

The Youth Coalition of the ACT recognises that young asylum seekers and refugees are a growing community in the ACT who are a valued part of our culture. However, refugee and asylum seeker young people have complex needs and the youth sector plays an important part in many young refugee and asylum seeker's lives. Many refugees and asylum seekers have faced overwhelming hardship and trauma before arriving in the ACT community and the Youth Coalition believes that all possible measures should be taken to ensure that they are supported and feel connected to local communities.

The issues faced by refugee and asylum seeker young people are often interwoven, such as lower levels of English proficiency, insecure accommodation, poverty and poor physical and mental health as a result of experiencing trauma in their country of origin, on the journey to Australia and/or in detention. The Youth Coalition calls for a holistic approach to the wellbeing of refugee and asylum seeker young people that is dependent on those who work with such young people to be adequately trained, informed and resourced on such issues.

As refugee and asylum seeking young people may also have reduced levels of support from or contact with their original families and communities, these young people face a significantly higher risk of becoming isolated and becoming homeless. A survey of almost 1,300 refugee students found that 16% were either homeless or housed in unsafe, unhygienic or overcrowded accommodation.¹ The Youth Coalition also believes that this issue is also a result of young people not being recognized and addressed as a specific target group of the National Integrated Settlement Strategy and the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.² The Youth Coalition also recognizes that income support for many young refugee and asylum seeking young people is inadequate and should be founded on need, rather than other arbitrary and irrelevant criteria.

Refugee and asylum seeker young people may also face significant barriers to participation due to their unique circumstances and a lack of supports within their lives. Some refugee and asylum seeker young people arrive in Australia without the family and friendship structures that many other young people rely on, highlighting the important role played by services which support refugee and asylum seeker young people. Cultural and experiential differences for refugee and asylum seeker young people may particularly mean that the assumptions about age that are in place for other young people are not applicable, including ages of independence which may need to be lower due to their life circumstances and age within the education system which may need to be higher due to interrupted education throughout the process of seeking asylum. Given the traumatic experiences young people face before seeking asylum and in the process of seeking asylum, there is a need for well resourced counselling and mental health support services for young refugee and asylum seeking young people.

¹ Louise Coventry et al.(2003) *Wealth of All Nations: Identification of Strategies to Assist Refugee Young People in Transition to Independence* National Youth Affairs Research Scheme p 50

² Ibid p3

Those seeking asylum face tremendous hardships and traumatic experiences both overseas and upon arrival in Australia due to Australia's policy on refugees. The Youth Coalition believes that Australia's policy of mandatory detention for refugee children and young people is immoral and against the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) and contravenes Article 37 of the CROC. The experience of being detained in Australia compounds pre-existing trauma for young people who are refugees and as such, the Youth Coalition therefore calls for the immediate abolition of this policy, to be replaced with a more appropriate system based on the best interests of the child or young person concerned.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for services that provide appropriate advocacy services to ensure their basic human rights are met in the ACT, including that of adequate food, shelter, healthcare and education.
- ◆ Advocating for services to ensure that open, fair, timely and equitable processes are followed in any determination about refugee and asylum seeker young people's residency where young people have the right to free legal assistance at all times in the process.
- ◆ Advocating for the adequate provision of financial support for young refugee and asylum seekers to account for the cost of resettlement.
- ◆ Advocating for services to be adequately resourced to assist refugee and asylum seeking young people in resettling in the ACT.
- ◆ Advocating for support for refugee and asylum seeker young people in accessing appropriate social, recreational and sporting activities that benefit their well-being and assist them in creating social networks and supports.
- ◆ Advocating for the continued eradication of racism and bullying towards young refugee and asylum seekers and the implementation of the ACT Facing Up To Racism strategy.
- ◆ Ensuring that all young refugees and asylum seekers have access to affordable counselling and health care support, particularly for trauma related matters.
- ◆ Supporting and encouraging all youth services (including youth centres, youth health, legal and accommodation services) to be supportive, understanding and responsive towards young refugee and asylum seekers' needs and issues