

***Intergenerational Family Conflict (IFC) – Key learnings from the MYAN NSW Sector  
Development Forum  
August 2012***

**Introduction**

Intergenerational family conflict (IFC) is an issue that is continually identified by multicultural young people, their families and service providers alike as having a significant impact on young people's family relationships and quality of life. However, there is little information or formal discussion about this issue in NSW. It is also rare to find community services and programs that deal with this complex issue, particularly in a culturally appropriate and responsive manner.

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW, as part of two consecutive annual consultations, identified intergenerational family conflict as a priority area to work on through its activities. In March 2011, the MYAN NSW released a policy position paper on IFC and in November 2011 it ran a Sector Development Forum – *Multicultural Young People and Intergenerational Family Conflict* - at The Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre.

The forum focused on providing information about intergenerational family conflict and good practice examples of projects that work with families and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to try and resolve conflict and create better relationships within the family. Presented here are some of the key learnings about IFC from that forum.

**About the MYAN NSW**

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW is a network of services committed to multiculturalism and improving the opportunities and outcomes for multicultural young people in NSW. The purpose of the MYAN is to coordinate information and undertake action on issues affecting multicultural young people and their families, and to develop appropriate policies, strategies and resources that address these issues at the local, regional and state-wide levels. The network is made up of workers from the youth, multicultural, education and training sectors and local government who currently support multicultural young people and their families. The MYAN also seeks representation and input from multicultural young people.

**Multicultural Young People and Intergenerational Family Conflict**

Family structures and dynamics can be significantly impacted by the refugee and migration experience. For refugee families some of the factors that impact on family relationships and lead to intergenerational conflict are directly related to the trauma of the refugee experience and the challenges of resettlement. For migrant families or families where parents came to Australia as migrants, many of the factors are associated with negotiating cultural dislocation and adapting to life in Australia (MYAN Australia, 2010).

## **About the Forum**

The MYAN NSW hosts Sector Development Forums as part of its sector development and capacity building activities. Sector Development Forums focus on the network's priority areas and invite participation from a broader cross-section of community services such as health and education. In its September 2011 interagency meeting the MYAN NSW decided to focus the next forum on IFC. A working group was formed from MYAN NSW members to plan for the forum between September and November 2011.

The working group broadly consulted the MYAN NSW for recommendations for speakers on IFC. The MYAN NSW State Coordinator then contacted NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) about their work with communities, SydWest Multicultural Services Inc. about their Family Harmony Program, and Relationships Australia about the Strength-to-Strength Program to speak at the forum. The MYAN NSW State Coordinator was also contacted by Danielle Antaki (the Artistic Director of Powerhouse Youth Theatre), who proposed that she present about the 'See It My Way' Project. 'See It My Way' is an interactive Forum Theatre Performance about family conflict and communication devised by students and families from Fairfield High School in consultation with local community elders and in partnership with Fairfield City Council.

The State Coordinator also promoted the forum through the MYAN NSW interagency and egroup as well as through the Youth Action and Policy Association NSW networks. Approximately 50 people attended the forum from across the youth, multicultural and settlement services and government.

Each of the four presentations dealt with a different aspect of IFC. Thanh Nguyen and Fatma Mohamed from the Department of Family and Community Services presented on intergenerational and family conflict and the child protection system. Abulla Agwa from SydWest Multicultural Services Inc. presented the Family Harmony Project at SydWest and issues faced by young people and their families when dealing with intergenerational family conflict. Rahat Chowdhury from Relationships Australia in Parramatta presented the Strength-to-Strength Program that works with young people and their families from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Finally, Danielle Antaki, Artistic Director of Powerhouse Youth Theatre presented about the 'See It My Way' Project, which included information about the projects process and its resources. All presentations from the forum were subsequently uploaded onto the MYAN NSW website for future reference.

The presentations were then followed by a consultation with participants about their opinions regarding what actions needed to be taken about IFC and what kinds of programs could help. Below are some of the key issues and actions that were identified by workers:

## Consultation at the Forum

- **Young people need more support**

Young people from multicultural backgrounds often have a lot of responsibilities within the family such as caring for siblings and earning an income and this has an impact on them and their ability to participate in normal types of activities for young people. It also has an impact on their families. Moreover, because multicultural young people often have more responsibilities, they need more support to understand what is and what is not their role and be supported to participate in age appropriate activities, i.e. sport and recreation.

- **Parents need more support**

The group acknowledged that the role of parents is really important and that when children take on the role of the parent, such as paying bills or acting as an interpreter/translator for the family they acculturate faster, which can often have a negative impact on the role of the parents. It was suggested that more bicultural parenting programs would benefit CALD families as well as providing parents with the opportunity to role-play how they will work things out and communicate with their children.

- **More programs that are ongoing and that focus on early intervention**

It was generally agreed that programs are needed that have ongoing funding rather than one off funding in order to support the development of relationships between young people and their parents. Participants suggested that there were programs for parents and programs for young people but that these activities rarely brought family members together. It was argued that more funding to work with families (both young people and their parents) using bicultural facilitators would be beneficial. In addition, some workers suggested that these programs should be linked to schools. Those present also suggested that at the moment there was little focus on early intervention and that family conflict was only being dealt with once it became a crisis situation.

- **Confusion over what programs and support was available**

Workers identified that there was a need for better access to information about programs and services dealing with IFC. Some of the workers present were unaware of where to access services to deal with IFC and it was the first time that they had heard of some of the programs showcased at the forum. It was suggested that information about services targeting IFC needed to be located in a centralised place so that they can be easily found, and/or a service directory for services dealing with IFC could be developed.

- **Families from CALD backgrounds in low settlement areas are often isolated**

Some of the workers present also pointed out that unless you live in a high settlement area where there are lots of services for new arrivals and migrants that you can be very isolated from services that target family harmony and IFC. It was suggested that families living in areas of low settlement required more support because of their potential isolation.

## Forum Evaluation

Of those who attended the forum, 24 completed an evaluation form. Of those who completed the evaluation form:

- 41% heard about the forum through 'word of mouth', 36% through an 'interagency email list' and 23% through the 'MYAN NSW Google egroup'
- The content and quality of the four speakers' presentations were rated as 'excellent' and 'very good'
- 23% rated the discussion panel as 'excellent', 36% as 'very good' and 36% as 'good'
- 83% stated that the forum had met their expectations, 17% stated that their expectations were 'somewhat' met
- 59% stated that 'my knowledge and understanding improved' by attending the forum, 41% stated 'somewhat, my knowledge and understanding improved a little'
- When asked what they liked most about the forum, 92% suggested it was the 'opportunity to learn about services and programs', 46% stated 'the speakers' and 21% stated 'networking'
- 70% said that the forum provided 'information and ideas that will influence how you run your service' and 30% said 'somewhat'
- 70% stated that they 'would attend another forum' and 17% said 'it would depend on the topic' whether they attended again, 13% stated 'maybe'.

## Summary

The MYAN NSW Sector Development Forum *Multicultural Young People and Intergenerational Family Conflict* provided an opportunity to highlight key issues and programs targeting IFC for youth, family and settlement workers in Sydney. From the forum it is clear that intergenerational family conflict is an issue that requires ongoing and increasing amounts of attention by youth, family and settlement services and ongoing funding from government. In addition, young people and their families need further support both to communicate effectively once conflict arises and the skills to be able to prevent conflict.

The results of the forum's evaluation demonstrates that opportunities to share information about programs and services are valued by forum participants and that this in turn influences how they run their services. From suggestions made as part of the consultation the MYAN NSW may have a further role to play in coordinating information about key issues and good practice programs that work to prevent and remedy IFC in migrant and refugee families. Overall, forum's such as the one discussed here provide valuable opportunities for those working with multicultural young people to come together, network and share information, which ultimately benefits both the worker and their clients – young people and their families.

## References

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (August 2010) *Policy Briefing Paper*, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Victoria