



## **Policy Platform: Multicultural Young People** Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition defines multicultural young people (aged 12 – 25) as including:

- Young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse;
- Young people who are newly arrived; and,
- Young people of a refugee background.<sup>1</sup>

As stated in the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2014*, the population of the ACT is culturally diverse with 22% of the ACT population having been born overseas, across 200 different countries; and speaking over 170 languages other than English.<sup>1</sup> Of the 69,578 young people in the ACT, 9,182 (13.2%) young people were born overseas.<sup>2</sup> Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people aged under 30 years arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program,<sup>3</sup> with young people accounting for 33% of the ACT's total humanitarian entrants between June 2007 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> In light of this, the Youth Coalition identifies multicultural young people as a key group that government and community resources and services should be directed to.

Members of the ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network have identified education, mental health, housing / homelessness, racism, intergenerational conflict, services delivery and interpreter use as key issues experienced by multicultural young people in the ACT. In the 2012 *Rate Canberra* survey conducted by the Youth Coalition, young people from a refugee background most frequently identified school work or study, unemployment / employment, having money for expenses like phone bills and food, starting high school, college or tertiary education, and caring for a family member or friend as affecting their lives and worrying them.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Education, Employment and Transitions***

Education is a significant issue for multicultural young people, particularly those who are newly arrived or from a refugee background. Young people who are newly arrived or from a refugee background may have experienced limited formal schooling, or gaps in their education.<sup>6</sup> Services that work with multicultural young people have highlighted the need to provide additional resources to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The Youth Coalition supports the development and implementation of mechanisms that support multicultural young people to meaningfully engage in education and employment opportunities.

The Youth Coalition also supports the expansion of the Dickson College Refugee Bridging Pilot Program, which supports young people aged 16 years and over who are newly arrived and of a refugee background, to complete Year 10 and 12. The Program reports that young people travel from all regions of the ACT to attend this program. Services report that young people who are under the age of 16, and who

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the Youth Coalition does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People in this definition. See also the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People Policy Platform.  
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are not eligible to participate in the Program, often experience a range of challenges in maintaining attendance at school. It was clearly identified that the ACT Government needs to improve transitional supports and education pathways for multicultural young people in the ACT, particularly for those who are either too young or too old to access the Dickson College Program.

Newly arrived and young people from refugee backgrounds face a range of barriers to entering the workforce and remaining engaged in meaningful employment including: experiences of racism and discrimination; limited English language skills; and limited resources and/or cultural competency within the employment services sector to respond to the needs of these young people.<sup>7</sup> The Youth Coalition supports MYAN Australia in recognising that refugees and newly arrived young people need targeted support to increase their engagement in training pathways and capacity to secure employment, including access to culturally sensitive training and employment services.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Mental Health***

Multicultural young people may be at increased risk, compared with the general population of young people, of experiencing mental health issues, due to additional risk factors such as racism and discrimination, social isolation, or pre-settlement trauma or torture. However, multicultural young people experience additional barriers to accessing appropriate mental health treatment and support, such as language barriers, stigma, and limited capacity of clinicians to work with diverse communities.

The Youth Coalition supports the work of the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, which identified a need to develop a transcultural approach to mental health that recognises the significance of cultural and linguistic factors in understanding mental health and addresses specific risk factors for individuals and groups.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Racism and Discrimination***

Despite the valuable diversity of our society, racism and discrimination are common occurrences for many young people.<sup>10</sup> Racism in our community comes in a variety of forms including: overt, covert, structural, institutional and individual forms. In consultations, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have identified racism and discrimination as a key issue. A national study conducted by the Foundation for Young Australians found that over 80% of research participants, from non-Anglo Australian backgrounds reported experiencing racism.<sup>11</sup> The experience of racism and discrimination by young people from multicultural backgrounds threatens personal and cultural identity and can impact negatively on mental health, psychological development and the capacity to transition to adulthood.<sup>12</sup> Racism in all its forms needs to be urgently and strategically addressed in order to ensure that all Australians experience the best possible quality of life.

### ***Intergenerational Conflict***

Multicultural young people are often forced to balance the expectations of their families and communities to maintain their culture and the expectations and attitudes of the mainstream society. The most common causes of intergenerational conflict include: independence, space, finances, activities outside the home, sexual relationships, values, expectations of success, and family responsibilities. Family or intergenerational conflict can have serious consequences for young people's wellbeing, identity-formation and family and housing stability.<sup>13</sup>

### **Service System**

Youth services and multicultural young people have identified the need for better linkages and transition points between 'specialist' multicultural services, and 'mainstream' youth services. It was reported that young people often experience a reluctance to exit specialist services (such as settlement services) due to the established relationship they have with those services, and a perception that mainstream services do not have the capacity to effectively respond to their needs. In addition, youth services noted the need to provide additional training to mainstream youth services, to build their cultural awareness and capacity to work with multicultural young people, but also multicultural services, to build their capacity to work with young people.

Over the past few years, service providers in the ACT have reported an increase in numbers of referrals of multicultural young people to housing and homelessness support services. They particularly noted an increase in the number of young women, young mothers and pregnant young women who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness due to conflict with their partners and families.

### **Language and Interpreter Use**

Communication is a significant issue for multicultural young people especially newly arrived and refugee young people who often possess a low English proficiency. Effective communication will often require the use of appropriately skilled and trained interpreters. Multicultural young people have the right to communicate in their first or chosen language. Therefore, interpreters should be engaged when a young people speaks limited or no English; speaks basic English but is under stress; when discussing important or sensitive information; or when a young person requests an interpreter.<sup>14</sup> However, evidence shows that services are not engaging interpreters when required.<sup>15</sup> Young people are often required to interpret for family or community members. This often places the young person in stressful and inappropriate situations and can limit the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information or support.<sup>16</sup> Multicultural young people should not be used as interpreters for family, friends or community members due to the inappropriate responsibility that carries.

### **MYAN**

Since 2008, the Youth Coalition has supported the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN), which is now comprised of over 100 members from government and community agencies, and seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people in the ACT. The sector development work of the MYAN is supported with funding from the Community Services Directorate, ACT Government.

### **Commitments**

1. Supporting the ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, in order to continue to progress multicultural youth affairs in the ACT.
2. Advocating for the ACT Government to provide funding to expand education bridging programs for newly arrived young people and young people with a refugee background, including to young people under the age of 16.
3. Advocating for improved transitional supports and educational pathways for all multicultural young people in the ACT.

4. Advocating for appropriate mental health treatment and support options for multicultural young people.
5. Advocating for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against multicultural young people.
6. Advocating for appropriate supports for multicultural young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, including young mothers and pregnant young women.
7. Working to improve the training opportunities provided to both 'mainstream' youth services and multicultural services to build their cultural awareness when working with multicultural young people, along with teachers, health professionals, police, care and protection workers and youth justice workers.
8. Advocating for improved referral and transition processes between specialist services, particularly settlement services, and 'mainstream' youth services.
9. Advocating for improved access to and use of accredited interpreters in youth services, schools, government services and health services; and access to appropriate interview friends if arrested.
10. Advocating for evidence based responses to racism in schools and the wider community that are underpinned by a robust and inclusive youth participation strategy.
11. Advocating for Cultural Care Plans for multicultural young people in care.
12. Advocating for the active and supported participation of multicultural young people in their individual care planning and case management.
13. Advocating for the active involvement of multicultural young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Multicultural Affairs (2010) ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2014, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government

<sup>2</sup> Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (2009) ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government

<sup>3</sup> O'Sullivan, K. Olli, L (2007) Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2012) Settlement Arrivals Information: New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory, Australian Government, Canberra.

<sup>5</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT (2012) Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the Survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT, Canberra.

<sup>6</sup> Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (2011) Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN): Policy Briefing Paper, Carlton, Victoria

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (August 2010) Mental Health Policy Statement, Victoria

<sup>10</sup> Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) (2011) Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN): Policy Briefing Paper, Carlton, Victoria

<sup>11</sup> Fethi Mansouri, Louise Jenkins, Les Morgan and Mona Taouk (2009) The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Victoria, <online> [http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact\\_of\\_Racism\\_FYA\\_report.pdf](http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf)

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<sup>12</sup> Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (2011) Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN): Policy Briefing Paper, Carlton, Victoria

<sup>13</sup> ARACY, (2007) Multicultural Youth In Australia: Settlement and Transition, Canberra

<sup>14</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) (2013) Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services, Victoria

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011) Good Practice Guide: Working with Interpreters, Melbourne, Victoria