



**SUBMISSION to Department of Education,
Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)**

**Discussion Paper *Employment Services – building on
success.***

March 2013

1. Introduction

1.1 The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is the nationally recognised policy and advocacy body representing multicultural youth issues.

The MYAN works in partnership with government and non-government agencies at the state/territory and national levels to ensure that the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised, and to support a coherent and consistent approach to addressing these needs in policy and service delivery. The MYAN believes that the needs of this group of young people are distinct from those of their Australian-born counterparts. Further the needs of this group of young people are often overlooked in the youth and settlement sectors, as they are a sub-set within each.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007:7). However, this group of young people face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including employment. These barriers include language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism, and discrimination. These factors can place these young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation and impact on employability.

The MYAN believes that a targeted approach to policy and service delivery, is essential to addressing these barriers and supporting the social, cultural and economic participation of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. The MYAN works across the settlement and youth sectors to achieve this goal, supporting links between these sectors and supporting the development of appropriate responses to the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

1.2 About this submission

The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to DEEWR's consultation on *Employment Services: building on success*. This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. Education, training and employment transitions is one of the MYAN's 5 policy priorities – consistently identified by both young people and services providers as the most significant issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The MYAN sees first hand the significant challenges facing young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in navigating the employment system and securing either part-time or full-time employment.

This submission will focus on Section 5 of the Issues Paper and address those questions relevant to improving outcomes specifically for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The submission concludes with a set of recommendations to address identified challenges and gaps in the service system for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

2. Response to the Discussion Paper

2.1 Meeting the needs of Job Seekers: How can we ensure that individual job seekers from all backgrounds and levels of disadvantage get the services that best meet their needs?

2.1.1 Employment & young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds - an overview of the issues

In order for employment services to best meet the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, an understanding of the particular barriers they experience in securing part-time or full-time employment is critical.

While many young people face a range of barriers to entering the workforce and remaining engaged in meaningful employment, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face additional disadvantage in terms of employment, earning, and occupational attainment (Ransly, C. and Drummond, S. 2001). These include:

- Lack of understanding about the (highly) complex Australian system of post compulsory education, training and employment options and lack of knowledge or familiarity with the system to successfully navigate pathways;
- Experiences of racism and discrimination in looking for work and in interview and selection processes;
- Lack of familiarity with employment services and Australian systems in relation to searching for and securing paid employment – e.g. developing a CV, completing job applications and conducting an interview, referral processes regarding employment programs or services, and eligibility criteria;
- Limited or established social capital in terms of networks for career advice, employment opportunities or advice on seeking employment;
- Lack of awareness about Australian workplace culture and expectations;
- Limited English language skills or engagement in the Australian education system (in 2010/11, 34% of humanitarian entrants aged between 12 and 24 years arrived with 6 or fewer years of education, and many have an educational background that is interrupted, inadequate or has little resemblance to the Australian education system);
- Limited exposure to a range of career options – particularly for young people who have spent many years living in developing countries or refugee camps;
- Limited resources and/or cultural competency within the employment services sector to respond to the particular needs of this group of young people; and
- Lack of recognition of prior learning and/or training when accessing employment opportunities.

Hugo notes that, given the majority of humanitarian entrants continue to be children and young people (indeed in the last financial year, approximately 60% of all humanitarian entrants were under 30 years of age), many will spend possibly their entire working life in Australia (Hugo, G., 2011:64). This highlights the critical importance of adequate education support as well as ensuring that training and employment programs target the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds in order to support their sustained economic participation in Australian life.

2.1.2 Systemic barriers and gaps – government-funded services to support education, training and employment outcomes for young people

In relation to Government-funded services designed to support employment outcomes, the MYAN is aware of a number of specific barriers in the current service system that prevent effective engagement of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the JSA program and ultimately, sustained or meaningful employment. Primarily related to the lack of specialist services, they include:

- The JSA job capacity assessment tool used to determine the level of risk or support that refugee or migrant young people may require is inadequate in identifying the specific needs of this client group. In many cases young people require an advocate to ensure they understand the assessment process and provide the relevant information, in order to ensure they are provided the correct level of support. This is compounded for young people with varying/limited English language proficiency and limited social and cultural capital.
- The environment within which at-risk young people are required to discuss their issues is often public and their circumstances and needs are often complex. Discussion about and identification of issues impacting on their employment is often not elicited within the regular assessment processes, resulting in inaccurate assessment of support/need and referral to services not designed to meet their needs.
- Lack of JSA consultants with youth work or cultural competency skills - the previous employment services system (JPET) generally had trained youth workers providing support in this space – with specific training in youth-appropriate assessment, referral and support. Currently JSA consultants are not youth-specific or trained to work with young people.
- JSA consultants will often work with Stream 4 clients (irrespective of age, cultural background or an understanding of the specific needs of clients). Except for those CaLD-specific JSA services (only a small number nationally), there are no specialist JSA consultants who are trained to respond to refugee/migrant young people in a culturally responsive manner and/or with an understanding of the barriers to successful employment for this population groups (often related to the settlement/migration experience). A combination of specialist youth work skills and culturally sensitive practice is required.
- Low English literacy among many clients and the need to ensure that written requirements and mail regarding appointments is appropriate – in accordance with Australian Government policies of Access & Equity.
- The lack of specialised programs for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are mirrored in the Compact with Young Australians where the need for intensive and specialised case management services is critical and will enable disadvantaged young people to successfully achieve requirements under the new ‘learn or earn’ rules.

- The need for greater specialisation within the JSA system is echoed by refugee young people. Consultations with refugee young people consistently identify significant gaps in the way job services are currently provided. The MYAN's ongoing consultation with young people has indicated that they were dissatisfied with job agencies, and their belief that Job Services Australia providers did not have the skills, experience or time to work effectively with refugee young people¹.
- Melbourne Citymission, a specialist youth JSA provider in Victoria, has also reported that, 'the needs of this most vulnerable group are not being sufficiently met under JSA to enable young people to achieve a lasting connection to employment, education and training.' A greater focus on stream 4 clients is needed and this can only be achieved through more targeted approaches².
- Lack of adequate data to reflect the experiences of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds engaging in JSA services and securing employment outcomes. The MYAN is aware that quantitative data collected through DEEWR reflects relatively good outcomes for young people engaging with a JSA service. However, this data is at odds with anecdotal evidence gathered by a range of organisations supporting this group of young people, including the MYAN, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCoA) and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA). This gap between quantitative DEEWR data and anecdotal data from young people themselves and the NGO sector working with young people from refugee/migrant backgrounds needs to be addressed and may require a comprehensive review of JSA data collection methodology and the introduction of new frameworks for measuring outputs and outcomes. Improved, more accurate data collection, is crucial to assist in policy and program planning, and ensuring that the specific needs of some cohorts are understood and addressed.
- The DEEWR-funded Youth Attainment and Transitions programs 'Youth Connections' and 'Partnership Brokers' have a priority focus on humanitarian entrants, with flagged regions and set targets. The MYAN is aware that these targets have not been met in most flagged regions and very few young people from humanitarian backgrounds access these services, relative to the mainstream youth population. A targeted approach to addressing the needs of humanitarian entrants, alongside increased incentives and/or contractual responsibilities, is required to ensure that YAT fulfils targets set by DEEWR.

2.1.3 Partnerships and incentives

- Contractual management arrangements within the JSA program to ensure partnerships between services is required. There are no incentives for JSA's to work in partnership with service providers and organisations that hold expertise in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Greater collaboration between refugee youth services and JSA's would lead to an improved JSA skill base and establish greater links between young people and supported employment transitions.

¹ For example, the Centre for Multicultural Youth in Victoria conducted a consultation with a group of young Sudanese in May 2011 about issues of concern, including employment. All reported their dissatisfaction with job agencies, and their belief that Job Services Australia providers did not have the skills, experience or time to work effectively with refugee young people.

² Cull E (2011) *Finding the right track: A snapshot study of Young People's experiences looking for work with Job Services Australia (JSA)* Melbourne Citymission

- These partnerships would include those between JSAs and education/training providers, settlement providers, and other services working specifically with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Involving schools and education providers in programs for young people is often critical, in order to ensure employment pathways that work alongside continuing education. Many young people are not aware of support systems available to them, and JSA partnerships with schools and education providers could play a crucial role in addressing this.
- For many JSAs, this may require working outside their regular stakeholders and partnerships – i.e. spending time to develop links with and understand organisations outside existing partnerships.
- Similar issues also apply to the DEEWR-funded YAT programs. These programs, Partnership Brokers and Youth Connections, would benefit from partnerships with the settlement sector, but there is currently no accountability or incentives to do so – even though such partnerships would ideally lead to increased access from young people from humanitarian backgrounds into YAT programs. The MYAN currently has a national partnership with the Partnership Brokers and Youth Connections national networks, designed to improve YC & PB engagement with young people from humanitarian backgrounds.

The MYAN believes that clear incentives and accountability measurements are critical to support partnership work, and need to be included within JSA/YAT contracts to ensure that partnerships between relevant organisations are developed, and that expertise is sought to support the work of JSA providers in meeting the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Without clear incentives and contractual obligations, many JSAs have no reason to adjust their service delivery model to meet the needs of specific groups.

However, the MYAN does not advocate for simply inserting incentives within the existing JSA fee structure. Performance management needs to be tied to a new set of outcomes or measurements that reflect the employment needs and outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds – i.e. program guidelines. It is not adequate to simply insert new incentives into a performance management system that fundamentally values a standardised model of service delivery.

2.2 New ideas for a better system - examples of good practice in employment programs for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

2.2.1 QLD - Youth Employment Forum, Brisbane

In 2012, MDA, in partnership with QPASST, the local Chamber of Commerce and the State Member of Parliament, piloted a Youth Employment Forum model, to bring young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds together with employers. More than 75 young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds discuss job seeking with 11 employers. The forum was run in two parts. First, a Q&A forum was run by a facilitator, during which young people were able to ask an employer panel a series of pre-arranged questions. The second part was a networking activity, allowing young people to speak directly with a number of employers, and showcase their skills and talents.

Questions from young people to the panel included:

- How do I get local work experience?
- What qualifications are required?
- Is it OK to wear cultural dress in the workplace?
- What level of English is required for different positions?
- Are there companies that actively sought and supported a culturally diverse workforce?

The young people attending were enthusiastic and highly motivated to find part time or full time work, using the opportunity to develop their job-seeking networks - a critical part of finding work in a competitive job market. Immediately following this event young people followed up with employers, sought assistance from MDA or their school teachers with job preparation. This model was enormously successful. It aimed to increase awareness amongst the young people of what employers were seeking and build their networks; and raise awareness amongst employers of the challenges faced by young migrants and refugees, as well as their talents.

There was no expectation placed upon employers to offer work to the young people. However, within a month of the forum:

- 2 of the 75 young participants were already in employment;
- 15 further interviews had been scheduled;
- 1 employer participant had already followed up with all the young people they spoke to and were contacting suitable candidates;
- another large employer committed to try to place a third of the young people they spoke with;
- a third employer planned to hold a follow up recruitment workshop with MDA

2.2.2 VIC – ReSource, Ecumenical Migration Centre, Melbourne

ReSource is a multi- faceted pre- employment program that targets marginalised young people living in public housing including refugee young people. The program addresses a range of barriers such as unfamiliarity with the education system through the use of peer education, career counselling and connections to volunteer opportunities. There are four elements to the program:

1. **EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS FOR REFUGEE YOUTH:** an experiential learning program designed to empower refugee young people to make informed choices about education and employment options. The program was developed in consultation with refugee young people living in the City of Yarra who felt they needed more support looking for work. The need to learn about the Australian workplace and alternative education and training pathways was also identified. The program combines practical learning (eg preparing resumes, cover letters and practice interviews) with work place visits and career advice. In 2013 a peer educator model will be developed training young people to facilitate the program themselves.
2. **PHUCHA (FUTURE) CLUB:** a weekly informal job club for refugee young people supported by paid staff and volunteers. Job seekers are encouraged to explore diverse career options and learning pathways and are linked into other support services. Feedback from participants highlights the benefits of individual and intensive job search assistance that allows young people to articulate their skills and strengths.

3. **COMMUNITY SERVICE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM:** successfully piloted with NMIT YAMEC students in 2011, this program introduces migrant and refugee young people to volunteering. Guest speakers talk about the benefits of volunteering followed by on-site visits to community led activities. Connections to organisations with volunteer opportunities are supported to develop ongoing volunteering opportunities.
4. **YOUTH VOICES:** in partnership with the Fitzroy Learning Network 'Youth Voices' creates a space for young people to share and develop project ideas that respond to common issues through the use of multimedia. As part of this program young people regularly participate in the Gertrude Street Projection Festival and other local arts based initiatives.

ReSource Outcomes & Learning's

Through the program, two young women are enrolled in hospitality traineeships, three are engaged in volunteer roles and others have gained employment at Coles, KFC, Cotton On. Clothing, Hoyts and in factories in the outer North. Participants have also indicated that they feel more equipped to look for work in their new cultural context. Key lessons from ReSource are:

- a. Having a local focus helps develop links with local employers and training providers that will in turn assist young people to make sustainable employment choices.
- b. Targeted approaches are required to specifically address young people's job readiness in a new cultural context.
- c. Refugee young people require ongoing support at different stages of their chosen employment pathway (including both pre and post placement).

2.3 Working in partnership with Employers

The MYAN believes that JSAs could play an important role in promoting the employability of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to employers and address misconceptions and/or discrimination and racism in the workforce.

2.4 What have we learnt?

The case studies highlighted earlier reinforce that an integrated approach, including case management, skill development, pre-employment support and strong partnerships with employers, is needed to create meaningful and sustainable job opportunities for disadvantaged job seekers such as young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds. Elements of this integrated approach include:

- **Intensive case management and personal support:** the complex and multiple barriers experienced by refugee young people and other highly disadvantaged jobseekers requires better engagement, case management and placement support to maintain both social and employment outcomes.
- **Pre- employment and basic skill training:** for refugee young people with limited or no experience of the Australian work place culture a focus on pre-employment skill development is critical.
- **Careers counselling and pathway planning:** informed decision-making is critical in making the transition from education to employment. Tailored assistance to young adults about career pathways need to be realistic, goal-oriented and individually tailored to maximise employment outcomes.

- **Supported work experience and industry links:** opportunities to undertake volunteering, work placements or internships is key to improving employment outcomes for refugee young people and communities. Local industry based experience provides an opportunity to learn and adapt to Australian work cultures, enhance language skills and build networks relevant to future employment pathways.
- **Building social networks and social trust:** New arrival young people and communities have less social trust and fewer social networks relevant to new employment opportunities and upward mobility. While expanded opportunities for local work experience can help develop people's social networks more needs to be done to improve public perception of new arrival communities and young people.
- **Employment support and liaison:** as part of the case management support to ensure the transition to employment is sustained.
- **Targeted programs (CaLD youth-specific):** that address the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, to complement mainstream employment service providers

3. Recommendations

The MYAN makes the following recommendations for future employment programs or those supporting employment outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds:

3.1 That DEEWR should fund, as part of its employment programs, specialised and targeted programs, including refugee/migrant youth-specific JSAs, for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Program models should³:

- Be flexible and responsive to the often complex and diverse needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds
- Focus on reaching young people who are unaware of available services and/or unfamiliar with navigating the post-compulsory education/training system
- Involve schools and education providers
- Provide opportunities to bring young people and employers together to build networks and increase understanding
- Allow time for building trust and providing intensive support
- Have flexible age criteria
- Provide intensive support both pre and post employment placement
- Ensure partnerships between CaLD communities, specialist organisations, employers and education/training providers.

³ See also Multicultural Development Association (MDA), submission to DEEWR on Employment Services Discussion Paper, March 2015, p.13

3.2 That the Australian government develop a coordinated employment strategy to ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are appropriately and effectively targeted in any future employment programs and as such, receive the support they need.

3.3 That DEEWR:

- Improve data collection in relation to measuring outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- Address the gap between DEEWR quantitative data and anecdotal evidence from the NGO sector in relation to successful outcomes in the JSA program for young people from refugee backgrounds - critically engage with this feedback in order to identify and address anomalies.
- Develop incentives for JSA providers to develop partnerships with relevant local agencies/organisations with expertise in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- Ensure, either through incentives or other contractual obligations/responsibilities, that all JSA providers are trained in cultural competency and supported to implement cultural competency – both at the individual/consultant and organisational levels and at every point of service delivery (from assessment through to support).

3.4 That State and Federal Governments support successful refugee/migrant youth-specific transition employment programs and expand them to other areas of high settlement, including regional areas.

3.5 That State and Federal governments develop and implement specific initiatives to tackle discrimination of young people, particularly those from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in the employment process and in the workplace.

3.6 That DEEWR, in any future youth-specific programs that support young people in education, training and employment pathways, fund specialist programs that meet the specific needs of young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds. This would mirror the Reconnect Specialist program funded through FaHCSIA – a demonstrated model achieving good outcomes for this client group.

MYAN (Australia) Contact Details

Nadine Liddy, National Coordinator
nliddy@cmy.net.au
(03) 9340 3700
0437897178