

Settlement Interrupted

The lasting impact of the COVID-19
pandemic on newly arrived young
people in Victoria.

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1. Executive Summary

2020 was a year like no other in our lifetime, with a global pandemic and extended lockdowns impacting all Victorians. At the time, CMY produced a brief report on the impact of lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Victoria.¹ However we also wanted to understand more about the particular experiences of newly arrived young people,² given they are at a critical juncture in terms of establishing a new life in Australia.

In the first half of 2021, CMY held consultations with both newly arrived young people, and the sectors that support them, to understand more about the legacy and ongoing impacts of the pandemic on their lives. We wanted to know how they were faring approximately one year on from the extended lockdowns of 2020 in Victoria. These consultations were held at a brief period in the first half of 2021, when restrictions had lifted in Victoria and life was beginning to resemble some form of 'normality'. Since this time, further extended lockdowns have ensued, reminding us that as much as we look to recovery, the pandemic is far from behind us. Neither it seems are the effects on newly arrived young people's lives.

What can we learn from newly arrived young people's experiences at this unique time and the significant response of governments to these obstacles? And how do we ensure that newly arrived young people have every opportunity to thrive and participate fully in the community, even in the midst of a pandemic, now and in the future?

Sector consultations highlighted that the impacts of the pandemic on newly arrived young people's lives are far reaching, and still unfolding. They reflected that newly arrived young people's connection to education, employment and social networks had been significantly impacted and that their mental health and wellbeing had been adversely affected. Despite the complex challenges posed by the pandemic, government responses and investment in supporting the community has provided some level of stability and community safety. In particular, the Victorian government's targeted initiatives that aimed to support disadvantaged communities are a critical step towards addressing long-standing inequalities that exist in our community, and provide a solid foundation on which we must continue to build. There are still concerns however, that some of this support is not reaching the young people who need it.

The pandemic has both impacted upon and interrupted newly arrived young people's settlement experience. Young people revealed that the ongoing effects of the pandemic on their lives were multifaceted and interconnected. When asked what were the key issues still affecting them as a result of the pandemic, almost half (45%) identified challenges with employment, followed closely by education (41%), mental health and social connection (both 23%). Young people spoke about set-backs and difficulties with learning English, challenges with remote learning, confusion and anxiety around their education and employment pathways, lack of social and recreational opportunities, feeling socially isolated, anxious or depressed, and experiencing financial pressures and related stress.

Young people called for stronger support with their employment pathways (including career guidance, work experience, volunteer work and advice on how to look for and apply for jobs); face-to-face engagement with education and educational support, such as tutoring; more social, recreational and leadership opportunities to build connections with others and participate in the community; and more accessible, culturally responsive and diverse models of mental health support.

Both the federal and state government responses to the pandemic have highlighted that it is possible to take strong, visionary action to build a better society. Not only is it possible, it is fundamental. It is integral that we continue to build on the gains made, and take this opportunity to continue investing in the systems that make a healthier, fairer and more cohesive society for all. In addition to broad policy responses, tailored approaches will ensure that newly arrived young people are not left behind.

Whilst targeted support is critically important, we must also continue to understand and address the systemic barriers, such as racism, that serve to lock out certain groups from the job market, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

2. Key findings

- The pandemic is having an ongoing impact on newly arrived young people's ability to settle well and build new lives in Victoria.
- Newly arrived young people are experiencing particular challenges related to employment, education, mental health and social connectedness.
- There is an urgent need to innovate in order to create positive outcomes for newly arrived young people, by learning from and building on government responses to the pandemic.

3. Recommendations

Education

1. Department of Education to:

1.1. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the Victorian Government's tutoring program on students from newly arrived/EAL backgrounds. This will help ensure the needs of this specific cohort are being addressed through the tutoring initiative, and will provide valuable information as to what support may be required in the future.³

1.2. Establish a substantial, ongoing, government funded grants program to resource homework clubs, building on the success of small and philanthropically funded grants to the sector. Free tutoring or homework support should be open to young people attending school or other educational institutions such as AMEP or TAFE. This will harness existing structures and volunteer effort, to help ensure newly arrived young people receive the educational support they need, whilst supporting broader settlement outcomes such as fostering social connectedness and social capital – all of which have been impacted on by the pandemic.

1.3. Evaluate the impact of increasing the number and capacity of Multicultural Education Aides during the pandemic, and continue this into the future. Build on these learnings to improve longer-term educational equity for young people who are newly arrived, and ensure greater accountability for how schools utilise EAL funding.

2. Improve and increase newly arrived young people's access to quality career guidance and pathways support. It should be strengths-based, culturally responsive, engage with family, and provide accurate information and advice around labour market opportunities, and support to access government initiatives (such as Free TAFE; Traineeships; Apprenticeships). For instance, the new Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors⁴ initiative provides an opportunity to prioritise newly arrived young people as a specific target cohort.

Digital Inclusion

3. Invest in research to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and extent of the digital divide for newly arrived young people and families, including what can be learnt from the 'digital learning curve' during the pandemic. This should inform decision making and action to address digital inclusion as a fundamental right and a critical element to participating in society.

4. Resource the youth, settlement and community sectors to co-design and deliver initiatives alongside newly arrived young people and parents/carers to increase online safety.

Employment

5. Develop a Multicultural Youth Employment Strategy, as part of a broader Youth Jobs Guarantee, that:

- Builds on the success of initiatives such as Working for Victoria, to create 12–24 month paid, entry level roles and internships in a variety of industries for groups that face particular disadvantage in the labour market, including newly arrived young people. Ensure non-digital recruitment options exist to increase accessibility.
- Create supported training and employment pathways (i.e. Traineeships and Cadetships) for multicultural young people in key areas of growth and demand, particularly where their cultural knowledge and brokering skills are urgently needed – for instance, in mental health and community services.
- Strengthen wrap-around employment support for newly arrived young people that builds social capital, provides paid work placements, pre-employment skills, exposure to different industries and that works with employers to create opportunities and build their capacity to better recruit and support multicultural young people. These services could work in close partnership with Local Jobs and Skills Taskforces[i], to connect young people to opportunities in their local area.

Financial security

6. Permanently increase the rate of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments to at least \$65 per day to ensure newly arrived young people and families can meet their basic needs, and ensure ongoing access to income support for temporary migrants with no income safety net.

Social connectedness and participation

7. Invest in targeted social and recreational programs for newly arrived young people whose settlement has been interrupted due to the pandemic. These should be co-designed, and support social connectedness, wellbeing and connection to the broader community. Where possible these should be face-to-face.

8. Ensure place-based services (including local government) have a range of free, accessible, gender and culturally-inclusive social and recreational opportunities and spaces for young people to connect – and that newly arrived young people are actively supported to engage with these initiatives.

Service accessibility

9. Expand the eligibility for newly arrived youth funding support (e.g. SETS, Reconnect) to allow for needs-based responses for up to 10 years, and for some ineligible visa holders⁵ given the interruption to young people's positive settlement in Victoria as a result of the pandemic and related lockdowns.

Mental health and wellbeing

10. Fund culturally responsive co-designed and co-delivered youth mental health and wellbeing initiatives to support newly arrived young people, families and communities to 1) reduce stigma, 2) build understanding and promote mental health and wellbeing, and 3) strengthen connections to local support services. These initiatives should build on the importance of peers and community and/or religious leaders as ambassadors for positive change.

11. Fund multicultural youth mental health and wellbeing workers across Victoria to focus on community engagement with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and their families. These roles should work in close partnership with youth workers, education providers, settlement services and youth mental health services to broker culturally responsive support within the youth mental health service system.

Family relationships

12. Resource programs that work with newly arrived parents/carers and young people to strengthen family relationships given the increased stressors of the pandemic on families and the intergenerational gap that can often exist as a result of different rates of acculturation.

4. What did we do?

4.1 Consultations with the sector

In February and May 2021, CMY held two sector consultations with representatives from the Victorian Settlement Youth Network (VSYN) – organisations that work to support newly arrived young people and their families. We facilitated an additional consultation with eight staff at CMY who work primarily with newly arrived young people through various programs, including those that provide social support, sport and recreation, employment pathways and homelessness prevention. The consultations focused on the key questions:

- What (if any) is the lasting impact of the pandemic on newly arrived young people's lives?
- What support do they need now and in the future to ensure they have every opportunity to thrive?

A total of 40 representatives from the youth and multicultural sectors (including CMY staff) participated across the three consultations.

4.2 Interviews with young people and demographics

CMY interviewed 22 newly arrived young people who were participating in CMY's Employment Empowers program – to learn about the key issues they were still experiencing as a result of the pandemic and associated lockdowns, and their ideas for solutions.

The demographics of participants were as follows:

- Gender: 16 identified as female; 6 as male.
- Age: ranged from 18 to 27 years of age (average 22 years old), with one young person not stating their age.
- Cultural background: self-identified cultural backgrounds were Afghan (8), Hazaragi (2), Hazara (2), Iranian (2), Somali (1), Ethiopian (1), Burmese (1), Albanian (1), Pakistani (1), Muslim (1), Kachin (1). One young person did not state their cultural background.
- Countries of birth: included Afghanistan (11), Iran (3), Myanmar (2), Somalia (1), Ethiopia (1), Vietnam (1), Kosovo (1), and Australia (1). One young person did not state their country of birth.⁶
- Years of arrival in Australia: more than half of the participants (16 or 73%) had lived in Australia for 2 years or less. Others arrived in 2015 (1), 2016 (1), 2017 (1), 2018 (3).
- The majority of these young people were from humanitarian backgrounds, given they are participants of CMY's Settlement Engagement and Transitions Support (SETS) program, funded by the Department of Home Affairs.

4.3 Limitations

These consultations and interviews were conducted in a discrete period (prior to Victoria's 4th lockdown in May 2021), and present a snapshot in time. Since this time Victoria has experienced further extended lockdowns, which highlights the rapidly changing context we are currently living in. It could be assumed that many of the issues raised in this paper have been compounded due to the return to extended lockdowns for the majority of 2021.

Sector and youth perspectives shared are not necessarily representative of the experiences of all services or newly arrived young people in Victoria. Invitations to consultations were extended to multiple organisations, and reflect only the views of the various representatives that attended. Young people were engaged in interviews through a method of convenience sampling,⁷ given they were participants in CMY's Employment Empowers program⁸ and had established and trusting relationships with program staff. There is the potential that by nature of their interest in participating in the program, the issues of employment, education and training are particularly pertinent in their lives.

Participants fell into the young adult range, and therefore do not necessarily reflect the experiences of young people below the age of 18. They were also predominately from humanitarian backgrounds, which represent a particular cohort of those who are newly arrived.

5. Background

The National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF), an evidence-based guide to inform good practice for supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, identifies key domains fundamental to young people's positive settlement and participation in Australia.⁹ The issues raised in this paper relate to the central domains in the NYSF, including:

- economic participation (including education)
- social participation
- civic participation; and
- personal wellbeing.

Although the first five years of arrival are recognised as an important time to provide support to assist young people and families to establish themselves and become active participants in their new community, in reality, the settlement experience is often a complex and challenging process that unfolds over many years.¹⁰ Refugee and migrant young people demonstrate agency and resilience and utilise a wealth of strengths during the settlement experience; such as intercultural competencies and knowledge, multilingual skills, adaptability, strong educational aspirations and, often, a strong commitment to family and community.¹¹

Previous research highlights that protective factors for good settlement for newly arrived young people include English language proficiency, little or no experiences of discrimination, and engagement in volunteering or community life.¹² Conversely, poor

mental health and housing instability are identified as having a negative impact on settlement outcomes.¹³

Both the NYSF's key domains of settlement and newly arrived young people's access to, and experience of, protective factors have been significantly interrupted by the pandemic. The pandemic and associated lockdowns have undermined newly arrived young people's engagement, wellbeing and active participation as they look to build new lives in Australia.

6. Key Issues and Findings

6.1 Education

Longstanding education equity issues have been compounded for newly arrived young people as a consequence of the pandemic and associated lockdowns. The challenges this group of young people face in the education system are not new, including issues related to a lack of digital literacy and access, lower levels of family engagement and home environments that can be un conducive to study, such as overcrowding. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated these inequalities. At the same time, the rapid transition to learning at home and increased visibility of educational disparity has resulted in government and schools needing to be far more responsive to students' needs.

The Victorian Government's Tutoring Program, with 5,600 tutors in schools, including 60 multilingual and bicultural workers to support student and family engagement, is a critical initiative in terms of ensuring that educationally disadvantaged young people are not disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.¹⁴ The Department of Education identified that those with low levels of English are one of the groups most likely to have struggled with remote learning,¹⁵ and claims that many students benefitting from the tutoring program are likely to be from EAL backgrounds.¹⁶ It is important, then, that the impact of this initiative on newly arrived students is closely monitored and evaluated, and that the strengths of these initiatives can be built on into the future.

Young people outside of the secondary education system, such as those learning English or pursuing further studies, appear to have had less targeted support, and indications are that many are struggling. Challenges with remote learning, lack of opportunity to practice conversational English, and confusion around future pathways is concerning many young people. However, recent changes to the AMEP program to remove the cap on 510 hours of learning has been particularly welcome and needed at this time.¹⁷

The Victorian Government's investment in career counsellors as part of Jobs Victoria provides an opportunity to specifically focus on the needs of newly arrived young people, particularly those outside the post-compulsory school system, which seems to have become more urgent in the context of the pandemic.¹⁸ In order to do so, the initiative must closely partner with AMEP providers, English Language Centres/Schools and multicultural and youth settlement workers, and ensure that the career advisors are strengths based, culturally and age responsive, and can work with the young person in the context of the family.

Young people spoke extensively about wanting better career advice that supports them to make informed decisions about their education and employment pathways.

Our experience suggests that it is important to involve families in these conversations, to build shared understanding and support for young people's choices. It is important to consider how young people and families can gain access to the most up-to-date labour market information, obtained by new bodies such as The National Skills Commission and the Victorian Skills Authority.

With extended lockdowns in both 2020 and 2021, there is the real potential that many newly arrived young people will require more ongoing support to ensure educational equity, including those outside of the post-compulsory education system. The young people who have been disadvantaged by remote learning were likely to have been experiencing barriers to full and equal participation in their education prior to the pandemic. The greater insight gained into educational disparity during this time presents a real opportunity to embed and strengthen the support available to students, not just in response to the pandemic, but into the future. This will ensure every young person in Victoria has fair access to education and can choose pathways that build on their strengths, ultimately contributing to a stronger society.

6.1.1 Findings about education

EAL support

- **Opportunities to practise English face-to-face were extremely limited during 2020 and 2021, and for many, English language acquisition has reportedly gone backwards, impacting on young people's competence and confidence.**

Remote learning was particularly challenging for beginner level students. Research highlights that young women (aged 18-25) are at risk of lagging behind their male counterparts when it comes to English language acquisition, reminding us this is a group to continue to monitor and ensure they receive the support they need.¹⁹ This is particularly so when combined with the tendency for refugee and migrant young women to take on additional domestic labour and caring responsibilities during the pandemic.²⁰

Young people reported that they are struggling to find in-person, accessible educational support and tutoring, as many homework clubs have not yet returned to face-to-face delivery, even between lockdowns. When asked about the lasting impact of the pandemic on their lives, many of the young people spoke about the challenges of remote learning and the residual impacts. A number of young people felt they had missed out on foundational knowledge and are struggling to catch up. Some reported challenges in finding in-person homework club support, or discovering the costs of private tutoring inaccessible. One current Year 12 student expressed:

...because of online programs we couldn't do our exams, we didn't study really well, we needed to know the things in order to move on or improve. Now this year, doing unit 3 or 4 of VCE, it's hard for us because we didn't do the basics in year 11, we didn't do exams or SACS. It is hard for us to get used to it this year.

There was an overwhelming sense of concern and frustration amongst those taking EAL courses remotely. Many newly arrived young people stated that online environments were not conducive to receiving the educational support they needed,

as they often experienced delays or confusion, and there was not always the chance to ask questions or receive the extra help they felt they needed. The continuation of online classes by some educational institutions in between lockdown has also meant some young people have had limited opportunities to practice and improve their English language skills, eroding their confidence. Others had to suspend learning remotely due to personal challenges, and felt discouraged and 'set back' in their educational goals.

Studying online is hard... easier to focus and ask questions in person. I find online class distracting, with many people asking questions.

I feel like lots of people did not learn much from Cert 3 and 4 in EAL last year.

If last year I could have studied, I would have finished Cert 4 and gone on to Pathology; but because of online learning I had to stop classes because I have weak eyes and time in front of the computer gives me headaches.

Some educational institutions have continued to deliver remote learning, even during periods when lockdowns had lifted.²¹ This will continue to present challenges for young people who are still learning English.

- **A significant reduction in migration numbers appears to be impacting the kind of extracurricular support young people are able to receive in English Language Schools/Centres.**

With smaller numbers of students, schools and EAL centres are reporting they do not have the capacity to host youth programs or services who previously facilitated specialised activities. This has led to a reduction in young people's options for social connection and recreational opportunities. This is concerning given the importance of embedding access to a diverse range of recreational and social experiences to English language learning in youth English language classes, to maintain young people's educational engagement and wellbeing.²² Young people identified that remote learning has impacted not only on their education, but also on their ability to form friendships and social networks.

- **A potentially positive, unexpected result of reduced numbers in English Language Schools/Centres and staff cuts has been the redeployment of some of these teachers as part of the tutoring program in schools for 2021 to support newly arrived students.²³**

This presents an opportunity to learn from the impact of having trained EAL teachers as tutors and support staff for newly arrived EAL students in secondary schools, and could inform future efforts to support these students.

- **Some AMEP providers reported that there were benefits of remote learning, such as being able to connect students online across campuses and bring classes together.**

Further research could be undertaken to explore young people's experiences regarding this, and the circumstances in which remote learning could strengthen educational outcomes and connectedness for certain groups of young people, such as those who are geographically isolated or experiencing mental health challenges. For instance, a regional AMEP provider reported that the move to remote learning had actually increased some young people's attendance, as it reduced barriers to participation such as transportation and childcare.

Educational engagement

- **In the height of the 2020 lockdowns, services were reporting a number of newly arrived young people withdrawing from their education programs. It appears that some young people have not re-engaged.**

Services believe that this is due to the challenges of remote learning and not having adequate support; lack of access to devices/the internet or space to study; increased caring responsibilities; and needing to contribute to household income to alleviate household financial stress.²⁴ This resonates with broader indications that substantial numbers of vulnerable students are not returning to school,²⁵ and the concern that more needs to be done to support students who were already vulnerable to disengaging from education.²⁶

Services are also reporting that a number of newly arrived young people who may have disengaged from their education in 2020 are confused about what to re-enrol or re-engage in, given the rapidly changing labour market and in the evolving context of the pandemic. Some young people who withdrew from their education are delaying re-commencing, in the hope that their course may return face-to-face.

Career pathways

- **Many newly arrived young people are still experiencing stress and confusion around their educational and employment pathways, building on what they told us in 2020.**

Young people expressed that they want to undertake further study, but are confused about their options and what is best in a rapidly changing labour market. Career guidance provided at school or TAFE is reportedly insufficient in responding to their needs, and some young people are finding the experience unhelpful, or at worse, discouraging and demotivating, if the guidance is not strengths-based or culturally responsive. Young people without citizenship are also reporting difficulties in finding out their study and financial options when not yet eligible for FEE-HELP.

Young people identified that remote learning has impacted not only on their education, but also on their opportunity to learn to navigate employment pathways. Many young people expressed wanting more support around understanding their educational and employment pathways to plan for their future. As a result, newly arrived young people are seeking career advice from youth and community workers to fill this gap in knowledge. However many youth workers do not feel equipped or qualified to provide this specialist advice.

As I am learning at home, I'm unsure where to apply for jobs and am busy with study. If I was at campus, I could network with other students and find jobs. I only know people's names, but haven't made friendships.

The rapidly changing labour market has created further anxiety for many young people in terms of understanding their future plans. Young people did not appear to have a strong grasp of the various options available to them, and some were very interested in undertaking shorter-term study that would lead directly to work.

I want to meet someone or talk to someone because of my career future. I am so confused about what I want to do in the future. This is the only thing that I'm worrying about.

[I] just learnt that there is a course that could help me get a job in hospital. I wish people could help me learn about the different types of courses, like short term courses to help find a job.

- **Household financial stress can limit newly arrived young people's capacity to pursue courses they are interested in.**

Some young people reported delaying finishing their Certificate 3 in AMEP as they are unsure what to do next and do not have the financial resources available to pursue further study, although some TAFEs have reportedly had success in helping young people secure scholarships to cover the costs of Certificate 4 in English. This appears, however, to be on an ad hoc basis, and some young people are reporting confusion as to what they can access and afford in terms of further EAL study.

- **There appears to be a lack of understanding among newly arrived young people and families around the education opportunities and support available through TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships, and their Job Active providers.**

Some newly arrived young people are unaware of the availability of Free TAFE courses in Victoria. More can be done to promote and help young people access this pathway. This is particularly important given the federal government investment in Apprenticeships and Traineeships through the JobTrainer initiative,²⁷ however this is not always a pathway that young people or parents/carers have a good understanding of.

Some young people also were struggling with advocating for their educational aspirations with their JobActive provider:

My JobActive is telling me now I have to get a full time job but I can't do that because I want to study childcare course; I want to learn driving a car.

- **Young people enrolled in courses that involve practical aspects have been particularly impacted as they have been unable to undertake face-to-face learning or work placements that may have been requirements of their course.**

Young people are reporting that this is challenging even for those studying in 2021, as educational institutions are trying to give priority to students who were unable to

undertake these aspects in 2020, creating a backlog of students requiring placements. It is encouraging to see that the Victorian budget 2021–22 has committed \$7.9million towards supporting practical placements for students via placement support officers,²⁸ which may contribute to meeting this need.

Family engagement

- **Prolonged periods of remote learning have contributed to both challenges and opportunities with regards to family engagement in young people’s learning.**

Remote learning, the digital divide and reduced face-to-face interactions with school has, in some instances, made family engagement even more difficult. At the same time, some schools appear to have developed a deeper understanding of students’ home situations, including the barriers to their learning and support required, and strengthened family engagement, which presents a real opportunity to build on in the future. The success stories from this period can be built upon by the Department of Education to share good practice and increase the accountability of schools to collect consistent data, and be responsive to the particular needs of their students, especially those from EAL backgrounds.

- **The increase in Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs) and further support provided to MEAs in schools is a positive step towards supporting both students, staff and family engagement, and should be continued into the future.**²⁹

6.2 Digital inclusion and online safety

The pandemic has rapidly transformed and accelerated our reliance on online forms of engagement, creating new possibilities to connect and learn regardless of physical distance, but also potentially leaving many behind. The rapid shift to online forms of learning, socialising and accessing services exposed the inequities that exist in the community with regards to digital literacy and access. It also accelerated a steep digital learning curve for many.

Further lockdowns in 2021, and the fact that many services and education providers are remaining online, is a reminder that the world we know has fundamentally changed. The pandemic provides an urgent context whereby the Victorian Government stepped in to fill a digital divide that has long existed, particularly for school students, to ensure they could continue learning at home by providing laptops and free internet.³⁰

Although both federal and state governments have made some form of commitment to digital inclusion in their most recent budgets, it is important that digital access and skills are considered fundamental rights in and of themselves. Digital access is now considered an ‘essential service’ “for participation in education, employment, information, community services, organisation of finances, health and wellbeing, and connecting with family and friends”.³¹

6.2.1 Findings about digital inclusion and online safety

- **Digital access is still a challenge for many newly arrived young people and families.**³²

Services reported that many young people do not have adequate access to a device or the internet, or quiet spaces at home to engage online, which is interfering with their ability to study, employment options, access to services and broader participation. This finding was supported by young people's responses during the 2020 lockdowns, where 29% of young people CMY surveyed reported they had difficulty in accessing a computer/device or the internet to learn online.³³

Access to digital devices appeared to be particularly problematic for newly arrived young people learning outside of the secondary school system (e.g. those studying EAL or attending TAFE), with a lack of consistency amongst educational providers in terms of support offered. Services reported instances of young people still trying to attend classes on their mobile phones.

The impact of interacting predominately online permeated young people's experiences regarding the lasting challenges of pandemic. They reported struggling to learn in this format, experiencing challenges forming social connections online, and expressed relief when able to re-engage face-to-face.

For the most part, young people did not speak extensively around challenges associated with digital access per se, although one young person identified it as their most significant ongoing challenge as a result of the pandemic.

- **The fact that online options for support have been accelerated as a result of the pandemic is positive, with services reporting that access to out-of-hours support, such as e-headspace, is helpful. However, face-to-face engagement is also critical.**

Services reported that despite the benefits of online services, they cannot replace the trust and engagement that is built face-to-face, particularly with newly arrived young people who are often unfamiliar with the service system. Youth workers observed that some online check-ins with newly arrived young people are working well if they have a pre-established relationship with the young person. However, it is insufficient as the only form of engagement.

Services are reporting that many young people are 'Zoom fatigued' and less inclined to join online spaces (such as youth programs) when restrictions are eased. However, some services and initiatives remain predominately online. Although subsequent lockdowns in Victoria have highlighted that the ability to pivot programs and services online is needed, services report that engaging newly arrived young people predominately in this way can be challenging.

- **Remote forms of engagement, particularly when discussing personal topics such as mental health or family violence, are not always suitable for newly arrived young people.**

Services are reporting that some young people are unable to find confidential spaces to talk, supported by research suggesting mediums such as telehealth are not always suitable for those living in inappropriate home environments, raising privacy and confidentiality issues.³⁴

- **Some services reported an increase in online gaming and gambling by newly arrived young people.**

Some young people are turning to gaming and gambling as a distraction from remote education, an issue that may be exacerbated by the amount of time spent online during the pandemic. This is concerning in the context of recent revelations that social media giants, such as Facebook, are on-selling young people's data for targeted gambling advertising.³⁵ Gambling is more frequently being built into gaming apps, and Australian research during 2020 suggests that young men are a group most at risk.³⁶

- **Increased time spent on digital platforms has highlighted a lack of online safety awareness among young people and families.**

Youth workers reported that increased time spent online is resulting in young people's exposure to online harassment, racism, bullying and intimate partner harassment (such as the sharing of personal images). Research undertaken during 2020 by ANU and CMY identified that since the pandemic, over half (59%) of young participants had experienced racism or discrimination online or in the media.³⁷ Services identified the need for earlier education around online safety and reporting options for both young people and families.

- **The digital literacy generation gap has been accelerated during the pandemic and lockdowns, particularly in families where parents/carers lack English language and digital skills.**

Young people's increased time spent online and on social media may contribute to increased family conflict. Services are reporting that parents/carers have an incomplete picture of how their young people are engaging online, which is causing concern.

6.3 Employment

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the labour market, and young people have been hardest hit.³⁸ Young people in the general population are likely to face an increasingly competitive job market,³⁹ particularly for those in the 15-24 age bracket who are not studying full time.⁴⁰ Migrant workers have also been identified as a group particularly vulnerable to experiencing economic disadvantage as a result of the pandemic.⁴¹

Those who are young, newly arrived and from a refugee or migrant background experience intersecting disadvantages that result in being crowded out of the labour market.⁴² This however, is nothing new. Young people from refugee backgrounds in particular have long experienced numerous barriers when trying to gain work.⁴³ Newly arrived young people encounter additional challenges to finding employment, including developing English language proficiency, limited history of local work experience and social capital, a lack of recognition of overseas qualifications or experience, and racism and discrimination.⁴⁴ Those from humanitarian backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed compared to other recently arrived migrants.⁴⁵

The Victorian Government's Working for Victoria initiative has been an important investment in supporting people back into employment.⁴⁶ Consortiums of employers from both the multicultural and youth sectors highlight the initiative has been important in providing a foot in the door for many who may have been previously overlooked by employers, and at the same time has enabled organisations to better meet the needs of the community.⁴⁷ Paid, entry level roles such as these are precisely the kind of opportunities newly arrived young people need access to. Carving out roles specifically

for multicultural young people helps to overcome the barriers they commonly experience when entering the job market, and provides them with the experience and networks they need to secure work in the future.

6.3.1 Findings about employment:

- **Applying for jobs has been increasingly challenging for many newly arrived young people, with more workplaces turning to online recruitment during the pandemic.**

A majority of young people expressed that they were struggling to navigate the increasingly changing and competitive job market. With reduced options for support around understanding employment pathways, resumes and interviewing processes (that were increasingly online), they struggled to find work. This finding was supported by services that reported an increase in digital modes of recruitment and pre-interview video screening, which they stated young people had found daunting and difficult to navigate.⁴⁸ This issue was exacerbated by the reduction in face-to-face support to assist young people to navigate job application processes online.

- **Barriers to finding work can contribute to newly arrived young people's experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. It is also impacting their mental health and wellbeing.**

For newly-arrived young people, not only does employment offer economic security but it also allows them to form social connections and experience a sense of belonging as they work to establish a new life in Australia. This is vital, considering many have limited social and professional networks. Barriers to employment, feeling discouraged by what future career options are available, and insecure work, are impacting young people's mental health and wellbeing which in turn impacts their job readiness. Observing or hearing about discrimination in recruitment practices was also impacting on some young people's sense of hope for employment possibilities.

Employment is still hard to find. [It's] very frustrating. I've heard from other people that some companies do not hire Muslim people - because they wear the hijab etc.

Some young people who had found a job since 2020 reported feeling much more positive about things and enjoying getting to meet new people.

Young people recommended employment-related mentoring as *"very helpful to get jobs in special industries of interest"* and wanted greater support with understanding their employment options, learning about short courses with employment related outcomes, opportunities to volunteer, increased networking opportunities, and practical help in looking for and applying for jobs.

- **Newly arrived young people who have found employment since 2020, are mostly in insecure, casual jobs. This leads to young people experiencing economic insecurity as a result of insecure underemployment.**

CMY's employment team has observed that most of the work young people have managed to secure since the pandemic is casual or short-term in nature, with instances of some young people being underpaid. International research has demonstrated the pervasive and longer-term negative impacts of sudden unemployment.⁴⁹ Impacts of this nature were expressed in newly arrived young people's stories of losing their job during the pandemic and facing economic insecurity in the following months. Financial stress was especially common in families where one or more family members had also lost their job, or were underemployed. Young people felt pressure to contribute to household income, but felt powerless when unable to obtain employment. Conversely, where young people were able to find work, it provided a stronger sense of financial security and wellbeing.

I think if it were not for coronavirus I would have found a job or other opportunities earlier. Even my father had a job and he was at home not working for 4 months. He is casual. It's very hard for him looking for a job. He can't speak English very well and it's hard for him to find a job in tiling/construction.

I did not have money during coronavirus - I was borrowing money from friends, I was very broke. Following coronavirus [in 2021] I started a part time contract at [employer] and then shifted to casual contract. Currently [things are] a bit more stable.

- **Many newly arrived young people (including international students) are unsure of their rights relating to employment, and where to access this information.**

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of newly arrived young people understanding their rights relating to employment given the scarcity of jobs, potential for exploitation, and health and safety risks that can be exacerbated during a pandemic.

Economic insecurity is contributing to young people pursuing any work available, without adequate protections in place. Services are reporting instances of young people being underpaid, given insufficient shifts to meet their day to day needs, juggling multiple casual jobs to try and cover their costs, being paid cash in hand, and encountering health and safety risks. International students and young people on visas who are ineligible for income support face particular vulnerability to exploitation in a scarce job market. Young people have expressed concerns that their visas may be cancelled if they speak up for their rights in the workplace.

- **The pandemic has meant a reduction in face-to-face volunteering and work experience opportunities for newly arrived young people.**

Volunteering and work experience are often the first opportunities newly arrived young people have to gain Australian workplace skills and professional referees and networks. Some young people reported that they had their work experience cancelled in 2020, and had not been successful in gaining either new work experience or employment in 2021. Others struggled given they had no or limited work experience, and felt it was difficult to compete in a tight job market.

Looking for jobs is hard. I don't have experience and there weren't many job opportunities last year. It's harder to stand out in applications, especially with no experience.

- Acquiring driving licences has been extremely challenging, due to being unable to gain hours of practice required due to social distancing and disruption to the L2P program.

Newly arrived young people faced obstacles in obtaining their driver's licence as a result of the pandemic, which impacted upon their ability to take on shifts at work, with one young person commuting by public transport up to 2-3 hours one way. This is impacting young people's employment options, given many jobs require a licence, including trade based apprenticeships and the growing need for delivery drivers. Inability to secure a driver's licence impacts on young people and families' work opportunities, service access and social opportunities. Long waiting lists for the L2P program existed before the pandemic and there are now waiting lists of 12-18 months in some areas.

6.4 Financial stress

Financial insecurity is not new to many young people and families who have recently arrived in Australia. The pandemic has exacerbated the financial precarity many young people and families are experiencing, particularly for those who may be ineligible for income support due to their visa status. Additionally, many newly arrived families face unique economic challenges, as it is commonplace to provide financial support to relatives overseas, something that has become increasingly challenging since the onset of the pandemic, but perhaps all the more urgent.⁵⁰

Financial stress exacerbated by the pandemic and rolling, restrictive lockdowns has ramifications for young people's mental health, housing and food security, educational options, and family relationships. Young people more broadly are particularly at risk of financial insecurity, with 18-25 year olds identified as bearing the brunt of food insecurity in 2020, with 65% of those identified as food insecure going hungry at least once a week.⁵¹

Critical government initiatives in 2020 such as JobKeeper and the Coronavirus supplement –although essential for keeping many afloat – failed to reach all vulnerable community members. The Federal Government increase of \$50 per fortnight for JobSeeker and Youth Allowance fails to cover basic living costs and lift young people and families out of poverty,⁵² while the extension of the newly arrived resident waiting period protracts many young people and families' financial insecurity for an even greater length of time.⁵³

6.4.1 Findings about financial stress

- Families experiencing unemployment, financial strain or job insecurity is having negative flow on effects for young people, impacting on their educational choices and overall wellbeing.

Many of the economic difficulties young people spoke about stemmed from unemployment, whether faced by themselves personally or other members of their household, or ineligibility for government income support due to visa status. Some eligible newly-arrived families who had been kept afloat by the Coronavirus supplement or JobKeeper again experienced financial issues once these supports ceased. Financial challenges were spoken about in terms of stress, uncertainty and negative mental health impacts.

Things have changed in our family - my dad got sick and no one was working. All the jobs got impacted. Basically everyone had financial problems. It is still kind of challenging for us.

[We] also have to send money to brothers in their home country. It's hard to manage finances across two countries.

Services reported that young people are also concerned about not being able to afford course fees, with some putting their education on hold to contribute to household costs and to provide for relatives overseas.

- **Services are reporting newly arrived young people and/or families are experiencing housing insecurity as a result of the financial implications of the pandemic, also impacting on their mental health and wellbeing.**

6.5 Social connectedness and participation

Social connections and community participation are cornerstones of positive youth settlement.⁵⁴ All young people have the need to connect with others and have a sense of belonging. Developing a strong sense of self through relationships with others (particularly peers) is a critical point in adolescent development, and positive relationships play a strong protective factor in young people's lives. This is especially so for newly arrived young people who frequently lack extended family relationships and social networks in Australia, and are in the process of navigating a bicultural identity that incorporates both their culture of origin and their new life in Australia.

The pandemic has interrupted the formation and continuation of these positive connections. It is therefore all the more important to support young people's positive connections with peers, family, community and broader society. In addition, education, employment, recreation and social activities play a critical role in supporting young people from newly arrived backgrounds to connect and form new friendships, as well as interact with the broader community and service system. The Victorian Government's investment in community sport, for example, for young people from African and Pasifika backgrounds is a strong example of the importance of accessible recreational and sporting activities.⁵⁵ Free, accessible social and recreational opportunities are more important now than ever, particularly for young people who are experiencing social isolation and building new connections in Australia. They lay the foundations for wellbeing and participation.

6.5.1 Findings about social connectedness and participation

- Many newly arrived young people and families appear to be experiencing social isolation.

A number of young people spoke about ongoing experiences of social isolation and disconnection as a result of the pandemic. Some were unable to meet new people given the extended and multiple lockdowns, and had limited pre-existing social networks due to their recent migration experience. Despite lockdown lifting, some young people reported that they are still re-establishing connections with friends and family, and many are still experiencing social isolation.

Connection to friends and family in Melbourne [has been difficult]. Cannot see my friends, cannot chat in person, it's hard to trust that they are okay. Despite the end of lockdown, I haven't been visiting friends and family very much, as they live far away.

Service providers saw that though newly arrived young people may have had limited social networks prior to the pandemic, the effect of multiple lockdowns, remote learning, and cancelled social activities and events on their ability to form new connections has been significant.

- Young people who arrived in Australia late 2019 and early 2020 have been particularly impacted. These newly arrived young people have not had adequate access to support through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP).

Young people with very limited or no time in Australia prior to the pandemic are at particular risk of experiencing social isolation and disconnection. Their hopes of making new friends, exploring their new home, participating in social and recreational activities have, for the most part, been put on hold. Some young people have expressed to workers how devastated they were to be unable to connect with others and get to know their new home as they had hoped.

Settlement support through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) has also been impacted, including the cancellation of many excursion and orientation sessions that would normally be provided by settlement workers or AMEP providers. Young people have reported that they have had very limited support, but now do not qualify for the program given they have been in Australia for more than six months.

- The role of services and education providers are critical in providing social connections, excursions and orientation. The move to online services and education has been unable to meet this need.

Remote learning was a key contributor to feelings of isolation as young people found it difficult to form new connections with peers. When asked how they could be better supported, some young people spoke about increased excursions, social, recreational and leadership opportunities to connect with others and get to know their surroundings, and to have fun.

I really enjoyed that [social/recreational program for newly arrived young people] last year... This program had excursions to Parliament, to some museums... It was amazing day for young people and I really enjoyed. I think if after these restrictions if [organisation] can make a program like excursions for young people it would be really good to have fun and to meet each other.

Maybe running some leadership workshops with students, motivational workshops, organising some events and outings for young people in the community.

- **In certain regions, there are a lack of affordable and accessible social and recreational opportunities for young people from newly arrived backgrounds, given the closure of many activities, and the move to remote forms of delivery, many of which have not returned in-person.**

A number of services reported struggling to link young people into activities to promote social connection, mental health and community participation. Young people are reporting they are finding it challenging to know what is on in their local area. There are reports that young women may be finding it more difficult to participate in activities, due to reduced options that do not necessarily cater to young women's specific needs.

Some local government areas lack any kind of youth space or safe, free and accessible venues for young people to connect, making coordination difficult.

- **The cancellation of festivals, cultural events and celebrations during 2020 and 2021 has impacted on young people's sense of belonging and social connectedness.**

Cultural celebrations and participating in broader community events can be important for strengthening young people's connection to community and their own sense of identity and belonging in Australia, particularly given they are still in the formative years of settlement. The cancellation of these events and inability for young people to attend events in person has led to disappointment and disconnection.

- **Services are reporting challenges in building family engagement and rapport due to lockdowns in 2020 and the shift to digital platforms.**

Family engagement and trust with services is a critical element of newly arrived young people being able to participate in social and recreational opportunities.

- **Young people are finding it difficult to be separated from family overseas.**

Concern for the welfare and safety of family and friends overseas and the uncertainty of not knowing when they can see their family is negatively impacting on young people's day to day lives. This challenge also raised by other multicultural young people in 2020.⁵⁶ This has implications on young people's mental health and wellbeing. One young person reported their greatest challenge as a result of the pandemic as being this separation and uncertainty:

Feeling homesick – I can't visit family overseas. There is nothing we can do. It's really difficult, every day. There is no way to explain it.

6.6 Service accessibility and support

Access to services and accurate information is important at all times, but especially so during a health crisis. Governments have now recognised the importance of multicultural communities in responding to the pandemic, and are more collaborative by ensuring the expertise and resources within communities are recognised and supported.⁵⁷

Young people have been shown to be playing a critical role in their families and their communities during the pandemic,⁵⁸ particularly highlighted during the hard lockdowns of the high rise flats in Inner Melbourne during 2020.⁵⁹ It is important that we recognise the strong role young people frequently play as a bridge and connector between families, communities, services and government, and that this has intensified during this time, particularly as many services are now online.

6.6.1 Findings about service accessibility and support

- **Changes to services' operation and availability due to the pandemic has been confusing for newly arrived young people and families to navigate.**

Young people reported not knowing how to get in touch or access different services at times. For many newly arrived young people, who are unfamiliar with the service system and may not trust that their needs will be understood, it is critical that the system is responsive at the time they need support.

*"You get one chance with some young people (to link them into further support). If there isn't an adequate response – you lose that trust and engagement. There shouldn't be any waiting lists when a young person needs support."
– Program Manager, multicultural youth support.*

- **The role of young people in supporting families to access to services has increased, given the accelerated demand for not only English, but also digital literacy.⁶⁰**

This can have implications for both family dynamics and demands on young people. Yet this also presents an opportunity to build on young people's strengths and capabilities to meet community needs.

- **Youth workers are reporting broader service strain and barriers to referring young people for further support, particularly around safety and mental health concerns.**

One youth worker reported trying to refer to Child Protection for over a month around concerns for the young person's safety at home, with no response. Young people with suicide ideation have been told there is a six month waiting list for mental health support, and instances where young people have perpetrated violence in the home have been told there is a three month waiting list for support.

It is encouraging to see recent state government investment to increase frontline child protection workers and also significant investment from both federal and state governments in mental health. However, it will be some time before the impacts of this are felt on the frontlines.

6.7 Mental health and wellbeing

It is vital that all young people are able to access the mental health support they need, particularly during a pandemic and as we move into recovery. Extended and recurrent lockdowns in Victoria during 2020 and 2021 have shone a light on the importance of mental wellbeing, and effective responses to mental ill-health.

Young people from newly arrived and culturally diverse backgrounds can experience particular vulnerabilities to mental ill-health and/or barriers to getting the support they need, and are generally underrepresented in the service system.⁶¹ Young people from humanitarian backgrounds can experience higher levels of psychological stress than the general Australian youth population.⁶² Similarly, evidence suggests that even before the pandemic, the mental health of international students was deteriorating, with the pandemic accelerating this decline.⁶³ Research in 2020 found that almost two thirds of international students during the pandemic were showing signs of low or very low levels of wellbeing.⁶⁴

Although Governments responded promptly and significantly to mental health concerns during last year and into 2021, the system is still under-resourced and under strain.⁶⁵ It remains to be seen whether traditional channels of mental health support are, in reality, reaching newly arrived young people, given the barriers that existed prior to the pandemic.⁶⁶ Services and newly arrived young people are reporting that the pandemic is still affecting their mental health and wellbeing, and it seems essential that we find new, creative means of bridging the gap between the current service system we have, and young people's immediate needs.

6.7.1 Findings about mental health and wellbeing

- **Information and knowledge around mental health support has not been adequately reaching newly arrived young people and communities, particularly in regional areas.**

Assisting newly arrived young people and families to understand and navigate these systems (particularly sensitive and unfamiliar systems like mental health) can be challenging and requires resourcing under normal circumstances. The pandemic has increased the importance of this work, but has also increased barriers to services being able to support young people and families to navigate these supports.

- **Both services and young people shared concerns around mental health and wellbeing generally –particularly in relation to social connectedness, employment and financial security.**

Newly arrived young people's mental health and wellbeing has been impacted significantly during the pandemic. This is the result of stress related to financial insecurity, educational and employment options, housing instability, social disconnection, family conflict, and in some instances, family violence.

Young people's mental health was closely associated with their social connectedness, employment and financial security. During the lockdowns, many newly arrived young people spoke about feeling isolated or depressed, as they struggled to forge or maintain connections. While some young people reported feeling a little more socially connected with the easing of lockdowns in early 2021, others expressed a fear of further lockdowns, which turned out to be well founded.

Migrant young people are alone. When I came to Australia I expected that I meet lots of people my age and I will have lots of fun or teams or classes together but everything was online and boring. Now it's better - but we are always going into some restrictions.

I was at home a lot of the time last year. I didn't have friends or know my neighbours. I couldn't go anywhere. But now [with lifting of lockdowns] my mental health is much better.

There appears to be a strong correlation between young people's decline in mental health and financial difficulties. A number of young people experienced stress when unable to secure employment, and spoke of feeling 'stuck', with research supporting the close relationship between young people's transition to employment and mental wellbeing.⁶⁷ Those able to obtain a job became more financially and mentally stable.

[I am] feeling quite stuck, due to loss of job, education opportunity and injury.

Staying home was really stressful - [I] couldn't do anything and felt stuck. It has improved over the past few months. Starting a job has helped. Can help to forget. Learn to communicate with other people.

Some young people are still finding it difficult to develop effective coping strategies to manage depressive thoughts at this time, reporting that they felt anxious about the health implications of the pandemic and worry about potentially catching the virus.

During coronavirus I felt I was depressed. I dunno how to tell, but still I feel like I can't do things I want to because of what happened during coronavirus. I dunno...

I found it very hard to manage and avoid difficult thoughts... [I] felt very anxious, affected my sleep. I still struggle with anxiety and sleep issues... Still something I try to manage.

- **Mental health has been a key issue for international students, given lack of family supports, remote learning, financial pressures and lack of connection to the broader community.**

Remote learning has interfered with the ability to connect and form friendships with peers on campus, contributing to isolation and poor mental health.

- **Many young people of Asian appearance (including international students) have been fearful to re-engage and interact in the community (even after lockdowns were lifted) for fear of racism fuelled by the pandemic.**

Fears experienced specifically by young people of Asian appearance have contributed to further social isolation and mental ill-health, supported by research in 2020 by CMY and ANU.⁶⁸

- **More time spent online has increased exposure to negative aspects of social media, such as bullying and racism, which has negatively impacted newly arrived young people's wellbeing.**

The pandemic has accelerated online forms of racism,⁶⁹ and young people are more likely to be the targets of or witnesses to racism online.⁷⁰ This can have a significant impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing.⁷¹

- **There is a need for far more front line youth mental health staff who are culturally responsive and can support young people when they need it, regardless of their visa status. There is also a need to co-design mental health support with multicultural young people to ensure services can be more responsive to their needs.**

Young people suggested that more youth-focused programs to support mental wellbeing, coping skills would help them both during and beyond the pandemic. Others wanted more access to free and ongoing counselling support, regardless of their visa status.

Services recognised there is a strong need for holistic approaches to mental health and wellbeing, such as social, recreational and arts based options that may connect with some young people where western, individualist approaches fail.⁷² Both young people and services recognised the need to co-design and develop more culturally relevant approaches to support the mental wellbeing of newly arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

6.8 Family relationships

Family plays a critical role in the lives of young people, and adolescence can bring about shifts in these relationships.⁷³ However, newly arrived young people and their

families can experience further complexity in their intergenerational relationships, as a result of different rates of acculturation, changing roles and power dynamics, navigating bicultural identities and, at times, conflicting cultural expectations, all in the context of broader adolescent development.⁷⁴

6.8.1 Findings about family relationships

- **Common challenges experienced by newly arrived young people, including the intergenerational and acculturation gap and strained family relationships, have been compounded.**

Sector consultations raised several challenges related to an increased strain on parent-adolescent relationships in newly arrived families as a result of the pandemic. By way of contrast, most of the young people didn't report this as one of their key concerns in terms of lasting impacts. One young person did identify family relationships as an area that was still challenging as a result of the pandemic, but did not provide further details.

Conflict or stress around the high expectations of newly arrived families for their children to excel in education is relatively common. However the experience of disrupted education in both 2020 and 2021 appears to have exacerbated these pressures for some young people, and has made meeting these expectations feel all the more unattainable.

- **Increased financial hardship (where one or both parents have lost work) was seen to be contributing towards increased stress, feelings of blame and guilt, and family conflict. This can lead to an increase of family violence.**

Some services reported an increase in instances of family violence; other services reported not necessarily an increase in the number of reports, but an increase in the severity of violent behaviour or threats of violence and risk of family violence.

7. The way forward: Sector and youth perspectives

7.1 Sector recommendations

We asked services what the lessons we'd learnt during 2020, and how we could build on these. This is what was shared:

- Continue to address the systemic and structural gaps in our systems that have been clearly exposed during the pandemic (including education, digital exclusion, health, employment and income support).
- Recognise, respect and resource the important expertise and work of young people and communities during the pandemic, recovery process and beyond.
- Strengthen the coordination and partnerships between services, government and communities that developed during the pandemic, including identifying and advocating around systemic gaps that the pandemic has exposed.
- Focus and invest in re-engagement and relationship building with young people, families and communities given lockdowns have severely disrupted engagement with the service system and community connectedness.
- Continue working with the broader service system to ensure it is inclusive and culturally responsive to young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds, given the gaps that have been exposed.
- The sector to strengthen its knowledge and understanding around how to deliver culturally responsive and safe programs and services online for newly arrived young people, and be more responsive in using social media as a tool for engagement.

7.2 Young people's recommendations

Young people shared their ideas for what would help them and other newly arrived young people at this time, and in the future:

- Government to encourage educational institutions to reinstate face-to-face classes once lockdown restrictions lift.
- Funding for tutoring and educational support for newly-arrived young people.
- Comprehensive and supportive career pathways guidance and accurate information about pathways, what jobs and opportunities exist, and support in accessing these options.
- Specialist employment programs for newly arrived young people to increase job-readiness skills (e.g. mentoring, support, resume writing, job application processes and interview skills, industry networks and opportunities for work placements).
- Partnerships between employers and youth employment services to identify labour market needs, train young people up, support work placements and provide on the job support.
- Greater access to and increased government financial assistance – e.g. increasing the rate of Youth Allowance and other forms of income support to young people and families.

- Increased access to social, recreational and leadership workshops and activities for young people in local areas.
- Greater access to counselling and other forms of culturally responsive mental health and wellbeing support.

8. Conclusion

The process of building a new life in Australia can be a complex and difficult process for newly arrived young people at any point in time. Navigating settlement during a global pandemic presents unique challenges, alongside the general complexities that adolescence and young adulthood can bring. Extended lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 and the broader pandemic have presented significant interruptions to the settlement process, with implications for young people's longer-term participation and wellbeing.

Never before in our lifetime has there been a more important time to listen, collaborate, and respond to newly arrived young people's voices. Both young people and the services that work with them have highlighted the need for greater support, particularly in the areas of education and pathways advice, employment, social connectedness (including social, recreational and youth participation opportunities) and mental health support.

In addition to building on broader government initiatives to the pandemic, supporting young people's settlement at this time requires targeted and tailored support. Only then can we be confident that the interruptions young people have experienced in the settlement process will not have longer-term marginalising effects. Newly arrived young people want to learn, succeed and contribute to the community which they now call home. We need to ensure that our systems provide them with all the necessary tools and support to thrive, both in the midst of a pandemic, and beyond.

9. Endnotes

1. See CMY (2020) COVID-19 Insights: Key issues and recommendations from CMY's work with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria, Carlton: CMY.
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