

Multicultural Young People and Family and Intergenerational Conflict – Position Paper

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW is a network of services committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for multicultural young people in NSW. The MYAN NSW works to develop appropriate policies, strategies and resources that address multicultural youth issues at the local, regional and state-wide levels. It does this through consultation with the youth, family and multicultural sectors, state and local government, and multicultural young people.

Multicultural young people in NSW

The MYAN NSW use the term multicultural young people to refer to those aged 12-25 who are newly arrived, those from refugee backgrounds and Australian born young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. According to the 2006 Census in NSW there are 1,227,475 people aged between 12-25 (ABS 2006). Of these, 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 80 languages are spoken at home (ABS 2006). Between 2005-2010, 30% (7,310) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, January 2011). In 2009-10 alone, 23,993 people aged 12-24 migrated to Australia of these there 6,608 or 28% arrived to NSW. Of these young people 1,071 arrived as part of the Humanitarian Program, 4,143 came as part of family migration and 1,390 came as part of skilled migration (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, July 2010).

Multicultural Young People and Family and Intergenerational 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, 2010b).

Key Issues

- **For Refugee families**

By definition, the refugee experience is traumatic - families have been displaced by war and conflict, often subjected to atrocities and separated from loved ones (often without knowledge of their safety or survival) and commonly spend many years in refugee camps. While resettlement in Australia brings safety, new opportunities and hopes for the future, the pressures of building a new life (learning a new language, finding stable, affordable housing, understanding new systems) can be enormous and further complicated by changed family unit and relationships (MYAN Australia, 2010b).

Common issues that impact on family relationships and intergenerational conflict in refugee families include:

- **Family reunion and reformation**

Some young people may be reunified with family members on arrival in Australia, having been separated from siblings or a parent/s for many years; other young people may have fled their country of origin and arrive in Australia under the care of relatives (perhaps an 'aunty' or 'uncle') or are cared for by a member/s of their cultural community with whom they have no established relationship (MYAN Australia, 2010b).

- **Role changes within the family**

Some young people may have been required to adopt adult roles and responsibilities, either in their home country, on their journey to Australia or during the resettlement process. This can include caring for (younger or older) family members or carrying the responsibility for communication with institutions and services in Australia. This often complicates family roles and power dynamics as many parents/carers feel their authority is undermined (MYAN Australia, 2010b).

- **Financial pressures**

A combination of factors such as low incomes, high rents, repaying debts and remittances to family overseas

has adverse effects on families and can easily become a source of conflict (MYAN Australia, 2010b).

- **Misunderstanding regarding the law and the rights of the child/young person**

Young people often lack understanding about their responsibilities and rights, and repercussions of enacting their rights. For example, young people do not always understand the consequences for parents/guardians when police are called to intervene in situations of family conflict (RCOA, 2010).

- **For Multicultural families**

For multicultural families more generally, the following factors can contribute to intergenerational conflict:

For parents

- Fear or uncertainty around cultural differences – i.e. cultural norms, values and expectations are (or perceived as) different to those in their home country and young people often adapt more quickly to a new culture (MYAN Australia, 2010b)
- Fears regarding their children's physical safety – this may be due to lack of familiarity with or trust in a new culture and society
- Lack of familiarity with youth services or programs and knowledge about youth rights and/or legal rights (MYAN Australia, 2010b)
- Approaches to discipline may not be appropriate, acceptable or effective in an Australian context (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010).

For young people

- Multicultural young people often juggle the expectations of family and their cultural (or religious) community with those of mainstream Australian society – a society that places high value on individual choice in terms of study, career and relationships (MYAN Australia, 2010b).
- Young people from multicultural backgrounds often negotiate multiple identities, moving between cultures, as they seek to establish a sense of belonging (and connection) to their peers, community and the broader Australian society. For young people, this is occurring as they negotiate the developmental tasks of adolescence. Many young people describe this experience as 'being in between' (MYAN Australia, 2010b).

Recommendations

The MYAN NSW recommends the following to improve outcomes for multicultural young people and their families in NSW:

1. Invest in programs that:
 - a. Support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families to manage and resolve intergenerational conflict and;
 - b. Bring families together to discuss Australian laws, customs, rights and responsibilities.
2. Fund research on the impact of culture, language and the migration experience on parenting approaches in order to inform future policy and practice.
3. Invest in initiatives for multicultural young people to explore their identity and experiences within their cross-cultural context.

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