



ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) Issues Paper

December 2010

This document aims to provide information about issues affecting multicultural young people in the ACT and make recommendations towards progressing these issues.

Introduction

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) began in 2008 as a partnership between the Youth Coalition of the ACT and Multicultural Youth Service (MYS). It seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services, strengthen connections between multicultural youth services, and raise the profile of multicultural young people in the ACT. There are currently 85 individual MYAN members, comprised of youth and community service representatives, government representatives, and other stakeholders.

In 2010, the Youth Coalition received one-off project funding in partnership with the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, to employ a MYAN coordinator one day per week until 30 June 2011. The purpose of the funding is to coordinate MYAN activities, and build the sustainability of the MYAN beyond the funding period.

Overview of Multicultural Young People in the ACT

The population of the ACT is highly diverse and includes a number of sub-populations. According to the *ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014*, one in five ACT residents is a young person between 12 and 25 years of age. Of the 69,578 young people in the ACT, 597 (1.7%) young people are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 9,182 (13.2%) young people were born overseas.¹ Please note that the MYAN does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in its definition of multicultural young people.

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. Of the 76,513 ACT residents born overseas, 12% are aged 12 – 25 years.² Multicultural young people arrive in Canberra through a range of avenues, including under migration programs (such as the Skilled Migration Program or Family Reunion Migration Program), as refugees, under the humanitarian program or as students.

This paper defines multicultural young people as recently arrived young people (including young people of a refugee background), and second-generation young people. Second-generation young people are defined as those young people who were born in Australia, with one or both parents born in an overseas country.³ The distinction between these two groups is important; as both groups of young people experience different needs. Issues of access and equity are particularly serious for newly arrived young people and young people of a refugee background; hence, this

Issues Paper will focus on their discrete needs.

Overview of the Multicultural Youth Sector

The multicultural youth sector in the ACT is very small. Multicultural Youth Services (MYS) is one of the key service providers in the sector; mainly providing support to newly arrived young people. Other key providers include Companion House (assisting survivors of torture and trauma), CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn (assisting in settling newly arrived humanitarian entrants within the first six months of arrival), Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (assisting humanitarian entrants up to 5 years after arrival). There are also generalist government and non-government agencies that provide support and services to multicultural young people in the ACT, including health services, housing and homelessness services, and youth services and others.

Role of Family

It is important to acknowledge the role of families of multicultural young people. Families have a lot to offer in resolving many of the complex issues that multicultural young people face as they settle in Australia, and their contribution can be key to improving services to multicultural young people. Conversely, multicultural young people often play a key role in supporting their own families to settle in Australia, and the MYAN notes the importance of developing strategies to support young people in this role.

Issues for Multicultural Young People in the ACT

At a MYAN Planning Day held in June 2010, members identified mental health, education, housing and homelessness, service delivery and ACT Government policy as key priority issues affecting multicultural young people in the ACT. Other issues included transport, limited recreational opportunities, language barriers, interpretation services, policing and legal issues, and community participation in activities such as Youth Week and the Multicultural Festival.

This Paper will provide more information on mental health, education, housing and homelessness, service delivery, and ACT Government policy.

Mental Health

Mental Health is described in the National Mental Health Plan 2003 – 2008 as:

A state of emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual can cope with the normal stresses of life and achieve his or her potential. It is not simply the absence of mental illness.⁴

Mental health issues are likely to be significant in many young people's lives with 25% experiencing a mental health issue at some point;⁵ and the median age of onset being under the age of 24.⁶ In addition, the issues associated with mental health affect Australian society as a whole with mental health issues accounting for 13.3% of the total burden of disease and injury, the majority of these being related to anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders.⁷

VicHealth reports that there are three determinants of mental health and wellbeing. These include social connectedness, freedom from discrimination and violence, and economic participation.⁸ Those who are excluded from enjoying the benefits of these

determinants are at risk of experiencing mental health issues, and can include multicultural young people.

Newly arrived young people, particularly those who enter through the humanitarian program are at high risk of experiencing mental health issues. Many of these young people may have suffered displacement and trauma before coming to Australia. Cultural differences and language barriers expose newly arrived young people to social isolation, discrimination and exclusion from economic participation.

At the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) meeting in June 2010 it was noted that some multicultural communities have different understandings and definitions of mental health. For example, a Sudanese National Youth Conference held in October 2010 identified that many Sudanese young people find it difficult to discuss mental health, or to identify with concepts such as trauma or stress in their first languages. The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) identified the need to explore 'transcultural' models of mental health supports and services⁹.

MYAN members identified that multicultural young people experiencing difficulties accessing mental health services, in part due to language, stigma, and cultural barriers. Members also identified the importance of ensuring that young people 'have a say' in their health and treatment; and highlighted issues of confidentiality and misinterpretation with interpreters.

Recommendations:

- *Use of accredited interpreters / teleconferencing*
- *Cultural competency training to healthcare and mental health practitioners*
- *Community education programs targeted at newly arrived multicultural communities to reduce stigma in those communities*
- *Encouraging family involvement in addressing mental health issues to improve outcomes for multicultural young people*

Education

Anecdotally, services and young people report that education is very important to multicultural young people and their families, who seek to access quality education in Australia. Education has the potential to be a supportive and positive environment for young people and their families; through providing educational and social outcomes.

The Census of ACT Government Schools 2010 revealed that there are 38,758 students in 83 primary and secondary schools in the ACT. Of this 4,158 students were identified by the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) as English as Secondary Language (ESL) students in the Department's Annual Report for 2009-2010.¹⁰

ESL students are those who speak a language other than English at home, and do not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The majority of ESL students indicate that they have at least one parent who speaks a language other than English, indicating that many ESL students may be second-generation young people. Newly arrived ESL students include those who have been in Australia for up to seven years, and may require additional intensive language assistance.

While many schools have ESL teachers to support students, only 1 public secondary school, Dickson College, provides intensive English classes to support students to transition to school. 3 primary schools, North Ainslie, Hughes Primary and Urambi

Primary provide intensive ESL to children. This intensive ESL is offered for a minimum of three terms; depending on the needs of students. Dickson College also provides a self-funded Bridging Program for young people of a refugee background who are aged 16 years and over.

Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS) runs the Program for After School Studies (PASS), which supports newly arrived young people with schoolwork. PASS recruits volunteer tutors who work individually with students.

Members identified a number of issues around educational pathways and transition points for multicultural young people, particularly those under the age of 16 and in high school. They particularly noted the importance of placing young people in classroom settings that suit their educational experience and social requirements. For example, while it may be inappropriate to place young people with limited education in primary school environments, it may be equally inappropriate to place them in their age-equivalent year level.

It was also noted that the recent ACT and national legislative changes to ensure that young people complete Year 10 and then remain in approved education, training or employment until they complete Year 12 or turn 17, may have a significant impact on multicultural young people and their families.

Recommendations:

- *ESL data to be more disaggregated and available*
- *ESL program may need to be expanded to cover other area such as science*
- *Providing culturally-aware 'educational counselling' to support students with education pathways and transitions and make specific plans for every young person*
- *Bridging programs for young people under the age of 16*
- *Intensive ESL classes in more secondary schools*
- *Develop strategies to engage with and support young people in a family context*
- *Assessing the impact of recent legislation changes on multicultural young people and their families*

Housing and Homelessness

Housing and homelessness is a national problem in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that during 2008 – 2009, 204, 900 people received support from housing and homelessness agencies¹¹. This figure does not include the numbers of individuals and families who did not access support, despite experiencing or being at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project, a non-government organisation that advocates on behalf of asylum seekers, reports that provision of housing is a fundamental human right and people who cannot access housing and are homeless or at risk of being homeless are the most vulnerable in society¹². Housing asylum seekers is a significant issue, particularly following the release of a number of asylum seekers by the Australian Government into the community.

In the ACT, housing and homelessness is often experienced by newly arrived humanitarian entrants and asylum seekers who are usually unemployed, have no rental history and don't understand the complex housing market and system. Multicultural young people are a particularly at-risk group and it has been reported

that the number of referrals from multicultural young people to housing and homeless agencies in the ACT has increased. It was also noted that young multicultural women with children are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations:

- *Ensure that multicultural young people receive priority housing*
- *Provision of clear information to multicultural young people about housing options and services*
- *That the new youth housing and homelessness framework address the needs of multicultural young people*
- *Broader issues around housing and homelessness (such as increasing the housing stock) being addressed by ACT Government*
- *Responsive emergency housing for multicultural young people*

Service Delivery

Newly arrived people, particularly those who arrive under the humanitarian program, are entitled to a range of services aimed at supporting them to settle in Australia. These specialist services, referred to as Settlement Services, work with individuals and families for varying periods of time; from six months to five years; with the goal of eventually transitioning them to generalist services.

MYAN members report that multicultural young people often experience a reluctance to transition from settlement services to generalist services, for a variety of reasons; such as language and cultural barriers, and a perception that mainstream services cannot work effectively with multicultural young people.

In its 2008-09 Access and Equity report, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA) reported that many generalist service delivery agencies failed to meet the needs of multicultural people¹³. The Australian Government Access and Equity framework is underpinned by four principles including responsiveness, communication, accountability and leadership. Generalist government service delivery agencies are expected to report annually against these the four principles listed above.

MYAN members have reported a need to provide cultural competence training to workers and services from generalist youth programs, to build the capacity of these services to work with multicultural young people. In addition, members highlighted the need to provide training to specialist multicultural services, in working with young people aged 12 – 25.

Recommendations:

- *Development of transition / exit plans for multicultural young people to transition to generalist services*
- *Increase education young people around the generalist services they can access*
- *Appropriate interpretation services for all youth services*
- *Cultural competency training for generalist youth services*
- *Training for multicultural services in working with young people*
- *Developing mechanisms for services to engage and consult with multicultural young people*

Multicultural Policy in the ACT

The *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013* is the ACT Government's multicultural policy framework against which government agencies report annually. The Strategy is guided by human rights principles and identifies strategies that are aimed at empowering multicultural people and communities. The Strategy also has a focus on social inclusion, working towards ensuring that multicultural people and communities are not isolated from the wider ACT community and gain a sense of belonging to the ACT community. However, MYAN members are concerned that the Strategy did not include any of the strategies for multicultural young people that were included in the first initial draft, such as support for multicultural young women.

The ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014¹⁴ outlines the ACT Government's priorities and strategies in relation to young people aged 12 – 25 years, particularly in relation to participation, transition, access and support; which are all key issues for multicultural young people.

While both of these documents have the potential to significantly progress supports for multicultural young people in the ACT, neither specifically responds to their discrete needs.

Recommendations:

- *Develop accountability and transparency within the ACT Government with regards to who is responsible for progressing the interests of multicultural young people in the ACT*
- *Development of ACT Government strategic policies that specifically outlines the ACT Government's policy development and implementation for multicultural young people in the ACT*

More Information

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