



CULTURALLY-COMPETENT YOUTH WORK

CMY's APPROACH

We work with young people and their families within a human rights framework that values diversity and promotes participation. We use a strengths-based approach alongside community development practices.

Purpose

This *Good Practice Guide* is designed to provide organisations and workers with some strategies to enhance the accessibility and responsiveness of their service when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Introduction

While every young person is unique and their experiences are diverse, there are some common themes arising in the lives of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds that have implications for the kind of service response that is likely to be most useful to them.

An accessible and responsive service model is based upon:

- Recognition that culture is an essential part of every individual's identity, that it is dynamic, can be multiple, and encompasses all aspects of a person's life.
- Understanding that services and practitioners need to be aware of their own culture—beliefs, biases and world view—to ensure that responses are empathetic and non-judgmental.
- Knowledge that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face particular pressures and require a targeted response.
- A strengths-based approach that recognises that young people have rich and varied experiences, and builds on their resilience and capacities.

Cross-cultural Communication

Good practice in cross-cultural communication requires us to:

- Be open to different values, perceptions and behaviours.
- Recognise that culture is not homogenous and is shaped by class, ethnicity, family, gender, religion, political beliefs, age and migration experience.
- Learn about other cultural and ethnic groups by showing interest and asking questions.
- Not make assumptions about culture or language. Each young person is an individual, with individual circumstances. Do not stereotype according to race, gender, dress or sexuality.

- Use correct pronunciation of a young person's name and ask if not sure.
- Avoid judgements or assumptions about English language proficiency.
- Use an interpreter when necessary and learn about the language needs of a particular cultural or ethnic group.
- Employ a range of communication strategies including professional interpreters, translated material and displaying posters that reflect diversity.

Environment

An inclusive culture within your agency is a critical component of culturally-competent practice and will make young people and their families feel more welcome. Consider:

- Location: ensure that clients can easily get to your service via public transport and check that they have the information they need to travel to your service.
- Visual representation of cultural diversity: include images of newly arrived young people and families, diverse languages and cultures.
- The way in which newly arrived young people (as well as parents and other family members) are welcomed on initial contact as first impressions can be significant, e.g. some services make it part of their practice to always offer a glass of water or a hot drink.
- Opening times, the cost of services and provide a drop-in service if possible.

You may also wish to utilise CMY's cross-cultural audit available at: www.cmy.net.au/AllCMYPublications#

Practice

Culturally-competent practice requires skilled workers with clear roles, and a flexible and responsive approach to service delivery. A toolbox of strategies are useful and may include:

- Access interpreters and translated materials as well as material in English. Young people may need both versions, and a translated version can be shared with their parents (see *Good Practice Guide: Working With Interpreters*);

CONTINUED OVER 

- Employ staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
 - When meeting a young person for the first time, try to arrange for the person who made the referral to also be present (see *Good Practice Guide: Culturally-Competent Intake and Assessment*).
 - Be clear about your role by communicating simply about what you do and don't have the capacity or power to do. Explain that you are not a government service as this can reduce fear of power and authority.
 - Build knowledge of the service system—don't assume that young people (or family members) are familiar with the service system.
 - Avoid assumptions about a young person's stage of life, role within the family and connections to their community or religion as these are often complex areas.
 - Offer practical support—young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families will often need assistance with immediate issues like income support, material goods or school enrolment before they are able to deal with other issues (e.g., family conflict). Practical assistance can help you demonstrate your role to a new client.
 - Provide outreach by meeting with the young person where they feel most comfortable. This may require home or school visits and consequent organisational commitment to flexible service delivery. Ensure that the time and place of meeting is convenient for the young person rather than implementing a strictly office based appointment model.
- Be aware of the way you talk about your service. Parents may not be familiar with youth workers or services and others may consider some youth services as encouraging young people to leave home. Explain that you help to support families and promote stronger family relationships.
 - Seek information about the communities in your region, and the issues arising for them.
 - Clarify cultural information with either young people or family members.
 - Accept gestures of hospitality. Sharing food, a cup of tea or attending a community celebration are important aspects of (non-verbal) communication that help build a trusting relationship with the target group.

Be responsive to feedback

To encourage and respond to feedback is an important indicator of culturally-competent youth work. Ensure you:

- Ask for feedback on your service, either verbally or through a written survey (using simple English or translations where appropriate).
- Be responsive to feedback given by your clients or community members about the service you are delivering. Consider ways in which you may better address their concerns or strengthen your practice.
- Deliver your service within an Action Research framework by dedicating time to reflect on how you deliver a culturally responsive service at both the individual and organisational level. Identify areas where you believe strategies have worked well or where you need more information or support (this process should include seeking feedback from clients).

Inclusive of families and communities

Providing a service inclusive of family and community can be a significant factor in culturally-competent service delivery. Some parents/family members may not give permission for a young person to attend your service (programs or activities) if they don't understand or trust what you offer.

- Ensure your work practice is determined by the needs of the young person in the context of their family (see *Good Practice Guide: Youth Work in the Family Context*). This may mean reflecting on whether your service is 'open' or accessible to parents or family members. For example, although your service may be located in a 'youth centre', parents/guardians should feel comfortable about coming to see you and understanding what services or support you offer, when and how.
- Be aware that you may need to work with family members in order to provide appropriate support to a young person (see *Good Practice Guide: Youth Work in the Family Context*).
- Consider strategies to welcome parents or family members, including parent/family information sessions, so that parents are clear about how the service operates and feel both included and supported while the service is working with the young person. Make time to meet with parents individually if necessary and use resources such as *'What is a Youth Service?'* (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2006).

REFERENCES/OTHER RESOURCES

- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (1994). *Given A Chance: A Video-Training Manual on Working with Refugee Young People*. Melbourne, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues.
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2004). *CMYI Information Sheet: Making Successful Referrals with Refugee Young People and their Families*. Melbourne, CMYI.
- Drummond, S. (1998). *The Longest Journey: Torture and Trauma & Refugee Young People*. Sydney, Youth Action and Policy Association.
- Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (1996). *A Guide to Working with Young People Who are Refugees*. Melbourne, VFST.
- Aristotle, P. (1999). *Developing Cultural Responsiveness in the Delivery of Services to Refugees and Survivors of Torture and Trauma*. Restoration for Victims of Crime Conference, Melbourne, Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2006) *What is a Youth Centre? A guide for families wanting to find out more about youth services in Australia*.
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2004). *FaCS Reconnect Self-Evaluation Report 03-04*. Melbourne, CMYI.
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2004). *Refugee Young People: Understanding the Family Context*. Melbourne, CMYI.