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RE: ACT Multicultural Framework 2014 – 2018

Dear Nic,

On behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition), I would like to thank the Community Participation Group for the opportunity to provide input into the ACT Multicultural Framework 2014 – 2018.

About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. The Youth Coalition is a membership-based organisation responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

One of the ways in which we bring like-minded agencies together is through the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) ACT, which the Youth Coalition facilitates in partnership with Multicultural Youth Services ACT. The MYAN ACT seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally), strengthen connections between 'mainstream' and multicultural youth services, and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT.

Multicultural Young People in the ACT

Young people are a distinct, and often discrete, population group aged between 12 and 25 years. As a population group, young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. Additionally, there are certain groups of young people that face additional barriers in participating socially, economically and politically in Australian society. While cultural diversity provides a rich and positive contribution to Australian society, multicultural young people may face a number of issues that make them a vulnerable social group.¹

Multicultural young people are a diverse group encompassing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, asylum seekers and newly arrived young people, as well as first and second generation Australians. As a collective, multicultural young people may also be referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

The ACT is home to many cultures, with 22 per cent of the population having been born overseas, from 200 different countries, and speaking over 170 languages other than English.² Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people under 30 arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program.³ In the ACT, young people accounted for 33% of total humanitarian entrants between June 2007 and 2012.⁴ The *CALD Youth Census Report 2014* found that, of the 67,341 young people in the ACT in 2011, 10,980 (16.3%) were born overseas and 16,362 (24.3%) were culturally and linguistically diverse.⁵

"CALD youth are a highly diverse group and their specific issues and challenges may differ depending on the particular cultural group with which they identify; the number of years they have been in Australia; their pathways both to Australia and once residing in Australia, and the level of community and family support they receive once they are living in Australia."⁶

Members of the MYAN ACT have identified education, mental health, housing and homelessness, racism, intergenerational conflict, service 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 of the ACT, 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.⁷

In the previous ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013, the Youth Coalition welcomed the inclusion of children and young people as a key focus area. We

¹ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

² Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2010, *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2014*, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government, Canberra.

³ O'Sullivan & Olli, 2007, *Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia*, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Melbourne.

⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012, *Settlement Arrivals Information: New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory*, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁵ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

⁶ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

⁷ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2012, *Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT*, Canberra.

would like to see the ACT Government maintain their commitment to multicultural young people in the ACT Multicultural Framework 2014 – 2018.

Recommendation 1

Maintain the commitment to supporting multicultural young people, as outlined in the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013.

Education

For multicultural young people, particularly those who are newly arrived or from a refugee background, education is an important part of adjusting to life in Australia and acquiring the skills to fully participate economically, politically and socially in society. However, education is often reported as a significant issue for multicultural young people.

Multicultural young people are often faced with a multitude of intersecting issues that can impact on their educational engagement, achievement and attainment. This can include lower levels of English proficiency, insecure accommodation, poverty, and poor physical and mental health as a result of trauma, particularly for newly arrived and refugee young people. Newly arrived and refugee young people may also have limited experience of formal schooling, or gaps in their education in their countries of origin.

Multicultural young people may also have limited education support at home if parents or family members are unable to support their learning due to their own language barriers. ACT services that work with multicultural young people have also highlighted the need to provide additional resources to English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) programs.

While many schools have EALD teachers to support students, there is only one intensive English language program for high school students in the ACT. While there are five primary Introductory English Centres (IEC) co-located in five primary schools across Canberra, there is only one secondary IEC co-located at Dickson College. The IECs provide intensive English language teaching to support students with limited English language to transition to school.⁸ The Youth Coalition notes the significant gap in English language support for multicultural young people on the south side of Canberra.

Members of the MYAN ACT have 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. The Youth Coalition strongly supports the Refugee Bridging Program at Dickson College, which provides support to young people with a refugee experience to complete Year 11 and 12. However, we note that the program is only available to young people aged 16 years and over,⁹ and highlight the significant gap in educational support for those under the age of 16.

⁸ ACT Education and Training Directorate, *English as an Additional Language of Dialect Programs*, ACT Government, Canberra, accessed 17 February, http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/literacy_and_numeracy/english_as_a_second_language_esl

⁹ Dickson College, *Refugee Bridging Program*, ACT Education and Training Directorate, ACT Government, Canberra, accessed 11 November 2014, http://www.dicksonc.act.edu.au/specialised_programs/refugee_bridging_program

With youth unemployment, underemployment, and rates of casual employment among young people on the rise, the Youth Coalition recognises that it is becoming increasingly important that young people transitioning from school and entering the workforce are able to demonstrate desired employability skills. This is even more significant for multicultural young people who are disproportionately at risk of unemployment and other forms of labour market exclusion.¹⁰

The Youth Coalition recognises that multicultural young people, particularly refugees and newly arrived young people, and their families, need targeted support to increase their engagement in education and support their pathways to employment.

Recommendation 2

Provide a secondary Introductory English Centre on the south side of Canberra.

Recommendation 3

Provide bridging programs for young people under the age of 16 with a refugee experience.

Employment

Employment impacts many aspects of young people's lives including housing, health, education, income, social inclusion, workplace rights and relations, independence, and future prospects. Youth unemployment is a growing concern both locally and nationally. In the ACT, youth unemployment has risen by 13% in the last two years, reaching 10.8% in the year to February 2014.¹¹

For multicultural young people, research shows that unemployment is even more pronounced. The *CALD Youth Census Report 2014* found that CALD young people aged 18-24 years have lower levels of workforce participation when compared to their Australian born counterparts. In the ACT, 58.4% of CALD young people aged 18-24 years are employed full- or part-time, compared to 79.5% of Australian born young people in the same age bracket.¹²

Multicultural young people may 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, as well as limited resources and limited cultural competency within the employment services sector to respond to the needs of these young people.¹³

It is worth noting that while multicultural young people may face discrimination and barriers to gaining employment, their relatively lower rates of employment could also be linked to an emphasis on education for older multicultural young people. In 2011 67.2% of CALD young people aged 18-24 years in the ACT were enrolled in

¹⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2014, *Facilitating the Transition to Employment*, Melbourne.

¹¹ Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *Youth Unemployment Monitor: March edition*, <http://createsend.com/t/r-C00FBEEAD9543CDB2540EF23F30FEDED>, accessed June 2014.

¹² Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

¹³ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2011, *Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN): Policy Briefing Paper*, Melbourne.

full- or part-time schooling, compared to 49.5% of their Australian-born counterparts.¹⁴

The Youth Coalition supports MYAN Australia in recognising that multicultural young people, particularly newly arrived and refugee 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.¹⁵

Recommendation 4

Develop and promote local targeted responses to youth unemployment that are culturally appropriate and involve collaboration between ACT Government, business, schools, services and young people.

Mental Health

Young people, youth workers, and services in the ACT consistently report that mental health is one of the top three issues for young people in the ACT. This is a pattern that is replicated nationally. Mental health issues are likely to be significant in many young people's lives with 25% experiencing a mental health issue in any given year.¹⁶

Multicultural young people, particularly newly arrived and refugee young people, may be at an increased risk of poor mental health compared with the general population of young people. They may face additional risk factors such as racism and discrimination, social isolation, or pre-settlement trauma or torture. Further, 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 MYAN Australia, 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.¹⁷

The Youth Coalition welcomed the inclusion of increasing mental health support for multicultural young people as an objective in the previous ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013. We would like to see the ACT Government continue to focus on supporting the mental health of multicultural young people in the ACT Multicultural Framework 2014 – 2018.

Recommendation 5

Maintain the commitment to improving access to services which support the mental health of multicultural young people, as outlined in the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013.

¹⁴ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

¹⁵ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2011, *Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN): Policy Briefing Paper*, Melbourne.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *Australian Social Trends: Mental Health*.

¹⁷ National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, 2010, *Mental Health Policy Statement*, Melbourne.

Recommendation 6

Provide cultural competency training to health and mental health practitioners.

Recommendation 7

Target community education programs at newly arrived multicultural communities to reduce the stigma around mental health.

Housing and Homelessness

Out of all the states and territories in Australia, the ACT has the second highest rate of homelessness, with 50 in every 10,000 people being homeless. In 2011, 1,785 people were homeless in the ACT. Of those, 754 were under the age of 25, representing more than 42% of all homelessness in the ACT.¹⁸

Multicultural young people may face increased barriers to accessing housing and are at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. For newly arrived humanitarian entrants and asylum seekers in particular, housing and homelessness is a significant issue. People seeking asylum are often not eligible for mainstream homelessness or public housing, and often do not have the income needed to access private rental.¹⁹ The 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 society.²⁰

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 have a limited understanding of the complex housing market and system. 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.

The complexities and issues faced by young people experiencing homelessness are significant. For young people who are at risk or experiencing homelessness, simply providing a place to live is insufficient to addressing the root causes of homelessness, and does not always end the potential pathways to homelessness in later life. Issues such as mental health, employment, education, alcohol and other drug use can often be barriers to stable housing for young people.

Recommendation 8

Provide clear information to multicultural young people about housing options and services available to them.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*, Australian Government, Canberra.

¹⁹ UnitingCare Lentara, 2014, *Lentara UnitingCare Asylum Seeker Programs: Resource Kit*, Melbourne.

²⁰ Liddy, N., Sanders & Coleman, 2010, *Australia's Hidden Homeless: Community-Based Approaches to Asylum Seeker Homelessness*, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project.

Recommendation 9

Provide cultural competency training to staff across the housing and homelessness service system.

Service System

In the ACT, as well as 'mainstream' or 'generalist' services, there are also 'specialist' multicultural services that work specifically with multicultural people. For instance, 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.

Research has identified that multicultural people are less likely to access formal sources of assistance such as health services and less likely to have informal sources of support, such as family, friends and neighbours, when compared with the non-CALD Australian population.²¹

“Negative experiences such as cultural insensitivity or a failure for CALD young people to find an appropriate service for their needs may result in some young people deciding not to seek help in the future.”²²

MYAN ACT members report that multicultural young people are often reluctant to transition from settlement services to generalist services due to the established relationship they have with those services, language and cultural barriers, and a perception that mainstream services cannot work effectively with multicultural young people.

The Youth Coalition recognises the need for better linkages and transition points between 'specialist' multicultural services, and 'mainstream' youth services. We acknowledge the need for a two-pronged approach, on the one hand providing additional training for mainstream youth services to build their cultural awareness and capacity to work with multicultural young people, and on the other hand, providing additional training for multicultural services to build their capacity to work with young people.

The Youth Coalition welcomed the inclusion of providing multicultural young people with access to age-appropriate support services as an objective in the previous ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013. We would like to see the ACT Government continue to focus on supporting multicultural young people to access the services that are available to them.

Recommendation 10

Maintain the commitment to ensuring multicultural young people have access to age-appropriate services, as outlined in the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013.

²¹ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

²² Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

Recommendation 11

Ensure all youth services have the budget for interpreter services and that staff are trained and confident in using an interpreter.

Recommendation 12

Provide clear information to multicultural young people about 'generalist' or 'mainstream' youth services available to them.

The Youth Coalition would welcome the opportunity to work with the Community Participation Group to support the youth sector to have input into the further development of the ACT Multicultural Framework 2014 – 2018.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6247 3540 or at director@youthcoalition.net if you wish to discuss this letter further.

Sincerely,

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