. Tran also coached his school soccer, basketball and volleyball teams and his community service efforts extend to the West Sunshine Community Centre where he facilitated activities for people with disabilities each weekend.’

Tran, now 22, is currently completing his final year studies in economics and finance part-time and is working full-time in the banking sector. At age 17, he worked as an Electorate Officer for a Member of the State Parliament and for a Federal Senator, making him the youngest parliamentary staff member at the time. Tran started to get involved in motivational speaking with a range of service and community groups after receiving the Brimbank Council Young Citizen of the Year Award in 2003.

Tran’s story began with his parents fleeing the civil war in Vietnam in the early 1980’s, when they made the dangerous journey to Australia on a small boat with scarce food and water.

Courageous journeys

My parents needed to flee Vietnam because they were faced with retribution and persecution as the civil war was ending. My father was incarcerated at his first attempt to leave Vietnam. After his release, my parents made a second attempt and successfully made it here.

I admire the courage and bravery shown by many other people just like my parents who take the ultimate risk; who needed to leave their country of origin to seek a greater life for their children.

My parents came to Australia seeking a better future and a country that respected freedom.

They took that ‘ultimate risk’, taking my eldest sister, who was only one at the time, on the dangerous journey to Australia.

As time changes, we see similar situations with new waves of refugees coming from the Balkans, Africa and the Middle East. Every time Australia helps those people in need of assistance and shows a sense of social justice and global responsibility, I feel more and more proud of being Australian.



Photo Newpix,
Lilydale West Primary School.
Picture Steve Tanner



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTINUED...

Family and community expectations

My parents place a high value on family and had three more children including me after settling in Australia. Personally, there can be a lot of family expectations and demands as a sole son. It's a lot of pressure, especially in a traditional Chinese-Vietnamese family, upholding the family tradition, the family name, and this is evident in many other Asian families.

Not only that, we sometimes feel obligated to uphold our whole ethnic community. I am definitely keen to progress the rights of the Vietnamese community so they have a stronger voice in the political arena, but I also have to consider my personal life, my studies, my friendships and my family responsibilities.

Providing support

I believe it's very important to engage with your broader community and with family to provide the support to ensure young people can achieve what they want. When there isn't that support – that sense of belonging and the ability to look up to people for advice – that can be when problems occur.

Transition points

There are times in a young person's life when you have to make key decisions. It becomes clear you must decide which path to take. Do you take the academic path, or do you look for a job... or even both? By having some external level of support for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it can help overcome this challenge.

I think that it is at these key transition points in young people's lives when it's imperative to ensure support networks are there and available. Family and community are so important to provide support and assistance, but this support needs to be combined with strong institutions providing viable options and solutions for young people.

Choosing the right path

I grew up in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. I think sometimes it's hard to see the problems and issues within a community until you get the chance to see it from a different perspective. At one point in my own life I was labelled a gang leader by my school principal and had more suspensions than holidays! It was at this time when there was the temptation to go down the wrong path and only with my family and community's support did I find my way.

WHAT CMYI DOES

CMYI recognises that for the young people we work with, their family and community context are inextricably linked to their identity and play an important role in their lives. Making decisions about education, employment and many other life choices will often involve consultation with family. Family and community support are, as described in several of the case studies presented here, critical to young people overcoming many of the barriers they face.

Through direct program delivery, one-on-one support is provided to young people experiencing family conflict. This may involve seeking additional support to address issues of isolation, unemployment and language barriers for parents and other significant adults. It may also involve taking time to visit, sit and listen to a mother, an uncle, an older sibling and to become trusted as a key support to the young person in their family.

CMYI also provides training and support to other services, government departments and input to research in order to build a better understanding of 'family' within culturally and linguistically diverse contexts.

NOSRAT

“ I believe it's very important to engage with your broader community and with family to provide the support to ensure young people can achieve what they want. ”



YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Nosrat was born in Iran and is 20 years old. Due to her father's political activism, her family fled to Turkey when she was six months old. They then moved to a refugee camp in Greece before being granted asylum in Australia.

Nosrat has strong memories of her family's activism, including protesting outside Australian immigration detention centres about the deportation of Iranian asylum seekers. Nosrat's father has been a significant role model for her and influenced her decision to follow the path of human rights activism.

Nosrat has participated in the National Youth Roundtable, is active in politics and has spoken publicly at a number of events, including being flown to Paris to address a rally. Nosrat was named Young Citizen of the Year by Moreland City Council (Melbourne) and she recently completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Melbourne.

Homelands

My family had to leave Iran. We had no future there. We had to flee because it was just too dangerous to stay. My father did not agree with the government and he refused to support them.

My family are still in opposition with the Iranian government and have not been back to Iran, although I would love to go one day when the time is right. It's my homeland. It's where I was born. I've been exposed to the culture through my parents' teaching, so I'd love to experience it first hand.

Getting young people involved

I strongly believe that society needs to listen carefully to the voices of young people. This should extend to supporting young people to be involved in the development of policy and in decision-making, and I think we need to encourage as many young people as possible to get involved.

A number of my friends have expressed some interest in contributing to forums and committees, but hesitate for a variety of reasons. Factors including language issues, school, study and family commitments, and juggling part-time work, all contribute to their decision not to participate. Other young people are unfamiliar with Australian systems and structures and are not aware of the opportunities that do exist.

If you talk to other people about your own experiences it's a good way to personalise it. I've encouraged a lot of my friends to get active and get involved in a range of groups and issues so they can make a difference.



YOUTH PARTICIPATION CONTINUED...

Government policy and consultation

I am wary of the way state and federal governments often engage with young people. At times policy has preceded consultation which gives young people the perception that it doesn't matter what they have to say. There have been a number of occasions where bodies that are intended to represent a wide cross-section of young people in reality have a narrow focus and lack diversity. These sorts of experiences can put young people off participating as they can feel there isn't a genuine commitment to their involvement.

I believe young people want to be listened to and youth consultation and participation must include more than simply 'successful mainstream youth'. If you only focus on this group, then you're not really capturing everything about young people. It's very important to speak with disenfranchised young people to develop relevant and worthwhile policy.

Local level decision making

I think that Australia's various levels of government provide good avenues for young people to get pro-actively involved. Providing more entry points to participation is a positive way to better hear the voices of young people.

Local level bodies that actively involve young people to provide feedback, such as schools and local services, can provide great opportunities for sharing information and ideas, getting involved and contributing to key policy areas. However, I would also caution that these bodies must inform policy and decision-making, not simply provide input once decisions have already been made.

Focus on younger people and cultural issues

I see an important way to involve young people is to make the connection as early as possible. Discussion and engagement with young people that are making the transition from primary to high school, or young people in years 7 and 8, is important as they are developing their thinking and their interest in participation is often growing.

Creating cross-cultural understanding at an early age is also important. Giving a broad understanding of all cultures gives young people the opportunity to identify for themselves the good and bad aspects and allows them the chance to choose and draw upon what elements they see as important.

Young people's ability to participate

I think family support has been central to my ability to express my opinion and get involved. My parents are particularly supportive. They encourage me to get involved in a range of activities, and I feel very lucky to have their support.

Opportunities like mentoring also give young people the chance to share ideas and issues and develop skills. To this end, I am participating in a program developed by CMYI that match up young people and mentors. I think it's a great way to learn and share.

WHAT CMYI DOES

CMYI's Youth Participation Team incorporates a number of initiatives aimed at empowering young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to better participate in community debates, structures, groups and the environments affecting them.

Programs include the Multicultural Youth Mentoring Program, the Young Leaders of Today Leadership Program and the Multicultural Leaders in Sustainability Project. The Youth Participation Team has also established the CMYI Youth Participation Register and provides support and advice to young people, government and organisations.

The Youth Participation Team is supported by the Youth Reference Committee. The Committee consists of 14 young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds that provide advice and direction to the activities of the Youth Participation Team.

Through the leadership programs being run by CMYI in partnership with the Australian Red Cross and Environment Victoria, CMYI provides training for young people and supports them to get involved in community activities. Mentors for the CMYI Mentoring Program come from a variety of professional backgrounds and commit to support their mentee for at least a year, helping them to achieve their professional and personal goals.

GET INVOLVED

Like what you've read? Been inspired by the young people involved in CMYI activities? Want to get involved yourself? Want to support the work of CMYI? Here are some options...

Stay informed and involved by subscribing to CMYI e-News

CMYI publishes a bi-monthly e-newsletter that features up-to-date news and information about events, resources, professional development opportunities and forums relevant to the multicultural youth sector.

To subscribe to 'CMYI e-News' go to: www.cmyi.net.au

Take part in the Statewide Multicultural Youth Issues Network

CMYI's quarterly Statewide Multicultural Youth Issues Network (SMYIN) meetings provide a regular forum in which workers who are engaged with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have an opportunity to meet and share information.

To find out about upcoming meetings, go to: www.cmyi.net.au/StatewideNetwork

Join the CMYI Youth Participation Register

CMYI is regularly contacted by government departments and organisations wishing to involve young refugees and migrants in activities or events. CMYI is compiling a list of young people aged 16-25 who would like to be contacted when such opportunities arise.

To join the CMYI Youth Participation Register, go to www.cmyi.net.au/GetInvolved

Help CMYI to fund this important work

CMYI is urgently seeking funding or 'in kind' support for many of its programs. CMYI welcomes partnerships with companies and trusts. Please go to www.cmyi.net.au for details

of how you can make a donation, or contact us directly by email fundraising@cmyi.net.au or call 03 9340 3700.

To get involved with CMYI go to: www.cmyi.net.au

Contact details

304 Drummond Street,
Carlton 3053 VIC Australia

T 03 9340 3700

F 03 9349 3766

info@cmyi.net.au

www.cmyi.net.au

cmyi centre for
multicultural
youth issues



cmji

centre for
multicultural
youth issues

304 Drummond Street,
Carlton 3053 VIC Australia

T 03 9340 3700

F 03 9349 3766

info@cmji.net.au

www.cmji.net.au