

## CASE STUDY:

### Youth Participation - A Young Person's Perspective



#### *Apajok Biar*

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Apajok Biar is a 23 young woman of South Sudanese heritage who lives in Sydney. Apajok was born in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and arrived in Australia with her family when she was aged 2 1/2. Apajok's youth participation "journey" started when her high school principal recognised her potential and recommended that she attend a youth leadership forum being planned for young people from multicultural backgrounds. Apajok was reluctant at first, but agreed to attend. It was there that she heard other young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds talking about their experiences advocating for change. And she realised this was something she wanted to do too.

After this she began volunteering for a homework club to help other young people from multicultural backgrounds. She went on to develop anti-racism workshops to take into local schools, and worked with the local council to produce an anti-racism resource for schools in the area. Apajok found out about MYAN NSW, and applied to become part of their Youth Ambassadors program, attending training and other events for young people.

Through MYAN, Apajok was chosen to help facilitate consultations with young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia, as part of the UN's Global Refugee Youth Consultations GRYC). Apajok also applied and was chosen to represent Australia at the GRYC in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2017.

Since then, Apajok has completed a Bachelor of Social Work, and began working as a Youth Participation Officer supporting other young people to participate in the decisions that affect them.

In reflecting on her experience, Apajok says there are a few things that have been critical in helping to achieve all of these things. "It's really important to train and support young people to participate. Having someone that checks in with you regularly is important too. They need to care about you as a person ... care about your feelings, and not just about the event you are speaking at. When we were in Geneva. Carmel (MYAN's Chairperson) would take me to lunch and spend time explaining what was going to happen, give me a chance to ask questions, and make sure I was clear and comfortable about my role. That really helped."

"When working with refugee young people, you also need to involve the parents and families. The staff at MYAN always offer to call my parents to explain the things I'm doing and what they will involve. Now my parents have gotten to know the MYAN staff and they trust them."

"It's also important not to make assumptions about what young people are capable of. Take time to ask questions, listen to the answers, and make sure the lines of communication go both ways."

