

CASE STUDY: Refugee Youth Peer Mentoring Project



MYAN NSW

In 2017 the NSW Government provided funding for a Refugee Youth Peer Mentoring (RYPM) scheme, to support refugee young people to settle well in NSW. MYAN NSW was asked to undertake a project to co-design this program alongside refugee young people.

The idea for a mentoring program designed specifically for young people from refugee backgrounds arose from consultations held in 2016 across Australia, as part of the UN's Global Refugee Youth Consultations. During the consultations, young people said that mentoring would be a useful way to support their settlement journey and help them achieve their goals.

What makes this project unique is that it was grounded in youth participation processes and principles. At its core, "participatory design" is a belief that problems that seem impossible to solve, like youth disengagement or social isolation, are actually solvable. It means believing that the people who face these problems every day are the ones who hold the key to their solution. This project was about putting young people at the centre and acknowledging that they are experts in their own lives. In order to design effective programs for young people we need to work alongside them as partners.



Photo courtesy of CMRC

Young people from refugee backgrounds were involved in all aspects of the project. They were part of the co-design team; they helped facilitate the workshops; they took part in a workshop specifically for young people, as well as participating in workshops for service providers and for government; and they were involved in testing some of the ideas and assumptions about how the program might work.

MYAN NSW learned a lot from the project. The included the importance of providing young people with support to develop their skills, knowledge and ideas in order to participate fully; the need to let go of preconceived beliefs and assumptions, and to trust the co-design process; and it reinforced the importance of involving young people as early as possible in the process.

Alex Long, MYAN NSW's Executive Officer said "the end result was different to what we would have come up with if it had just been designed by adults. The program is more flexible, more holistic. It is all in all a better program because of the involvement of young people in every aspect of its design, and I am confident that young people will utilise and benefit from the program because of this".

One of the positive outcomes of the RYPM project is that it has shown what young people are capable of, and the value of investing in participatory design processes. The project has also provided a model for how this can be done. It has also helped to create an appetite for this approach within the NSW Government, and amongst the network of services who took part in the workshops and the broader design process.