

*“They should know my story
before they judge me”*

Listening to the voices of young people
from refugee & migrant backgrounds in
Perth

MYAN Youth Consultation

Perth, April 2014

Summary Report



The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is the nationally recognised policy and advocacy body on multicultural youth issues. Auspiced by the Centre for Multicultural Youth, it is Australia's only voice on multicultural youth issues.

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Background

This Report provides a summary of a consultation held with over 30 young people aged 14-31 years from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Perth in April 2014. Held at the Mirabooka Multicultural Centre, the consultation was a partnership between MYAN (Australia), MYAN WA, and the City of Stirling.

The MYAN and the City of Stirling recognise the importance of providing opportunities for young people to inform our work. We believe that young people have unique experiences and knowledge, and should be supported to articulate the issues impacting on their lives and identify appropriate solutions. This is particularly important for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who face a range of barriers to participation and whose perspectives are often marginalised.

This consultation was designed to provide young people with an opportunity to share their perspectives with peers and local service providers and contribute policy and service delivery at the local, state and national levels. In particular, the consultation sought input from young people into:

- ⦿ The MYAN's *Youth Settlement Framework*
- ⦿ City of Stirling's Multicultural Centre youth activities
- ⦿ The development of a MYAN WA Youth Advisory Group.

Thanks to the young people who participated, for their time and contributions; to the City of Stirling's Family Services team, for hosting the consultation and assisting with the organisation and to ASeTTS and the Office of Multicultural Interests, for promoting the event and facilitating young people's participation.

Scope

Over 30 young people participated in the consultation. Questions were designed to elicit young people's perspectives on barriers and facilitators in the settlement journey, as well as perspectives on the types of youth-focused activities provided by the Mirabooka Multicultural Centre, and views on the development of and participation in a MYANWA Youth Advisory Group.

Working in small groups with a facilitator, young people were asked to respond to the following:

- ⦿ What helped you in building a new life/settling in Australia?
- ⦿ What else can we do to make it easier for young people like you to settle in Australia?
- ⦿ What things have made it difficult in building a new life Australia?
- ⦿ What are the top 5 most important things that people helping young people like you need to know?
- ⦿ What kind of programs would you like to see run in the Mirrabooka Multicultural Centre to build capacity of young people? (Skills, knowledge, social connections/networks)



- ⦿ Are you interested in being involved in an advisory group to the MYAN WA? If yes, what would you like to do? How would you like it to work? What do you need to be involved?

Summary

The following provides a summary of young people's comments in relation to each of the questions.

Q1: What helped you in building a new life in Australia?

Most participants mentioned recreational activities and structured programs, including leadership programs, school (and school-based programs), and access to English language classes, as important in helping the settlement process. One young person said:

"When I came to Australia I didn't know English and where I was and the things around me, such as houses, lights and electricity. It was all new (to me). So I guess going to school made me aware of the things around me and of course teaching me English, it wasn't the best the experience but being able to learn about Australia as a country; the animals; the people; and cultures really helped me as a young person to start off (life in Australia)."

"The Edmund Rice Centre Youth Leadership group really boosted my life in Australia. I had no confidence when I was young adjusting to Australian society and facing so many family barriers in place. The Leadership program made my life less depressing; I learned more things than being in school. I learned communication, how to present yourself as a leader, honesty, being a coach, how to manage a project/program, how to make music, determination, commitment and a whole range of other things. Overall the Leadership made me fit in with Australia."



Other things that helped in building a new life in Australia included:

- ⦿ Orientation programs in schools
- ⦿ Recreation activities & holiday excursions, including:
 - Sports
 - Camps – police camps, ‘Camp of Courage’, CentreCare, ASSeTTS
 - Perth-city activities - bowling, roller skating, ice skating
- ⦿ Learning about/linking in with other services
- ⦿ Opportunities to help others
- ⦿ Training on how to help others (training in leadership skills & peer support/mentoring)
- ⦿ Homework clubs – weekends/after school

Q2: What things have made it difficult in building a new life in Australia?

Beginning life in a new country away from everything that is familiar (i.e. structures, systems, and for some young people family members, etc.) can be difficult and times daunting experience for newly arrived young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

One participant in particular reflected:

“Not understanding the basics of Australia and what goes around really strained my life as a kid: basics meaning English, Indigenous people, (different) races, the school systems, Australian culture, Do’s and Don’ts and other stuff which is important to know. So I had to suck it up and just go along with whatever came. Racism being of those things I had to suck up at school. Not knowing how to handle (racist and bullying situations) because English was difficult.”

Some of the other barriers to successful settlement included:

- ⦿ Learning a new language (including slang words & accents)
- ⦿ Difficulty adapting to culture & lifestyle (including: unfamiliar concept of freedom of speech; different rights; gender equality)
- ⦿ Bullying, racism & discrimination/feeling judged – based on appearance/assumptions; lack of understanding or sensitivity to different cultures
- ⦿ Feeling isolated & homesick – missing family, friends
- ⦿ Lack of understanding/familiarity about “everything” – service system (types of support), education system and hard to access services/support (get the support I need)



- ⊙ Transport – both navigating public transport system and not having a car/hard to get a driver's licence
- ⊙ Peer relationships – making new friends, negotiating peer pressure re. alcohol (new easy access to alcohol)
- ⊙ Finances – learning how to save money, needing to send money home to support family
- ⊙ Young people without parents/guardians – isolated, less support, difficulty in having forms signed/gaining permission (e.g. enrolment in a variety of things).

Q3: What other things can we do to make it easier for new migrants to settle in Australia?

Although the participants identified a variety of barriers that make their settlement experience difficult they were able to provide insight into some of the ways these barriers could be reduced to ensure more successful settlement for newly-arrived young people. One of the more prominent suggestion by a majority of the participants was the importance of receiving/attending information sessions on available services and navigating systems (i.e. public transport; health; Centrelink; education; employment; etc.) during the early stages of their settlement experience in Australia.

Other responses included:

- ⊙ Assistance with bills, rent (living independently in a house)
- ⊙ Projects/programs/workers - youth leaders, case workers, family support, youth workers, volunteer, sports activities, opportunities to get to know other people
- ⊙ More activities/opportunities for young people to make friends (with Australian young people and others from different cultures, including Aboriginal young people) & develop skills (e.g. camps, school holiday activities)
- ⊙ Support them to become a part of the community (e.g. sporting clubs, church/religious organisations, own cultural community)
- ⊙ Someone to take you to basic places like the shops, teach you about Australia – can be peer or someone older person who is responsible
- ⊙ Life skills workshops & learning how to be independent (not relying on caseworkers)
- ⊙ Better cultural awareness – in schools (teachers - teach them about migrants) & opportunities for learning about cultures – e.g. Harmony Day activities, events at school, camps
- ⊙ Family support, youth workers
- ⊙ Volunteer opportunities:
 - Support – showing us around (Centrelink, bank accounts, hospitals, Medicare, education)
 - Help overcome challenges with new culture e.g. learning about new culture
 - Help with shopping e.g. discount/where to get affordable food



Q4: What are the top 5 most important things that people helping young people like you should know so they can help you best?

The young people who participated in the consultation are negotiating a new cultural, legal, social and service landscape alongside the challenges and opportunities of being a young person. Young people stressed the importance of service providers having more understanding about their circumstances and learning/knowing the background of a young person and the struggles/challenges they have experienced. The top 5 most important things that participants identified that service providers should know were:

“We are all teenagers going through adolescence but in a new country with a new culture...we have social pressures, cultural pressures, mixed identity between cultural identity and Australian identity. We want to fit in with our friends.”

“They should know my story before they judge me”

“They should know about me – my interests, culture, language, tradition, values, and religious belief”

“Treat young people with respect and equality – English is our second language”

“Work with communities – learn about their cultures, language (one word at least e.g., welcome)”

Other important things participants identified included:

- ⦿ Understanding and awareness about a young person’s culture and our values and beliefs
- ⦿ Recognise that young people are different from adults
- ⦿ Give opportunities to mingle and be open minded, (to support) to understand each other
- ⦿ Don’t force them to do things they don’t want to – give space to grow independently



Q5: What kinds of programs would you like to see run in the Mirrabooka Multicultural Centre to build capacity of young people? (e.g. skills, knowledge, social connections/networks)

Young people were primarily keen to be engaged in a combination of physical, capacity-building and information sharing activities at the Mirrabooka Multicultural Centre. Some of the specific activities identified were:

- ⦿ Capacity building initiatives: i.e. First Aid Skills, Men's Cooking Classes; Debating classes;
- ⦿ Group counselling;
- ⦿ Careers counselling –employment and education pathway options;
- ⦿ Opportunities to learn about Indigenous cultures and traditions
- ⦿ Sports tournaments; and
- ⦿ Performance arts classes: i.e. drama, acting, singing, and music classes.

Q6: Are you interested in being involved in an advisory group to the MYAN WA? If yes, what would you like to do? How would you like it to work? What do you need to be involved?

A majority of the participants expressed interest in being involved in a MYAN WA Youth Advisory Group. They believed that a MYAN WA Youth Advisory Group would provide them with opportunities to come together to consider ways to contribute to the successful settlement of other newly-arrived young people in Western Australia. The Group would meet regularly (i.e. during school/university holidays) to be effective, and would allow young people to contribute to project/program ideas. Young people expressed that the Group would need to be accommodating of the time constraints and responsibilities that participants have when scheduling meetings; events; training workshops, etc. They also identified the importance of the Group providing transferable skills and capacity building opportunities for its members.

Conclusion

Information from this consultation will be utilised by the MYAN (Australia) in its policy and advocacy work, and in particular in its development of a *Youth Settlement Framework*. The consultation will also inform the work of MYAN WA, and will assist the City of Stirling in planning youth-specific activities at the Mirrabooka Multicultural Centre. We also hope that this Report is utilised by a range of service providers and that the perspectives of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised and incorporated by government and the non-government sector into policy and service delivery.