
REPORT FROM MAROONDAH YOUTH FORUM FOR NEWLY ARRIVED YOUNG PEOPLE

Tell It Like It Is?
10am to 2pm, Wednesday 23th November 2010
EV's Youth Centre, Croydon

Overview

The *Tell It like It Is* forum was organised by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) in collaboration with the Maroondah Youth Service Providers Network Refugee Action Group (MYSPN RAG). The aim of the forum was to consult with newly arrived young people living or studying in Maroondah on issues important to them to get a better sense of how life was for newly arrived young people in this region. Participants were also asked to come up with recommendations that services or policy makers could implement.

The agenda for the day included:

- Music from a local Karen Band
- Youth Consultation: what is going well and what are you finding difficult?
- Hip Hop and Reggae workshop and performances
- A Local Services expo
- Lunch
- Theatre Sports
- Panel Discussion
- Youth Consultation: Recommendations

We hope that by presenting the experiences and ideas of newly arrived young people this report will help services in the region to plan more responsive support services and programs. If your service has further questions about this report or would like to make contact with either CMY or the MYSPN RAG please contact Nick Butera at nbutera@cmynet.au.

The forum was supported by the Office for Youth, the Migrant Settlement Committee (Eastern Region), Maroondah City Council and Centrelink.



Recruitment and Entertainment

- **Youth Advisory Group**

CMY engaged six young people from Swinburne TAFE in Croydon to advise us on the organising of the forum. The young people were selected from another CMY program, *Ucan2*. A CMY project officer met with the young people on several occasions, to provide them with project management training, and to consult them about the contents and logistics of the forum.

These young people played an important role and completed tasks including:

- recruiting a band to perform at the forum
- recruiting young people to the forum
- advising CMY to use simple language
- helping to welcome guests as they arrived
- presenting gifts to panel members

- **Recruiting Participants**

The forum was targeted at young people from 15 to 25 years old. The membership of the MYSPN RAG felt that there were generally less opportunities for young people in this age bracket to participate in such events and also that this more mature age group would be better equipped to reflect on their settlement experiences.

Invitations were sent to the appropriate refugee/multicultural coordinator at Croydon Secondary College, Ringwood Secondary College, Maroondah Secondary College, Blackburn English Language School and the Swinburne TAFE (Croydon Campus) requesting up to 10 young people from each school be sent to the forum. Members from the MYSPN RAG also sent the invitation out through their networks and flyers for the forum were posted at the Migrant Information Centre (MIC) and Centrelink.

Around 40 young people participated in the forum. The large majority of young people were from Burma, with one girl from Liberia and one boy from Iran.

- **Local Services Involvement**

The forum provided a great chance for local services to hear directly from newly-arrived young people about their concerns and explain what services were available to them. Representatives from Maroondah City Council Youth Services, Migrant Information Centre (MIC), Centrelink, Eastern Community Legal Centre, Outer Eastern Local Learning and Education Network (OELLEN), Victoria Police, Eastern Access Community Health, Consumer Affairs, CMY and teachers from various schools all attended. Their roles included facilitating and scribing the youth consultations in small groups, answering questions, setting up a stall at the Services Expo and/or participating in the Panel.

Interpreters were provided from Centrelink for Chin, Karen and Zomi languages.

- **Entertainment**

MA Karen band from Swinburne Croydon campus was recommended by the Youth Advisory Group, while the MIC recommended a local hip hop group and a Sudanese reggae musician. Each act was either paid or given vouchers.

Consultation

The key objective of the forum was to gather information from participants in order to paint a more informed picture of what life was like in the Maroondah region for young people from refugee backgrounds.

Minthura Wyn from SEAAC and Nick Butera from CMY facilitated the consultation.

Participants broke into eight small groups to discuss the following two questions:

- 1. What are the things in your life that make you happy?**
- 2. What are the things that can be difficult in your life?**

The young people were also asked to select one issue that they discussed to present to the panel later in the afternoon.

This is a summary of what was said:

1. What are the things in your life that make you happy?

Six key themes were consistently highlighted:

- **Family and Friends**
- **Sports, Recreation and Music**
- **Financial Security**
- **Freedom and safety**
- **Educational Opportunities**
- **Church**

Family and Friends

Participants reported that the following made them feel happy:

- The love and care provided by their families.
- The opportunity to make new friends and spend time with friends.
- Particular activities with friends and families such as going for bike rides and trips to the city.

Sports, Recreation and Music

The most common response involved sports, recreational activities and music/dance. Young people said they especially enjoyed the chance to be involved in:

- Playing sports, especially volleyball and soccer but also badminton and swimming.
- Holiday program activities where they had the chance to meet new friends such as trips to Luna Park, the city or to a camp.
- Swimming at the swimming pool and the beach.
- The opportunity to develop and express themselves creatively.
- Singing, dancing and listening to music.

Financial Security

Participants valued the security of having enough money to buy food and clothes:

- Having a job that allowed them to support their family
- Having enough money to go shopping

Freedom and Safety

Some participants mentioned the opportunity to live with freedom and without fear:

- Participants said that coming to Australia made them feel happy because there was no war and it felt safe.
- A few participants noted specifically that the government made them feel safe because it was interested in what people wanted.

Educational Opportunities

Many young people raised the point that the opportunity to learn new things was what made them happy living in Eastern region. Participants spoke about enjoying:

- Their school, the company of their class mates and their teacher.
- Improving their English language skills and learning new things about Australian culture.
- The opportunities to be involved in leadership programs.

Church

The young people said that being part of their church was something that made them happy:

- Spiritually belonging to a community, taking part in the church choir and reading the bible.
- Praying and finding quiet places.

2. What are the things than can be difficult in your life?

Participants raised many aspects of their lives that they found difficult. The nine themes that were consistently raised were:

- **Language Barriers**
- **Education**
- **Employment**
- **Obtaining a Drivers License**
- **Isolation**
- **Negotiating between cultures**
- **Navigating Transport**
- **Safety and Justice**
- **Securing Accommodation**

Language Barriers

The most common responses from young people in regards to what they found difficult was the process of learning English. Other language issues included finding it difficult to:

- Communicate with people.
- Understand teaching materials.
- Access health services and follow medical prescriptions
- Signing contracts they didn't understand.
- Participants noted that they were unaware that interpreters were available.

Education

Education was a regular topic brought up by the young participants. Problems included:

- A lack of interpreters or teachers aids in school.
- Understanding teachers because “*some teachers speak very fast*”.
- Understanding and completing typical school tasks such as homework, essays and exams.
- Young people weren’t aware of any homework clubs that could support them.
- Communicating with class mates and making new friends.
- Learning how to use computers and other new technologies.

Employment

The struggle to find a job was one of the most discussed points. Many young participants raised unemployment due to language and cultural barriers as a major and ongoing concern for them and their friends. Points made included:

- There are very few job vacancies (part time or full time) and often limited language skills meant they wouldn’t be considered.
- A lack of employment restricted their financial security and their ability to offer basic needs such as the internet and recreational activities. One young person said “*It would be better to have more money, things are expensive here*”.
- The most difficult thing was getting their first job because without experience they couldn’t get other jobs.
- Overseas experience was not recognised and they needed qualifications.
- They felt embarrassed and stressed when they were rejected for employment. One young person explained “*when it happens, it’s is upsetting, it hurts*”.

Obtaining a Driver's Licence

Participants said that completing the required 120 hours of driving practice was very difficult for them because:

- Many of their parents did not have driver's licenses either.
- It is especially expensive for their families because everyone in the family (mother, father and child) needed to get lessons.
- Language was also a challenge because most of the driving instructors spoke Burmese and/or English which many young people could understand or speak.
- Another issue that was raised was that without a license young people didn't have an identification card that was recognised.

Isolation

Although many people noted earlier that living in Australia made them very happy, many young people also noted that coming to Australia left them with a feeling of intense isolation, sadness and fear:

- Coming to Australia had meant that they had to leave family members behind and that this was very traumatic.
- In Australia they didn't have their family of origin and they missed the family members that were not here.
- They feared for the safety of family members (in Burma and Malaysia)
- They missed their "own country" and found it difficult being in a new place.
- They found it difficult to make Australian friends and networks because of language and cultural barriers.
- There is a lack of opportunities for them to engage with the wider community, which made them feel more isolated.

Negotiating between cultures

- Participants explained that they sometimes struggled to negotiate between their family's cultural background and the Australian culture.
- One young person said she was stuck in two cultures "*one inside the house and one outside the house*" and that this could cause difficulties.
- Other young people stated that their experiences and understanding of school learning was very different in Australia to Burma.

Negotiating Public Transport

- Young People found the transport and ticketing system very complicated.
- A lack of understanding has resulted in fines, getting lost and missing out appointments due to lateness.
- While local transport was easy to manage, catching transport to and around the city was raised as particularly difficult and intimidating.
- Transport is expensive, unreliable and often late.

Safety, Racism and Justice

A major concern that young people raised was bullying – particularly racial discrimination. One young person said "*some people look us down. Some people say 'go back to your country'.*" Participants explained:

- They felt particularly unsafe at the train and bus stations when other young people are there drinking alcohol. As one young person explained, "*stations and bus stations are scary at night – people are looking at us like we are strangers*".
- They are also worried about police (due to negative experiences with police in Thailand) and said they had a general lack of understanding about Australian laws.

Other issues that were raised but explored in less depth included:

- Difficulties finding accommodation and affording increasing rental prices.
 - Difficulties finding information about community activities and recreational activities.
 - Difficulty getting to appointments and long wait times when seeing health practitioners.
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Panel Discussion

Each small group was asked to come up with one key issue that they could put forward to the Panel. If possible the young people were asked to present a story to illustrate their issue.

The panel was made up of representatives from five local services:

Stuart Sorrell, Victoria Police

Adam Cooper, Maroondah City Council Youth Services

Bianca Spence, Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network

Dure de Winter, Migrant Information Centre

Merilyn Spratling, Eastern Access Community Health

Key issues and questions presented:

- What can we do to improve our chances of finding **employment**?
- What can we use as valid **proof of identity** if we don't have a drivers license?
- One young man told a story about going to visit his brother who was in hospital in the city. He caught a train into the city but did not know which stop to get off the train. When the train trip ended, he was the only person left on the train. The driver came and yelled at him to get off but he didn't understand and became very upset. His question to the panel was:

After the first six months in Australia my HSS settlement supports stopped but I still need help with things. **Who can help me now?**
- What should we do if when people are **bullying** us? Who can we go to for help?
- Once I was robbed and I called the **police** and they didn't come for a long time. What should I do next time if I am assaulted or robbed again?
- How can we get more involved in the wider community? How can we find more **sporting grounds** we can play on and more opportunities to join music groups?

Following each question the panel provided advice and recommendations for each groups.

Youth Recommendations

Participants made numerous recommendations to improve their lives. These included:

- **More access to youth services and recreational activities**
- **More opportunities for community connection**
- **More English language support**
- **Employment support**
- **Driving programs**
- **Increased safety**
- **Food for disadvantages**

More access to youth services and recreational activities

- Free youth spaces, clubs and sports grounds
- Swimming lessons and sessions for girls
- More opportunities to be involved with dancing and music
- Information about where these sports and recreations can be played

More opportunities for community connection

Participants recommended more opportunities for newly-arrived communities to come together with established communities to promote interaction and help settlement:

- Camps, picnics and sport activities – to promote interaction of newly arrived and established communities
- Diverse music programs which promotes traditional, cultural and modern music
- Opportunities to play music with Australian musicians

More English language support

- Participant's recommended more English language support and more opportunities for young people to practice their English with volunteers.

Employment

- More one-on-one support to find employment
- Making sure people are happy with their job- survey form
- Expand the *Ucan2* program so that lower level classes can participate.

Driving and transport

- A L2P Driving program
- Free transport for students
- More information about public transport for new arrivals

Increased Safety

- Extra security
- Increased police presence and safety camera's at train stations
- Make the library more comfortable

Food for disadvantaged

- School to provide meals for disadvantage youth

For more information

For more information about CMY's Youth Forum, visit CMY's website www.cmy.net.au

Or contact:

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