MODULE ONE

ACHIEVING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN SERVICE PROVISION FOR REFUGEE YOUTH AT RISK

What is access and equity in service provision and why is it important?

Access is about ensuring that every young person who is entitled to use your service can do so without difficulty and equity is about treating them fairly, for example, ensuring that you have policies, procedures and other measures in place that acknowledge and respond to diversity.

The concepts of access and equity are underpinned by the principle that all young people, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, have the right to access community services, resources and support essential to their development and full participation in community life.

While the concept of access and equity has been around for a long time, it has by no means been achieved and there continues to be a number of barriers to services for at risk refugee youth. For more information, see Module 2.

Policy framework for access and equity obligations

A range of international, national and state declarations, charters and policies have been developed with the aim of increasing access and equity in service provision for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Australian Government's position on access and equity was first articulated in the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society (1998). The Charter has been endorsed by Federal, State and Territory Governments and applies to all government funded services.

The Charter is underpinned by seven major principles:

1. Access. Government services should be available to everyone who is entitled to them and should be free of any form of discrimination, irrespective of a person's country of birth, language, culture, race or religion.

2. Equity. Government services should be developed and delivered on the basis of fair treatment of clients who are eligible to receive them.

3. Communication. Government services should use strategies to inform eligible clients of services and their entitlements and how they can obtain them. Providers should also consult with their clients regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government services.

4. Responsiveness. Government services should be sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and responsive as far as practicable to the particular circumstances of individuals.

5. Effectiveness. Government services should be 'results-oriented', focused on meeting the needs of clients from all backgrounds.

6. Efficiency. Government services should optimise the use of available public resources through a user-responsive approach to service delivery which meets the needs of clients.

7. Accountability. Government services should have a reporting mechanism in place which ensures they are accountable for implementing the Charter objectives for clients. Accessand equity cannot be achieved through the willingness and dedication of lone workers but requires a genuine commitment from all levels of management.

A Good Practice Guide has been developed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to assist service providers to implement the principles outlined in the Charter. This can be obtained online from the DIAC website. http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/empowering/refugees/

Cultural diversity

Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds currently comprise approximately 25 percent of the youth population of South Australia. Providing culturally responsive services to ensure their full and equitable participation in community life should therefore be a priority for all service providers. Some mainstream agencies, however, see it as the responsibility of multicultural agencies to meet the service needs of culturally diverse young people. Important as they are, multicultural agencies are just one part of the community services network and can only service a small portion of the refugee and migrant youth population. Mainstream agencies have a key role to play in providing support. The different experience, knowledge, skills and networks that both multicultural and mainstream services can offer are needed to reduce barriers and ensure equitable access to services.

Barriers to services

Identifying and addressing the barriers that prevent or limit the access of young refugees to your service is critical to achieving access and equity in service provision.

Key barriers include:

Language. Many young refugees are effectively excluded from participating in mainstreamservices due to limited English language proficiency. However, within 12 months of arriving in Australia, most young refugees have reasonably well developed verbal English language skills and so language should not be seen as an abiding service access barrier.

Lack of knowledge. Many young refugees simply do not know there is any help available. This can largely be attributed to a failure on the part of service providers to effectively promote their services to population groups outside the mainstream.

Culture. The majority of young refugees are not familiar with the communityservices system, much less the services expressly established for youth.

Pre-migration experiences. Many young refugees have witnessed or experienced traumatic events that may affect their confidence, communication skills, and ability to ask for help.

Fear or distrust of government. Some young refugees may be distrustful or fearful of government affiliated services because they have experienced (or their families have experienced) oppressive governments in their home countries.

Family. Some parents/caregivers are cautious about allowing their children to participate in activities outside their family or community due to a lack of familiarity with or distrust of mainstream Australian culture.

Treating young refugees as a homogenous group. One size does not fit all - there are differences within and between cultural groups based on age, gender, religion, education, social status and other factors including the extent to which the young person has acculturated to mainstream Australian culture and where they are situated in the resettlement process.

Time. Many services are offered to young people with the expectation that they will fit in with the agency's schedule. Many young refugees come from a cultural context wherevery little emphasis is placed on time, punctuality, and keeping appointments.

Transport. Many young refugees do not access services because of transport problems.

How to make your service more culturally responsive and accessible

Working effectively with refugee youth at risk requires a commitment to implementing access and equity principles in practice. Simply put, this means ensuring that young people not only know about your service and what it can offer them but that they are also able to successfully communicate and interact with it. This involves:

- Engaging in planned, regular outreach to familiarise young refugees with your service in recognition that most are not familiar with the community services network or its relevance to their lives. For more information, see Module 6.
- Orienting new and recent refugee arrivals to your service to ensure they understand how it operates and what their rights and entitlements are.
- Providing a welcoming, inclusive and youth friendly environment. For more information, see Module 6.
- Regularly reviewing your agency's policies, procedures and practices to ensure they are culturally inclusive and responsive.
- Participating in regular cross-cultural training to improve your knowledge of other cultures and gain a greater understanding of your own culture and how it impacts on your practice.
- Consulting with young people and their communities regularly to improve understanding of refugee youth issues and to develop more responsive and inclusive services.
- Facilitating the full and active participation of young people and their communities in needs assessments and service planning and development.
- Sharing decision-making with young people and their communities to increase their participation and self-determination.
- Establishing and maintaining effective links and partnerships with multicultural and other agencies involved in service provision to young people.
- Working to reduce racism and other forms of discrimination that prevent young people from accessing community services, resources and support.

- Recognising and responding to the different needs within and between cultural groups based on age, gender, religion, education, socioeconomic status and other factors including the extent to which they have acculturated to mainstream Australian culture and where they are situated in the resettlement process.

Where can I find more information?

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MODULE TWO
ISSUES AFFECTING REFUGEE YOUTH

The issues and needs of young refugees will vary according to whether they are living alone, with one or both parents, with older siblings, with extended family, or with distant relatives; whether they are living in fractured families or in intact families with disrupted family structures, dynamics, and patterns; their age at the time of migration and their current age; their social support networks; their level of acculturation to Western society; and where they are situated in the resettlement process. With this in mind, the following issues should be considered when developing services and programs for youth at risk.

The refugee experience

Young people from refugee backgrounds are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised population groups in Australia. While young people's refugee experiences vary widely in nature and severity, all have experienced massive disruption to their lives, including multiple personal losses that are outside the experience of most young Australians. Many, if not all young refugees have been affected in some way. Some have been child soldiers, some have witnessed or experienced torture and trauma, some have received very little or no formal education, many have lost or become separated from their usual sources of support, including family, friends and familiar networks and some have spent years in refugee camps.

Young refugees and their families generally arrive in Australia with limited money and few possessions, with poor English language skills and with little understanding of Western culture and systems. It is widely recognised that these pre and post migration experiences place young refugees at increased risk of a range of social, behavioural and mental health problems.

Acculturation stress

Adjusting to life in a new country can be very difficult for any migrant but it can be particularly difficult for refugees who have been subjected to forced migration. Young refugees in the initial stages of resettlement have to contend with many difficult issues including learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture and systems, coping with pre and post migration experiences of loss, trauma and disruption, making new friends and for many, helping parents or caregivers cope with the resettlement process.

Previous trauma experiences, difficulties negotiating bi-cultural membership, lack of family, peer and community support and broader social issues such as racism and discrimination can exacerbate acculturation stress and lead to feelings of isolation and alienation.

Poverty and economic hardship

Despite Australia's relative affluence, refugee families often have to endure poverty, unemployment or employment in low-status and low-income occupations, substandard accommodation, overcrowding and poor nutrition. Their former education, training, qualifications and work experience may not be enough to help them re-establish themselves because these are often unrecognised in Australia. Many parents decide not to go through the lengthy process of having their former qualifications recognised, believing that it is "too late" for them and instead transferring their hopes and expectations on to their children. The family's low socioeconomic status and attendant distress over all that has been lost can adversely affect the emotional wellbeing of young refugees. Many lack the basic resources necessary to

participate in school and community life, particularly if they are providing financial support to family members who have been left behind in the home country.

Racism and discrimination

Many young refugees, particularly those from visible minority groups, routinely experience individual and institutional racism in Australia. Both forms of racism can seriously affect a young person's wellbeing, not only impacting on mental health but also employment outcomes and community participation and involvement.

At the individual level, it is common for young refugees to be insulted, harassed or otherwise mistreated by peers, teachers, employers, shop owners, police officers and even the general public. At the institutional level, many refugees experience racism in the education, employment, housing, legal and welfare systems.

Given that institutional racism is firmly rooted in every social institution, including the mental health system, it is highly likely that young refugees will encounter it in their interaction with services. They will experience it, for example, if services do not educate themselves about refugee histories and cultural practices, if they do not invest the (additional) time necessary to establish rapport, if they fail to provide interpreters and translated information and if they neglect to address refugee needs in a holistic way. Institutional racism can create a barrier to services or, when services are accessed, it can result in poor service outcomes.

Loss of parents

Some young refugees arrive in South Australia without their parents and are placed under the Guardianship of the Minister for Families and Communities. These young people may have lost their parents through death, disappearance or separation following social and political upheaval and insecurity in their countries of origin. Some children are placed in the care of older siblings, uncles, aunts, grandparents or other distant relatives while others are fostered by members of their ethnic community. The loss or absence of one or both parents can give rise to or exacerbate existing social, behavioural, and mental health problems, particularly in younger children and those exposed to abuse or neglect in their new family.

Limited parental support

Many parents and caregivers are themselves suffering from mental health problems as a result of their refugee and resettlement experiences. This can lead to substance abuse, gambling and other problems. It can also result in child abuse and neglect and a general lack of affection and support for children.

Young refugees often have family responsibilities which can affect many aspects of their lives including education, work, and developing social networks. These responsibilities may include undertaking significant household duties, caring for siblings and other family members and providing support to parents struggling with pre and/or post migration experiences of loss and trauma. Young people may even be expected to leave school to support the family.

As young people generally adapt to Western culture and pick up the English language faster than their parents and caregivers, they may also be expected to help them with the settlement process, including orienting them to Western culture and systems, escorting them to medical and other appointments and providing translating and interpreting assistance.

Family responsibilities can prevent or limit a young person's ability to access peer and community support networks. They can also result in family conflict, with young people resenting the impact the added responsibility has on their education, work and social life, and parents/caregivers feeling disempowered by what they perceive as a reversal in roles.

While young people in the general population can turn to their parents for help with their education and other school-based issues, refugees cannot expect similar support. Most refugee parents and caregivers are unable to assist with homework and exams, or advocate for their children at school or in other areas of their lives, due to limited English language skills and/or lack of knowledge about Australian culture and systems.

Intergenerational conflict

Intergenerational conflict is a problem for many refugee families, particularly where there is disagreement over a young person's rate and level of acculturation to Australian society. This conflict sometimes results in family breakdown and youth homelessness or, where the family remains in tact, abuse or neglect of the child or young person.

Identity issues

The forming and shaping of cultural identity is linked to general adolescent development. All young people face pressures and challenges associated with adolescence but young refugees have the added pressure of coping with loss and trauma, adjusting to a new country, culture and language, finding new friends and, for many, coping with racism and discrimination.

According to Western thinking, creating and maintaining a strong sense of self and identity, including cultural identity, is critical to a young person's development. For many young refugees, however, there can be conflict surrounding cultural identity because they must reconcile two or more very different cultures. Some try to resolve this difficulty by identifying with Western culture, which can result in family conflict. Others respond by identifying with their culture of origin, which can expose them to increased racism and discrimination, especially if they belong to a visible minority group. For those unable to find a sense of belonging or "fit" to any culture, there may be considerable stress and alienation.

Young people who are able to find a balance between their own culture and that of their new country are better equipped to handle difficulties and challenges and make use of available opportunities. Yet there are very few support services available for young refugees struggling with cultural identity issues.

Lack of access to community services, resources and support

Most young refugees do not have equitable access to community services, resources and support due to a range of language and cultural barriers and an overall failure of the social service system to respond to the needs of a culturally diverse society.

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MODULE THREE

YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS AND NEEDS: RESEARCH WITH REFUGEE YOUTH AT RISK

This module details the findings of research undertaken by MYSA with refugee youth at risk in order to guide service responses and strategies. The research targeted young African males who had been involved in problem behaviour or who were at high risk of becoming involved in problem behaviour. Key issues included peer-on-peer violence, poor police-youth relations, truancy, early school drop-out, drug and alcohol misuse and a general lack of life skills. Many of the young people had become separated from their former sources of support including family and community networks. Many had also rejected authority figures and systems of authority, including those within their own community.

Participants

A mixed-methods approach, involving questionnaires and focus groups, was used in the research. In total 67 African males aged between 12 and 28 years from Sudan, Liberia, Congo, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Nigeria, and Burundi completed the questionnaires and of these, a subset of 21 participated in one of three follow-up focus group discussions. In addition to having refugee status, with all the loss, trauma and disruption this entails, a young person was considered to be "at risk" if he met three or more of the following criteria:

- Of school age but not attending school and not employed
- Persistent truancy
- Suspended or expelled from school in the past 12 months
- Using illicit drugs on a regular basis
- "Binge" drinking on a regular basis
- Engaging in physical altercations
- Suffering from a mental health issue
- Disengaged from broader ethnic community
- Under the age of 18 years and experiencing family breakdown
- Homeless
- Under the age of 18 years and regularly staying in the city after 9pm
- Problems with authority (e.g., parents/caregivers, teachers, police)
- Involved in gang or criminal activity
- Living under the Guardianship of the Minister
- Experiencing severe economic hardship

Given that it was possible for a young person to meet three of the above criteria and still be coping well overall, the criteria was used as a general guideline only. The interviewers, all trained social workers, were given the discretion to determine if a young person was at-risk and therefore eligible to participate in the research.

Questionnaire results

Demographic and background information

Most of the young people came from Sudan (69.2%), followed by Liberia (10.8%), Congo (6.2%), Ethiopia (6.2%), and other African backgrounds (7.7%) including Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Nigeria and Burundi. Most young people (87.8%) identified as Christian, followed by Muslim (9.2%). The average length of time in Australia at the date of interview was just over four years. Just over half (53.8%) of the young people arrived in Australia with their parents, followed by those who were accompanied by siblings (20%), uncles, aunties or grandparents (13.8%), cousins (4.6%), friends (1.5%) or alone (1.5%).

Just under a third of young people (30.8%) were not living with a caregiver at the time of interview, 24% were living with their biological mother alone, 18% were living with two biological parents, 1.5% were living with their biological mother and stepfather, 1.5% were living with their biological father and stepmother, and 1.5% were living with their stepfather alone. Just over 20% of young people were living with other caregivers such as siblings, cousins, aunties, uncles or grandparents. Of the one third not living with a caregiver, 50% were living with a flatmate, 35% were living alone, and 15% were homeless.

With respect to current educational or employment status, 72% of young people were attending high school, 9% were attending university, 9% were unemployed, 6% were employed, and 3% were attending TAFE.

Pre-migration experiences of loss and trauma

Ninety percent of the young people reported that they had experienced at least one traumatic event before coming to Australia, with the mean number of experiences being six (SD=5.22). The trauma events, with the percentage of young people who experienced them, are detailed in figure 1.

Figure 1 **Trauma event**

47%	Witnessing someone being badly injured or killed
43%	Being close to death
42%	Threatening events happening to someone close to you
40%	Lack of food or water
38%	Unnatural death of family member or friend
36%	Other extremely stressful events
34%	Being threatened with a weapon, held captive or kidnapped
32%	Ill health without access to medical care
32%	Being physically attacked or assaulted
30%	Combat situation
28%	Fire, flood or other natural disaster

28%	Sustaining a serious injury
28%	Lack of shelter
26%	Forced separation from family members
23%	Murder of family or friends
23%	Life threatening accident
19%	Murder of strangers or stranger
13%	Brain washing or re-education
11%	Forced isolation
9%	Imprisonment
8%	Being tortured or the victim of terrorists
6%	Witnessing rape or sexual abuse
4%	Sexually Assaulted

Resettlement problems and needs

As detailed in figure 2 below, young people reported a range of resettlement problems and needs in a number of areas. All young people reported difficulty in one or more of these areas, with 81% reporting difficulty in two or more areas. Only one young person reported no difficulty in any of these areas.

Figure 2 **Resettlement issues**

66%	Missing family and friends left behind in another country
60%	Racism and discrimination
57%	Difficulties finding work
29%	Homesickness
28%	Difficulties finding suitable accommodation
24%	Culture shock
21%	Difficulties understanding Australian culture and systems
20%	English language difficulties
14%	Difficulties finding acceptance among peers
11%	Difficulties adjusting to the Australian education system
9%	Conflict with parents/caregivers
8%	Lack of friends

An additional 11% of young people reported difficulties in other areas including socialising with people in the general Australian population and mental health issues.

Social, emotional and mental wellbeing

- Using the 5-Item Mental Health Index (MHI), 26% of young people were found to be psychologically distressed with the possibility of suffering one or more psychiatric disorders.

- Using the Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire-Revised, young people were asked to rate their self-disclosure and conflict resolution skills on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Poor at this", 2 being "Fair at this", 3 being "O.K. at this", 4 being "Good at this" and 5 being "Extremely good at this". The scores were then averaged across items to generate a scale score.

  - For the self-disclosure scale, young people as a group on average ranged from O.K. to Good at disclosing personal thoughts and emotions.

  - For the conflict resolution scale, young people as a group on average ranged from "O.K" to "Good" in their ability in resolving conflict.

Using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), young people were asked to rate their problems on five scales including the Emotional Symptoms Scale, the Conduct Problem Scale, the Hyperactivity Scale, the Peer Problems Scale, and the Prosocial Scale. The first four scales are totalled to give a Total Difficulties Score. Scores in the borderline or abnormal range predict with varying accuracy the probability for mental health problems.

- For the Emotional Symptoms Scale, 9% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 7.7% scored in the borderline range.

- For the Conduct Problem Scale, 7.7% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 7.7% scored in the borderline range.

- For the Hyperactivity Scale, 4.6% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 6.2% scored in the borderline range.

- For the Peer Problems Scale, 4.6% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 21.5% scored in the borderline range.

- For the Prosocial Scale, 1.5% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 4.6% scored in the borderline range.

- For the total difficulties score, 3.1% of young people scored in the abnormal range and 15.4% scored in the borderline range.

Thus, for the most part, the young people scored favourably on the SDQ, with proportions in the borderline and abnormal ranges falling below the average in mainstream communities (with the exception for elevated numbers in the borderline range for Peer Problems and Total Difficulties).

For further information on the research instruments used, please refer to the research executive summary available from Multicultural Youth SA, www.mysa.com.au

Focus group results

The young people who participated in the focus groups agreed with the results of the questionnaires that many African young people living in Adelaide were feeling unhappy, angry, stressed or anxious. Asked why they thought this was the case, young people highlighted racism, family loss and separation, education-based difficulties, and poor youth-police relations.

Issues affecting emotional and psychological wellbeing

Racism

Racism was identified as a major contributor to psychological and behavioural problems among African youth. Young people reported that there is scarcely a place where they can go without experiencing racism.

While the young people explained that racism "came from everyone", including peers, teachers, employers, and members of the general public, they appeared to be the most distressed about the racism they experienced from authority figures, in particular the police.

> Some of them, you walk in the street, they call you, "Black monkey."
>
> There is racism in the school - bad. A lot of Africans are being chased away.
>
> I take resume (of an African friend to an employer) and it's put in bin. It's not good … my (other) friend, (who is) white ... I take form and I give and it's filed. And I give (it to the) manager, and the manager (says), "Ah it's good."
>
> You guys don't know like the bad things police say to us … they say like bad things that make us feel bad like we're not accepted in this country … They will come and be like, "Look you guys, we don't want you guys in this country." They even said that before like, "We don't want you guys in this country."
>
> He (police officer) told us like, "The crime that you are doing is a lot (worse) than what Australian does."
>
> He (police officer) said like, "You're such a disgrace to this country".

Family loss and separation

Family loss and/or separation was identified as another major source of unhappiness and was described as being characteristic of the African refugee experience generally.

The young people' distress over family separation was in many cases compounded by the fears they held for their safety and wellbeing, particularly if family members were living in refugee camps.

The young people explained that family separation can mean being alone and having no one to turn to in times of difficulty, having no role models to provide examples of positive behaviour, and having no incentive to build a positive future.

> Some African guys have experienced a lot in their lifetime so you can (see) somebody is sad all the time.
>
> He always miss … his country.

Young people further explained that family separation can mean experiencing severe economic hardship, particularly where there is pressure to share already meagre welfare payments with family members living overseas. This sometimes means going without food and other basic necessities. Family separation can also make it difficult to put the past behind them.

Education-based difficulties

Education-based difficulties were identified as another important source of unhappiness and stress, not only for the young people themselves, but also for most other young Africans. It was explained that many young Africans struggle to adjust to Australia's education system as a result of language and cultural barriers, lack of previous schooling, and interruptions to schooling.

Educational difficulties were reported to be exacerbated by a general lack of support at home and at school. Unlike children in the general population who can turn to their parents for homework and other educational support, many African students have no support, either because they have no caregivers or because their caregivers have their own difficulties with English, literacy and numeracy.

Support at school is also lacking. Young people believed that teachers did not have any understanding of the difficulties they were facing and did not provide the additional assistance needed for them to succeed at school.

Young people further suggested that teachers held very low expectations for them, forcing them to choose "easy" subjects that would equip them for apprenticeships and TAFE courses rather than university.

Difficulty at school was cited as the main reason for misbehaviour, truancy, and early school drop out.

Many of the young people said that the experience of repeatedly failing, coupled with low teacher expectation and a general lack of support, made some African youth give up all together.

Another reason cited for early school drop out was racism. It was explained that anger, sadness and hopelessness associated with persistent peer racism led some young Africans to leave school prematurely. The perpetrators of racism were said to be rarely disciplined or held accountable.

Some young people reported that they actively resisted racism, sometimes with violence, and this resulted in their suspension from school while the perpetrators evaded punishment. Another reason cited for why some young Africans leave school early is to find employment so they can support their parents and other family members who are living in the home country.

Poor police-youth relations

Poor relations with the police was identified as a major contributing factor to unhappiness, frustration, and problem behaviour among African youth. Of all the issues discussed in the focus groups, none evoked more emotion than this. Young people reported being subject to disproportionate police attention and interference in public places, for example, being frequently stopped, questioned, asked to produce personal identification (ID), moved on, or arrested simply because they were street present.

However, it was evident that some young people did not fully understand police powers and rights, for example, they did not realise that it was legal for the police to ask for identification; they simply saw it as an abuse of police power. When police rights and powers were explained to them, however, it did not soften their attitude – they remained convinced that the police were targeting them for no other reason than they were African.

Young people reported that their preference for gathering in medium to large groups (four or more people) was seen by the police as concerning or threatening in itself, and sometimes led to arrest, particularly if group members argued with the police about being dispersed. The young people did not understand why African groups were being dispersed and they claimed that the police refused to explain their reasoning. This often led to frustration and anger, which in turn led to more arrests. Some young people even claimed that the police tried to provoke them into reacting aggressively so they could arrest them.

Young people reported that the police were frequently racist toward them and that they treated all Africans the same regardless of whether they were involved in problem behaviour.

A particular source of frustration concerns the way police refuse to listen or answer questions when engaging with African youth. Police were described as overbearing, authoritarian, and dismissive.

Many young people claimed that the police were intentionally oppressive, even suggesting they gave them criminal records to ruin their employment prospects and future life chances. So deep was this suspicion that some were afraid to give the police their personal details, as these could be used to charge them for crimes they did not commit.

Asked whether they had considered reporting inappropriate police behaviour, young people claimed that police officers often concealed their badge numbers. As one young person stated, "Nowadays man, they cover it up." Others did not think to take note of badge numbers.

One young person reported that when his friend attempted to record an incident of police brutality on his mobile phone, his phone was taken and smashed.

Some young people believed that even if they made a complaint, there would be no consequences.

Coping strategies

When asked what they did to cope with feelings of unhappiness and stress, young people reported a variety of coping strategies. At the top of their list were drinking, marijuana use, and smoking. Another coping strategy cited by many young people was talking problems through with friends. Some young people also reported that some African youth concentrated on their study or work as a way of taking their mind off their problems.

> They start telling you, "Hey, you have to move from here" … I don't know for what good reasons, they just don't want you to be there, they want you to break down and stuff… which is really, really – it pisses us off really, a lot.

> There are a lot of other white folks who be probably standing over there talking and making lots of noise and stuff but then they don't tell them anything.

> If you walk like they'll be like, "Oh, you've been drinking tonight mate?" You're like, "Yeah, I've had a couple, I'll be alright". Then they lock you up.

> They come up to you and (say), "What's your name man?" You get questioned but when you say, "Why? Why do you need my name?", then, from there (they) arrest you. "You say one more word, you get arrested.'"

> They say, "If you don't give your proof of age or ID, we will take you to police office".

> (The police say), "Now give me your identification. Otherwise, I'll take you to police station." Then you'll be like, "Look, you can't just take my identification for no reason." And then they'll be like, "Look, you can't tell me how to do my job".

> Your only choice to do is go hang out with friends and talk with them because if you come back home, (there's) no one to talk to, nothing. You feel like hanging yourself or doing some crazy stuff.

> Most African kids that have issues, they work, and they go to school like they study real hard … (they) try to do something with their life and future so they can try to bring their families here but it never works.

Peer-on-peer violence

The young people who participated in the focus groups agreed with the results of the questionnaires that many African youth were getting involved in physical fights with their peers. Fights were said to generally occur with mainstream Australians, Asians and other Africans, although most fights were with mainstream Australians. As one young person stated, "Australians have got something against us for some reason." Some young people suggested that fights between Africans only occurred when alcohol was involved.

Bullying and harassment were cited as the two main reasons for peer-on-peer interracial violence, with many young people suggesting this was often racially motivated.
Young people explained that if they did not fight, they would appear weak, which would attract more bullying and harassment in the future. Fighting was also seen as necessary to command respect among peers, and to maintain a tough, masculine image.

Some young people further explained that many young Africans get involved in fights to defend their friends and family. On the other hand, knowing that friends and family would protect them made some young people more willing to enter into fights. Some thought that alcohol was also a contributing factor and that, once intoxicated, young people became more aggressive and more willing to fight. As one young person stated, "It's just usually a little bit of vodka and people lose their minds".

Drug and alcohol use

The young people agreed with the questionnaire results that some young Africans were abusing alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other illicit drugs, although they were keen to explain that this only started once they came to Australia because alcohol and drugs are more accessible and culturally acceptable here than in Africa.

Asked why African youth abuse alcohol and drugs, many young people highlighted unhappiness, anxiety and stress. It was also explained that some African youth use alcohol and drugs recreationally, as a means of relaxation and enjoyment rather than as a coping mechanism. As one young person stated, "I party because I just like to party."

Here in Australia, you come here – you can drink free and you can smoke but back in Africa, if police saw you drinking or smoking, you go to jail. And you have to pay the money (fine).

Most of those kids, like most those teenagers in my year… a lot of people like they do drugs…They drink, they do drugs. They're so surprised I don't drink. I've been to a hundred parties where everybody drinks, everybody gets high – chicks, everyone. And it's not my culture.

Yeah it's like the culture. But that's sort of like starting to fade away, like it's not that drinking is wrong but we all have like different values and stuff.

Most of us come from a family where your parents don't drink. You don't have a brother that drink, you don't have a friend that drink. So like you feel like, "Why should I be the one who's drinking? Why should I have to do this? It's not my culture, it's not in my blood." But when you can't handle the pressure, that's when you fall into it. And it's not they do just cause they want to do it. It's just like, most times, some of them just can't handle that pressure.

I give up and start hanging on the street. So that's the intention because I don't have a job and shit so you know, start smoking up. Start drinking up every day on the street.

I didn't have no family, maybe I was stressed and I say like, "fuck everything" I was doing.

Unlawful and "gang" activity

Young people reported that many young Africans were being arrested by the police but they believed that police harassment was the main reason behind most arrests, although they admitted that some arrests were legitimate. In most cases such arrests were related to traffic offences such as running red lights, speeding, and driving while intoxicated.

With respect to gang behaviour, the young people reported that many young African men belonged to same-culture groups, but they would not call these "gangs" in the negative sense of the term. Young people explained that there is a strongly developed sense of community among group members; groups provide friendship, support, belonging, and identity. Groups were also described as providing protection in a hostile host country environment. Those who belong to such groups have status and respect; other young people know not to "mess" with them. If a group member is harassed or beaten up, retaliation in the form of violence inevitably follows. Retaliation is necessary for the group's status and reputation; if there is no retaliation, the whole group would be seen as "weak", and would be vulnerable to ongoing harassment and violence.

Summary

The questionnaire results reveal that young African males are experiencing a range of difficulties that may increase their risk of social, behavioural and mental health problems including pre-migration experiences of loss and trauma, loss of or separation from parents and other close family members, the breakdown of traditional family and community structures, cultural transition and resettlement difficulties, educational and employment difficulties, high conflict with peers, emotional and behavioural problems, mental health problems, risky peer group choices, and underutilisation of community services.

The qualitative results from the focus group discussions reveal that the reasons for problem behaviour are numerous, varied and interconnected. Resettlement stress was a major contributing factor. The process of cultural transition and resettlement can be extremely difficult for young people, particularly when they have lost of become separated from their parents and other close family members. Additional challenges arise when they are also disconnected from their own communities, when they feel victimised by the police, when they face racism from the general Australian community, and when they lack appropriate support.

Every Thursday night like we have fun, we go to movies in West Lakes and we go and have fun talking and chatting and stuff like that one because we understand each other.

It's not like they're going to go take over the hood and stuff like that. It's just basic - guys trying to fit in I guess.

I think there's also a place of belonging when you're with your friends - African friends I mean … I feel way better hanging out with my African friends because then I feel at home. And I can trust them.

When they form a gang, they know that if they fight, like they'll be fighting with other people with them so they won't be fighting by themself. So they form a gang to (get) protection.

It's a gang and you're supposed to show your power or else every other gang is going to keep on coming to you and taking advantage of the fact that you guys are weak. Every time somebody gets beat up, you just keep quiet. And so you have to react. If somebody reacts, you have to react. That's the way it is.

The people that are depressed, they try to work it out so they can change their life.

Many of the young people felt alone, out of place in Australian culture, unwelcomed by the broader Australian community, and despairing of any real future in Australia. On top of having to cope with pre-migration experiences of loss and trauma, they were trying to find their way in an often unsupportive and hostile host country environment. Moreover, many had to cope alone, without parents and other role models to support and guide them in positive directions. As a result, some drew solace from alcohol, illicit drugs, and joining groups of other disaffected African youth.

Modules 4 and 6 provide practical tips and pointers for service providers seeking to engage refugee youth at risk.

Where can I find more information?

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MODULE FOUR
ENGAGING REFUGEE YOUTH AT RISK

Service providers have a very important role to play as resources to support and protect refugee youth at risk. However, the results of two studies undertaken by MYSA indicate that many are not accessing services relative to their need. Lack of knowledge about services was the most frequently reported barrier. It was also evident in the responses of many young people that they did not know what a community service was. For example, some identified public toilets, buses and churches as services.

Of the few services available to youth at risk, many are not culturally and linguistically accessible and/or are not youth friendly. Previous research undertaken by MYSA with mainstream agencies has found that many service providers see it as the responsibility of multicultural agencies to meet the service needs of refugee and migrant youth. Important as they are, multicultural agencies are just one part of the community services network and can only assist a small portion of the refugee and migrant youth population.

The purpose of this module is to provide service providers with information and practical strategies for effectively engaging refugee youth at risk on an individual basis. For tips and pointers on program development, see Module 6.

Building the relationship
Establishing and maintaining a trusting relationship is at the core of effective practice with youth at risk. The following sections draw on MYSA's research and direct service delivery experience to provide practical tips and pointers to facilitate the development of an effective working relationship.

Showing you care
The most important message you can give a young person at risk is "I care about you." MYSA's research with refugee youth at risk has found that many lack supportive adults and positive role models who believe in them and are willing to invest in them. Many young people believe that no one cares about them. Workers can express their care for young people by spending time with them and listening to them; showing a genuine interest in their lives; maintaining regular contact with them; believing in and persevering with them, even when they are exhibiting challenging behaviours; being reliable and dependable; admitting when they have made a mistake or do not have the answers; maintaining a non-judgemental attitude; and demonstrating empathy, honesty and humility.

Keeping your word
It is very important to be clear about what you can and cannot provide and avoid making promises unless you are certain you can keep them. Broken promises, no matter how well intended, cause frustration and disappointment and can ultimately result in a breakdown in trust.

Confidentiality
While confidentiality is enormously important to most young people, it is particularly important to youth at risk. Many are so concerned about breaches of confidentiality that they refuse to access any services, including those that have been expressly established for them. It is therefore very important to carefully explain the limits of confidentiality to young people, not only during the initial engagement process but throughout the entire intervention process.

It should also be noted that most youth at risk will not access a service if it is offered by a same-culture worker who is potentially known to their families and broader communities due to concerns about breaches of confidentiality. Therefore if such workers are to be used, it is the agency's responsibility to ensure they fully understand and adhere to confidentiality requirements and young people should always have access to another worker if they wish. It cannot be over-emphasised that any breach of confidentiality would be enormously damaging to a young person's trust in a service.

Working from the young person's perspective

While workers and young people often have different views about what the focus of intervention should be, the focus should be on how young people see their situation, what they see to be their needs, and what they want to see change. Most youth at risk will not want to sit around talking about their issues; they will want their worker to provide practical support and concrete outcomes, not only because they have pressing needs, but because this indicates they are being cared about and taken seriously.

Self-disclosure

While social workers and youth workers have traditionally been taught that self-disclosure is generally not appropriate in a professional context, it can be an important prerequisite for establishing an effective working relationship with at risk youth. Self-disclosure can increase the credibility of the worker and contribute to an atmosphere of trust, and this trust can in turn lead to other positive outcomes for young people, for example, they may realise they are not alone; they may open up more than they would otherwise; they may continue receiving services; and they may come to see the worker as a positive role model. However, workers need to be cautious in terms of the circumstances under which they disclose and the amount they disclose. The relationship should not become a friendship. Workers should have one purpose in mind – to help the young person, not satisfy any needs or goals of their own.

Managing challenging behaviour

Youth at risk can exhibit attitudes and behaviours that are challenging, offensive, worrying and potentially harmful to both themselves and others. Expect young people to exhibit one or more of the following behaviours:

- Anger
- Aggressive questioning of the worker and his/her intentions
- Telling lies and half-truths, leaving information out, exaggerating
- Being disrespectful (talking back, rolling eyes, mocking the worker in own language)
- Loud, boisterous behaviour, with no consideration for those around them
- Withdrawn behaviour (refusing to engage or communicate)
- Refusing to listen
- Standing over and/or swearing at the worker
- Not attending appointments, attending late, intoxicated, or under the influence of drugs
- Stealing from the agency

The following tips and pointers for managing challenging behaviour are based on a strengths-based approach to practice. Strengths-based approaches rest on the assumption that even youth with the most difficult issues and problems have inherent strengths, resources, capacities, and resiliencies that can be utilised to help them grow, develop, and take control of their lives.

- Establish clear boundaries. Make rules for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour but do not make too many rules and ensure the ones you do make are consistently enforced. There should be consequences for unacceptable behaviour and these should be explained to the young people ahead of time. Consequences need to be expected, immediate and consistent with the behaviour.

- Understand that the behaviour of young people is not the sum of who they are; they have skills, knowledge, strengths, talents and achievements which can be harnessed to support them to identify their own solutions to problems.

- Be aware that the behaviour of young people is generally linked to broader environmental issues which are outside of their control, for example, the refugee experience, difficulties at school or at home, and feelings of isolation and exclusion. This is not to suggest that unacceptable behaviour should be overlooked or excused, but simply to acknowledge the need for understanding and empathy.

- Be attentive and listen to the young people – they want to be heard. Even if you disagree with them and their assessment of what is causing his behaviour, listen to them. Feeling unheard is a key source of much frustration and can cause young people to behave in ways that place them at further risk.

- Look for opportunities to build the young people up - tell them what is good about them, focus on their strengths and capacities.

- When faced with an angry young person, keep in mind that the heat of the moment and their emotions can make it very difficult for them to hear what you have to say, regardless of how important it is. It is therefore important to consider the most appropriate time to share your concerns - you may need to wait for another time when they are more open.

- Encourage the young people to share their interests, goals and aspirations and provide concrete and tangible opportunities for them to pursue them.

- Assist the young people to make links and connections in their areas of interest so they can find a sense of belonging and fit with the wider community.

- For serious and persistent anger management or behavioural problems, consider seeking advice from a mental health professional as behavioural problems often mask mental health issues.

- Recognise that extra time, commitment and patience is required to work effectively with at risk youth and that you will need to arrange opportunities to debrief with your supervisor or manager.

Becoming culturally competent

Increasing the access of refugee youth at risk to mainstream services requires a strong commitment on the part of workers and their agencies to make the necessary changes and adjustments to fully accommodate youth access. Very few service providers consider culture in their service planning, delivery and evaluation, and very few participate in regular cross-cultural training. Low cultural competence not only restricts young people's access to services, but it can seriously affect the quality of service they do receive. For a general guide to improving agency and worker cultural competency, see Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Working with Young Migrants and Refugees (MYSA, 2006).

Where can I find more information?

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MODULE FIVE

ENGAGING THE PARENTS/CAREGIVERS OF REFUGEE YOUTH AT RISK

Why is family important?

Despite the fact that family-related factors are often directly or indirectly implicated in the problems affecting at risk youth, parents and caregivers are of central importance to their lives. Young people rely heavily on them for guidance and support. Furthermore, the protective influence of a supportive family has been found to prevent the onset or mitigate the effects of a range of social, behavioural and mental health problems in refugee youth by providing a buffering effect before, during, and after stressful events.

A note on family structure

Many young refugees come from broken families, or from intact families with disrupted family structures, resulting in a lack of adequate parental support and supervision. Young people may be living with older siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, distant relatives, or other adults they have no close relationships with. Most also come from small and emerging communities with disrupted community structures. In some communities, for example the Sudanese community, the majority of the population is under the age of 28 years. Many young people have no significant adult figures to guide and support them.

When is it appropriate to involve parents/caregivers in youth work?

Youth work has long been criticised for working with young people in isolation from their parents and broader family networks. The exclusion of family may in part be due to a perceived lack of capacity and/or willingness on the part of youth services to effectively engage parents and caregivers.

The worker should consider involving parents/caregivers in youth work when the young person specifically requests it or when the young person needs it. A young person may need it when they are under the aged of 18 years and facing an issue that could have a far-reaching effect on their life and future. Some examples include:

- If they're at risk of suicide, self-harm, or some other harm – whether it be psychological, physical or sexual.
- If they are at risk of harming others.
- If they are facing a serious legal issue where the police and/or courts will be involved.
- If they are aged 15 years or under and is about to make an ill-informed major life decision such as leaving the state.

The worker will need to use their professional judgement in consultation with the young person and cultural liason worker to determine whether the situation warrants the involvement of parents/caregivers. However, as a general rule, the younger the client, the greater the potential need for parental/caregiver involvement. If, however, the parent-child relationship is such that parental/caregiver involvement may place the young person at risk, the worker should seek advice from their supervisor and/or cultural liason worker.

It needs to be recognised that many young people will not want their parents/caregivers involved regardless of the seriousness of the situation. Parents/caregivers may also be reluctant to engage.

The following sections detail why this may be the case and provide suggestions for addressing reluctance and effectively engaging both young people and their parents/caregivers.

What contributes to youth reluctance?

- Many young people seek out and/or accept youth work services precisely because they are youth-specific. They want a space of their own, a space that is free of parents/caregivers and other adults. Many would not accept a service if they knew their parents/caregivers had to be involved.
- Young people are in general highly sensitive to the values, beliefs, and ideals of their parents/caregivers and feel sure they can predict how they will react in any given situation.
- Many suspect they will not get the reaction or support they need from parents/caregivers.
- Young people and parents/caregivers may disagree about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it.
- Young people may fear that the worker will share too much information with parents/caregivers, information they believe should be kept private.
- Young people may not understand why parents/caregivers need to be involved and may be afraid of losing power and control.
- Where family conflict or tension is present, young people may fear that the worker will side with parents/caregivers against them.

Addressing youth reluctance

- If the worker judges that parental/caregiver involvement is warranted, they should first discuss this with the young person to ensure things happen on the young person's terms and in the least confrontational way possible. Ensure the young person is well prepared for their parent/caregiver's involvement and that they receive the support they need throughout the entire process.
- Reassure the young person that you are primarily there for them – the focus is on them, not their parent/caregiver. This can be achieved by clearly defining your role and purpose and establishing the parameters in which the parent/caregiver will be engaged.
- Inform the young person that you will always work with their understanding of the problem and that you will not digress from this no matter what their parent/caregiver tells you. This will help create the conditions necessary to maintain trust and secure their agreement.
- Given that many young people fear there will be intended and unintended breaches of confidentiality, particularly in relation to personal, sensitive or culturally taboo issues, it is important to consult with them about exactly what will be disclosed to parents/caregivers, and to provide constant reassurance about confidentiality.
- If the young person is still unwilling, this needs to be respected except where they pose a risk to themselves or others.

What contributes to parent/caregiver reluctance?

- Parents/caregivers may be concerned that the worker will introduce their child to ideas that conflict with their cultural values, beliefs and practices.
- Parents/caregivers may be concerned that their child's problems will be attributed to parental failure.
- Parents/caregivers may have concerns that the worker will undermine their parenting.
- Parents/caregivers may not believe they should provide the type of support expected in a Western cultural context. In some refugee communities, for example, parent-child relationships are characterised by less intimacy and more hierarchy than those of the West. Parents are often not encouraged or accustomed to providing a high level of emotional support to children because it would require an intimacy that could potentially disturb hierarchical structures and appropriate boundaries of interaction. In some communities, children do not engage in open and direct communication with parents about personal problems at all; children are instead expected to approach parents indirectly through an adult intermediary who is personally known to the family. In some communities, parents are only involved in serious practical or legal problems and major life decisions.
- Parents/caregivers may distrust government affiliated service providers due to past experiences with oppressive government regimes.

Addressing parent/caregiver reluctance

- Give careful consideration to how parents/caregivers may respond to the information in general and to the young person in particular. If parents/caregivers need support coming to terms with the issues facing their child, the worker should refer them to an appropriate service.
- Learn as much as possible about the parent/caregiver before trying to engage them. An awareness of their cultural background and current circumstances will give the worker appropriate background and contextual information necessary to establish some level of trust.
- With respect to culture, it is important to be culturally astute but not to treat parents/caregivers as a homogenous group. One size does not fit all - there are differences within and between cultural groups based on age, gender, religion, education, socioeconomic status and other factors including the extent to which the parent/caregiver has acculturated to Australian culture and where they are situated in the resettlement process.
- Consider recruiting known and trusted same-culture community members to help break down potential barriers. The emphasis here is on "known and trusted" - it cannot be assumed that parents/caregivers and/or young people will automatically accept same-culture community members just because they come from the same community. In fact, some parents/caregivers and/or young people will find it difficult to trust them because they are in a position to disclose confidential information to the rest of the community. It is important to consult parents/caregivers and young people about what is needed and wanted.
- Reassure parents/caregivers that you are there to help their child, not to undermine their parenting or cultural beliefs and practices.

- The above suggestions provide a general guide only. It needs to be acknowledged that various factors may make it impossible to effectively engage parents/caregivers, for example, parental mental health problems, substance abuse problems, and child protection issues. The worker should therefore be sensitive to the parent/caregiver's potential need for referral for their own issues.

How do I engage parents/caregivers?

General tips and pointers

- Given that some parents/caregivers may feel uncomfortable discussing their issues with someone of the same gender, it is important to ascertain beforehand whether they would prefer a male or female worker.

- Establish trust and rapport with parents/caregivers before attempting problem solving. Of central importance is meeting parents/caregivers on their terms, for example, being willing to engage in "small talk" for as many meetings as necessary to make them feel comfortable.

- If an interpreter is required, it is very important to consult parents/caregivers about their preferences as many interpreters will be known to the family and may not be trusted to keep information confidential. It is important to find out the parent/caregiver's exact language or dialect before engaging the services of an interpreter.

- Keep in mind that it may not be possible to find a trained interpreter for all dialects, particularly those of minority groups. Interpreters may only be able to interpret in the language/s they are fluent in so do not expect them to interpret in a similar language/s. If possible, brief the interpreter on the situation before the interview. You may need to ask for background information on the parent/caregiver's culture but keep in mind that an interpreter cannot speak for an entire cultural group because cultural norms differ within and between cultural groups.

- Be mindful that many refugee parents/caregivers are very relaxed about time, punctuality and keeping appointments so it is important to be flexible, for example, being willing to meet in homes, in the evenings, or on weekends. It is also advisable to allow more time than usual for appointments because they are likely to start late and go on for longer than planned.

- It is important to consider that due to unfamiliarity with mainstream Australian culture and systems, parents/caregivers will take longer than their Anglo-Australian counterparts to understand how your service works and what it can offer their children. Ensure you provide reading material that they can absorb at their own pace and, if possible, provide the material in their first languages. The material should be clear and easy to understand. Some parents/caregivers are illiterate in their first language so it is important to ensure information is also available in non-written form. Try not to overload parents/caregivers with too much information as most of it will be forgotten, especially if it pertains to issues that are not immediate concerns for them.

Tips and pointers for the first meeting

- Be mindful that parents/caregivers generally have the best interests of their children at heart, even if you disagree with their approach to parenting. Hold what young people say about their parents/caregivers in tension as there is always two sides to every story.
- It may be advisable to meet with the parent/caregiver alone for the first meeting or so to create a less threatening atmosphere for both the parent/caregiver and the young person. Seek advice from the young person about the best approach.
- Begin by introducing yourself to parents/caregivers. Inform them of their right to confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. Be welcoming and friendly but avoid the use of humour because it may be difficult to understand cross-culturally.
- Build rapport by displaying empathy, honesty, humility, a non-judgemental attitude, and good listening skills. Parents/caregivers will generally forgive cultural faux pas providing the worker is humble and sincere.
- Avoid jargon, use simple language, focus on one point at a time and pause frequently to give parents/caregivers time to understand your message.
- Ensure parents/caregivers clearly understand what is being said by occasionally asking them questions. Also allow room for them to ask questions. Keep an eye on their non-verbal communication to obtain an overall sense of how the interview is progressing. If the parent/caregiver appears relaxed, the session is probably going well.
- It is very important to be clear about what you can and cannot provide and avoid making promises unless you are certain you can keep them. Broken promises, no matter how well intended, cause frustration and disappointment and can ultimately result in a breakdown in trust.
- Only provide as much information about the young person's issue as is absolutely necessary – respect their right to confidentiality while also being sensitive to parental concerns.
- When the meeting has concluded, encourage parents/caregivers to provide feedback, including their perceptions of how it went and any concerns they may have.

Providing support to parents/caregivers

Parents/caregivers often struggle with their own issues and may expect the worker to assist them with a wide range of practical problems, for example, health, housing, employment, financial or immigration/citizenship issues. If this occurs, you should ensure that parents/caregivers receive the information and resources they need but you should not attempt to fulfill a dual role given the risk of undermining the young person's trust.

If the parent/caregiver needs to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide more consistent or supportive parenting, you should refer them to service that provides parenting and/or family focused interventions.

Where can I find more information?

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MODULE SIX

DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR REFUGEE YOUTH AT RISK

Young refugees who are the most at risk of social disengagement and exclusion are generally the least likely to access community services, resources and support. This module draws on MYSA's research and service delivery experience to provide practical strategies for developing programs for refugee youth at risk. The following tips and pointers provide a general guide only. Youth at risk are not a homogenous group. They come from a range of different backgrounds and circumstances and will vary in their willingness and capacity to engage with services.

What to expect

Challenging behaviour comes with the territory when working with youth at risk. Expect young people to exhibit one or more of the following behaviours:

- Anger
- Aggressive questioning of the worker and his/her intentions
- Telling lies and half-truths, leaving information out, exaggerating
- Being disrespectful (talking back, rolling eyes, mocking the worker in own language)
- Loud, boisterous behaviour, with no consideration for those around them
- Withdrawn behaviour (refusing to engage or communicate)
- Refusing to listen
- Standing over and/or swearing at the worker
- Not attending appointments at all, or attending late, intoxicated, or under the influence of other drugs
- Stealing from the agency
- Inappropriate self-disclosure in a group context (e.g., discussing sexual encounters and using names)

Be informed

It is very important to learn as much as possible about your target group of young people before trying to engage them. As noted in Module 2, the issues and needs of refugee youth at risk will vary according to whether they are living alone, with one or both parents, with older siblings, with extended family or with distant relatives; their age at the time of migration and their current age; their social support networks; their level of acculturation to Western society; and where they are situated in the resettlement process. For general background information on the issues affecting young refugees as a population group, see Module 2. For specific information on the issues affecting refugee youth at risk, see Module 3.

The best people to consult about the issues affecting youth at risk is the young people themselves – not service providers or community leaders and representatives. A wide range of methods can be used to consult with youth at risk, for example, focus groups, videos, debates, murals, collages, banners and photography. Some of these methods may not be appropriate for all youth at risk and others may need to be modified to accommodate a particular group's needs. Regardless of the method adopted, however, it is important to ensure young people have a say in the focus, method and processes of consultation. The consultation should be designed to elicit their views, experiences and preferences; it should not be about asking them to rubber-stamp an organisation's preconceived plans and ideas.

Engage in outreach

Trust needs to be established with youth at risk before they will access a service. This can only be achieved by engaging in planned, regular outreach - if young people will not go to services, then services must go to them. Keep in mind that these young people are generally living on the margins of the community and are not accessing information that is available to the broader refugee youth population.

Allow sufficient time

Given their complex and multifaceted needs, refugee youth at risk require more time than both their same-culture counterparts who are not at risk and the broader mainstream youth population. Working with one risk young person can be the same as working with two or three young people who are not at risk. This needs to be factored into a worker's caseload allocation. Workers will also need supervision, support and opportunities to debrief as working with youth at risk can be demanding and challenging.

Provide flexibility

Most young refugees are very relaxed about time, punctuality and keeping appointments so it is important to be flexible with service delivery, for example, providing a drop-in service. It is also important to allow more time than usual for appointments because they are likely to start late and go on for much longer than planned. Additionally, programs should be arranged for times when young people are likely to participate, that is, in the late afternoon, in the evenings and on weekends.

Promote your service

Most young refugees come from countries where there are no comparable services and therefore will not be familiar with most community services and what they can offer them. Moreover, even when they do access services, they will take longer than their Anglo-Australian peers to understand how they work due to unfamiliarity with mainstream Australian culture and systems. Youth at risk will be more difficult to reach than other young refugees so it is important to be creative and develop a promotions strategy that is specifically targeted towards their needs.

Provide skilled workers

It is vital to ensure that all workers and volunteers who will be working with youth at risk possess the skills, knowledge and personal attributes to effectively engage and develop rapport with them. An agency generally

- Consider developing a peer-to-peer outreach program using young people who have already overcome difficult life issues and are willing to be involved in outreach to other youth at risk.
- Form partnerships with schools with a high refugee student population as they will be able to identify young people with social, behavioural and mental health problems. A list of key schools is included below.
- Build connections and linkages with the Magill and Cavan Training Centres and the Family Conferencing Team as these agencies will be able to refer young people to your program. The contact details of these agencies are included below.
- Consult with the South Australian Police (SAPOL) about where youth at risk are hanging out and visit these locations regularly to promote your service. Ensure that what you offer directly interests or affects the lives of young people or they will be difficult to attract and engage. The contact details of relevant police are included below.
- Consider partnering with other agencies on programs that are already reaching at risk young people.

Keep in mind that even when youth at risk do access a service, it can take up to six months for them to develop sufficient trust to properly engage and make full use of it. It takes time and patience to get meaningful outcomes. It should also be noted that young people's mental health and wellbeing needs generally only come into focus after their basic survival needs (e.g.,housing and employment) have been met.

Ensure you only provide service information that young people can absorb - try not to overload them with too much information as most of it will be forgotten, especially if it pertains to issues that are not immediate concerns for them. Be creative and use visual as well as written resources to accommodate those with English language difficulties. If you are planning to use written material and are unsure whether it will be understood, ask some young people to review it.

has one window of opportunity to make an impact on the young person and if this opportunity is missed, the young person is unlikely to ever return. Moreover, given that most young refugees come from small and emerging communities where everyone knows everyone, one young person's negative experience can be all it takes to create a general feeling of distrust within the broader youth population.

Communication

Establishing rapport with the young person is critical to the development of a trusting relationship and this cannot be achieved without effective communication skills. Listening skills are the most important of all as many youth at risk do not expect to be heard or taken seriously. Keep in mind that young people are typically reluctant to see a worker the first time and so it is important to demonstrate warmth and openness to set them at ease. It should also be noted that it may take a number of sessions before a young person will open up and he may watch or test the worker to see whether he/she can be trusted before opening up.

Provide continuity of worker

Most youth at risk are uncomfortable seeking or accepting help from people they do not know or trust so it can take time for the worker to develop rapport. The young person should be allocated one worker and this worker should be retained throughout the intervention process. Trust is based on what the young person comes to know about the worker and this knowledge is developed over time through an ongoing relationship. Being passed on to another worker after going through this difficult trust-building process is likely to be met with resistance and may even result in premature termination of service.

Surroundings

It is very important to create and maintain a youth friendly environment in which every aspect of your agency's operations from policy to décor is mindful of your target group.

Group work

Group work is a particularly effective way to engage youth at risk who do not exhibit the level of trust needed to move on to individual work. With respect to group composition, the worker will need to ensure the most

Do not try to be "cool" or present an image of yourself that is not authentic. Young people do not want or need this – they need a worker who will listen to them, who will take their issues and needs seriously, and who will mobilise the resources at their disposal to support them.

Ensure you pay close attention to where the young person is coming from. If English is an issue, speak a little more slowly and clearly but do not raise your voice or patronise young people. Avoid colloquialism and slang and be sensitive with the use of humour. Clearly explain unfamiliar or complex terms. Keep in mind that nodding and smiling do not always convey understanding. Many young people nod and smile even (and especially) when they do not understand. Watch out for non-verbal cues that could suggest people do not understand, for example, loss of concentration, blank stares, fidgeting, talking in their own languages to friends and keeping quiet. If in doubt, seek feedback from young people on communication issues.

If providing continuity of worker is not possible for any reason, the young person should be informed ahead of time and they should be fully consulted about their preferences for a replacement worker. If possible, they should to be eased into the new worker over a number of sessions to facilitate a positive transition.

Consider using visual displays and promotional materials that feature the images of those you are seeking to reach. If your agency is not youth-specific, consider creating a separate youth space and/or appointment times for young people.

At the beginning of each group work session, inform the young people that there are two prizes to be raffled at the end of the session. If they observe the rules, they will receive two tickets and therefore two chances to win two raffles. If they break the rules, apply sanctions by way of "yellow cards" and "red cards" as in the game of soccer. If they break the rules, give them a yellow card and if they continue to break the rules, give them a red card. Those who receive a yellow card should only receive one ticket for the raffle, and those who receive a red card should receive no tickets and should be asked to leave the group work session.

appropriate mix of young people by considering age, ethnicity, emotional maturity, confidence, and political sensitivities (e.g., not mixing young people who come from communities with a history of conflict). With respect to size, the worker will need to ensure that the group is large enough to allow emotional privacy and small enough to foster trust and openness.

The worker will also need to consider group norms or rules and these should be set with the full participation of young people – let them set the rules. Some rules will need to be set at the start, for example, ensuring that young people understand the importance of keeping what is said in the group confidential. Other rules will be set throughout the life of the group depending on the group and how it interacts and behaves. It is very important to set limits on behaviour and ensure these are consistently enforced through sanctions and rewards.

Recreation

Providing recreational activities such as basketball, soccer, go-carting and pool is another effective way to engage youth at risk who do not exhibit the level of trust needed to move on to individual work. If the agency is able to participate in the activity, it also gives workers an opportunity to engage young people in a way that is less confronting than in an office. Providing recreational activities also enables the agency to see how the young person engages with others, which can assist in identifying potential leaders in the group.

Information and education-based programs

Youth at risk are typically not interested in participating in programs which focus on improving their life skills, despite how important these programs may be to their personal development. If your group is not responding well to your program, consider merging skills development information with a recreational activity. If, for example, your program focuses on anger management, you may want to consider playing a game of basketball with a focus on improving anger management skills e.g., if a young person loses his temper with the referee, his team loses points. You could also use poor examples from the sporting world to highlight why it is important to develop anger management skills.

Meeting young people at their point of need, as defined by them

As noted in Module 4, most youth at risk are not interested in sitting around and talking about their issues, or participating in programs that are primarily educational in focus. They want concrete, tangible outcomes that are directly related to an immediate need or want.

Respect confidentiality

Many youth at risk fear there will be intended and unintended breaches of confidentiality if they access an agency, particularly in relation to personal, sensitive or culturally taboo issues. This fear may be heightened if they are assigned workers from their own cultural background because information can easily be passed on to their families and broader ethnic communities. It is therefore important to provide constant reassurance about confidentiality.

Keep in mind that the best recommendation about an agency is from a young person who has already used that agency. Word of mouth is a very effective way of attracting youth at risk to your agency. It is very important to be clear about what you can and cannot provide and avoid making promises unless you are certain you can keep them. No young person should leave your agency empty handed. If for some reason you are unable to meet the presenting need, meet another more achievable need instead. This reassures him that you are action-oriented and serious about helping him.

Develop a poster to be displayed is your reception area to reassure young people about the confidentiality of your service. The poster should be youth-focussed, eye-catching, visually appealing and have a clear message that transcends language and culture, for example, "we are here to help, not tell".

For more information and support in working with refugee youth at-risk contact:

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