

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR
FAMILIES**

Organisation: Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW

Date received: 8/08/2011

The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

8 August 2011

Dear Director,

Re MYAN NSW Submission to the Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW welcomes this opportunity to make submission to the *Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families*. One of the MYAN NSW's three policy priority areas is education for refugee and newly arrived young people and we believe that the issue of transition support is of particular importance to this group of young people and their families.

About this submission

This submission refers to the Committee's terms of reference and pays particular attention to the specific needs for transition support of young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived and their families.

About the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW

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 youth and family services, the multicultural sector, 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.

In Australia

- 2.7 million young people in Australia are aged 15-24¹.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 200 languages are spoken at home.
- Between 2005-2010, 31% (24,679) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24².

In NSW

- 871,712 young people in NSW are aged 15-24, 13.3% of population³.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 80 languages are spoken at home⁴.
- Between 2005-2010, 30% (7,310) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24⁵.

In 2009-10, 23,993 people aged 12-24 migrated to Australia of these 6,604 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 migration⁶.

Education for refugee and newly arrived young people

NSW is home to one of the most diverse populations in Australia, which include a diverse group of young people. High numbers of migrant and refugee young people settle in NSW and there is also a large population of Australian-born young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. While multicultural young people make a significant contribution to NSW, they can often face barriers to accessing services and opportunities in order to be fully engaged in the NSW community, especially education.

Approximately one quarter of all students in NSW government schools come from language backgrounds other than English, both overseas and Australian born. These students speak over 80 different languages as a first language and hold a range of religious and spiritual beliefs⁷. In addition, the NSW Department of Education and Training identified that each year NSW public schools enrol between 1,100 and 1,500 newly arrived refugee students and that in 2009 there were approximately 12,000 refugee students at NSW public schools⁸.

The MYAN NSW identified the following as key issues for young people who are newly arrived migrants and from refugee backgrounds:

- **Length of time in Intensive English Centres (IECs)**

IECs are really important in the education of young people from refugee backgrounds and newly arrive migrants because they are stepping-stone into formal education in Australia. However, newly arrived migrants and young people from refugee backgrounds are often not given sufficient time in Intensive English Centres. Currently in NSW they are entitled to three to five school terms in IECs, and often further intensive support is required for them to be able to be prepared to enter mainstream schools.

- **Disrupted education and education level and age**

The majority of refugee young people have had a disrupted education and need time, support and flexibility to catch up to their Australian-born peers who have been engaging in education since early childhood⁹. Often there are additional challenges for these students when they are placed in grades at school that are beyond their level of capability, based on their age. This is particularly acute for those young people from non-literate societies and those who have spent years in refugee camps prior to arrival in Australia. These young people are expected to enter into a school system after little or no formal education, in an environment with other young people who have moved through the Australia education system over many years.

- **Navigating the education system and education pathways and transitions**

Upon arrival in Australia young people are often faced with an education and training system that is very different to anything that they have previously experienced. Unfamiliarity with the school system and style of learning, as well as the vocational education and training (VET) system, means that ensuring young people and their families are aware of the educational pathways available to them can be challenging¹⁰. Further, there are often inadequate levels of support to assist these young people in the transition from IECs to mainstream schools and to vocational education and

training programs. This lack of support means that the transition can be very stressful, resulting in high levels of difficulty managing the new setting (and therefore achieving education/training outcomes) or disengagement from education and training.

- **Finding space and time to study**

Often newly arrived and refugee young people live in over crowded housing with little space to study, with responsibilities for assisting family in the resettlement process - including earning an income, cooking for their family or caring for younger siblings¹¹. In addition, the need to catch up often requires more time studying, which can increase the pressure on the young person.

- **Unrealistic expectations from family and/or self**

There is often an intense pressure from both family members and young people to perform in the Australian education system, which offers new and previously unavailable opportunities. There is also often a significant disparity between the education and career aspirations of young people and their language and literacy abilities¹².

Providing transition support for young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived

When you speak to youth and settlement workers who are engaging with young people from refugee backgrounds and newly arrived young people one of the most common issues stated, is the need for transition support. This is support from IECs to mainstreams schools, support for transition between school and TAFE and transition between school and university and transition between school and employment. It is also important that young people from refugee backgrounds understand the pathways to further education and employment.

The NSW Department of Education and Training have a Refugee Transition Program in high schools, which aims at improving students' participation and engagement in schooling, which is run in partnership with the University of Western Sydney, the University of Sydney and Charles Sturt University. The MYAN NSW believes that this is an important program that could be better resourced to extend to additional high schools in NSW.

Models of good practice

The Refugee Council of Australia in its research report *Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW* (July 2010) identified a number good practice principles when designing programs for young people from refugee backgrounds. These are:

- Flexibility
- Understanding
- Pastoral care
- Partnership
- Strengths-based approaches
- Supported transitions
- Literacy support
- Family-centred approaches
- Community involvement
- Youth specific
- Bridging

- Mentoring
- Re-engagement
- Stable funding.¹³

Best practice transition support included advisors or initiatives provide supported transitions from one education/training environment to the next (e.g. 'taster' programs, one-on-one support) and that workers have time and capacity to build trust.¹⁴ In addition, it is in this transition space that the role of support structures such as homework clubs becomes very important for young people who are newly arrived and from refugee backgrounds.

Recommendations

The MYAN NSW recommends the following to improve transition support for refugee and newly arrived students in the secondary school system, by:

1. Increase the amount of time newly arrive students can spend in IECs from five terms to up to two years.
2. Increase investment in transition programs between Intensive English Centres and mainstream schools and vocational education and training programs.
3. Invest in the coordination of homework clubs and supported study groups across the state.
4. Invest in mentoring programs in the secondary school setting, as a key strategy to support the health and wellbeing of students.
5. Refer to the Refugee Council of Australia's principles for good practice when planning transition support for young people from refugee backgrounds and their families.

Conclusion

The MYAN NSW thanks the Standing Committee on Social Issues for the opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families*. The MYAN NSW believes that improving transition support for young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived to Australia will make a significant contribution to their life outcomes.

For further information please contact:

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

² Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010.

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- ³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.
- ⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.
- ⁵ (DIAC, January 2011)
- ⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010
- ⁷ NSW Department of Education and Training, 2005, Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy: Multicultural education in schools, https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/equity/comm_rela/PD20050234.shtml?level=Schools&categories=Schools|Access+%26+equity|Multicultural
- ⁸ NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010, Refugee Support Strategy Key Initiatives – 2010.
- ⁹ Refugee Council of Australia, July 2010. Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html>.
- ¹⁰ Refugee Council of Australia, July 2010. Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html>.
- ¹¹ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, August 2010a, Education Policy Statement, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Victoria.
- ¹² Refugee Council of Australia, July 2010. Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html>.
- ¹³ Refugee Council of Australia, July 2010. Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html>.
- ¹⁴ Refugee Council of Australia, July 2010. Finding the Right Time and Place, Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html>.