



## **NEW START**

### **A Study into the Mainstream Education Experiences of Newly Arrived Refugee and Migrant Young People in Whittlesea**

**June 2005**

**Produced by:**

Whittlesea Community  
Connections  
(Formerly Community Information  
Whittlesea)  
Shop 111, Epping Plaza  
Cnr. High & Cooper Streets  
Epping Vic 3076

Tel: 9401 6666

Web:  
<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~ciwwhit>

Email: [ciwwhit@vicnet.net.au](mailto:ciwwhit@vicnet.net.au)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In completing this project, Whittlesea Community Connections would like to thank a number of people and supporting agencies:

Epping Secondary College  
Lalor North Secondary  
Lalor Secondary College  
Peter Lalor Secondary College  
City of Whittlesea- Youth Services  
Kildonan Family & Child Services  
English Language Centres

A special thankyou is extended to all the newly arrived and refugee young people who participated in the project in order to help future new arrival young people.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	
Background	4
Project Aims	5
Literature Review	5
<b>Project Design</b>	
Introduction	7
Ethical Considerations	7
Method	8
Limitations	9
<b>Findings</b>	
Focus Groups	10
Youth Consultations	12
Youth Sector Consultations	14
Discussion of Findings	16
<b>Recommendations &amp; Conclusion</b>	19
<b>References</b>	21
<b>Service Providers</b>	22
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions	23
Appendix 2: Youth Consultation Format	24
Appendix 3: Youth Sector Consultation Format	30

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Newly arrived and refugee young people represent a growing part of the Whittlesea community. A significant proportion (29%) of refugee and new arrivals in 2003-04 were under the age of 19 and the 10- 19 age group represented 16% of the total new arrival population in Whittlesea alone (DIMIA 2005).

New arrivals, refugees and a growing youth population in particular have meant that the average age structure in Whittlesea is substantially younger than Victoria (ABS 2001 Census). Over the next 15 years, the population of young people aged 12- 24 years in Whittlesea is expected to grow by an additional 16.4% (ABS 2001 Census). Rapid expansion of a youthful population is grossly inconsistent with growth in service provision, placing those with complex needs including refugee and new arrival young people at higher risk of disadvantage and dislocation.

Whittlesea is exposed to a number of risk factors including lower educational levels and school retention rates. Young adults aged 19-20 living in Whittlesea had significantly lower rates of school completion (72%) than those in metropolitan Melbourne (83%) and Victoria in general (80%) (ABS 2001 Census). Whittlesea consequently rates third lowest on Metropolitan Melbourne's Index of Education and Occupation. Whittlesea Youth Commitment concluded, "that young people in this situation are entering the labour market with insufficient education and skills to be successful in the long term" (WYNA 2003: 37).

In relation to new arrivals and refugees in Whittlesea, almost one fifth (18%) had had 10 years or less of education in 2003-2004, indicating that many are completing their formal education through the local school system (DIMIA 2005). These figures may be under- stated however, as nearly half (45%) of new arrivals did not know how many years of education they had completed (DIMIA 2005). The education needs of newly arrived and refugee young people are further complicated by low English proficiency and disrupted schooling.

In 2003-04 over half (54%) of all new arrivals in Whittlesea were of the two lowest English Proficiency levels, three and four (DIMIA 2005). Fifteen percent were also humanitarian entrants, indicating that some young people may have had refugee experiences including disrupted schooling and long absences from formal education (DIMIA 2005). Appropriate and adequate support from mainstream education as well as other relevant services is critical in providing equal education and training opportunities for newly arrived and refugee young people.

Other risk factors affecting young people in Whittlesea are clearly evident. Secondary school students reported higher use of alcohol and tobacco and significant higher incidences of deliberate self- harm across interface councils such as Whittlesea, compared with young people in metropolitan Melbourne (RMIT 2003). The need to address mental health and well - being issues in Whittlesea is heightened for the newly arrived with refugee backgrounds.

Refugees may carry complex psychological impacts due to the exposure to torture and trauma. The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (2002) estimated that one in four refugees in Australia have been subjected to torture or severe human rights violations, with almost three in four having endured traumatic events such as forced dislocation or refugee camp experiences (VSFT

2002). For refugee and migrant young people these experiences are exacerbated by several factors including the settlement process, acculturation, forming an adult identity, racism and discrimination.

Racism and discrimination can reignite feelings of anxiety and trauma, affecting migrants' sense of safety and belonging, and impacting on access to other resources such as education, employment and recreational activities (VicHealth 2002). Undermining new arrivals cultural, racial or religious identity may also compromise cultural identification and family and community cohesion and stability (VicHealth 2002). This is particularly important in Whittlesea where over forty smaller and emerging communities exist (DIMIA 2004). This limits the capacity of such communities to support new arrivals.

It is clear that newly arrived and refugee young people have a range of special needs additional to the risk factors affecting young people in Whittlesea. Human service gaps, reduced employment opportunities, cultural issues, the lack of resources and access to transport have been identified in several reports as directly impacting on the social and economic participation and health and wellbeing of young people in Whittlesea (RMIT 2003, WYNA 2003, City of Whittlesea 2004). However for newly arrived and refugee young people, disrupted and transition to mainstream schooling, low English proficiency, mental health, racism and discrimination also impact on outcomes and opportunities that need to be addressed.

## **1.2 Project Aims**

There is a lack of analysis or discussion regarding the specific issues affecting young refugees and new arrivals in Whittlesea as well as appropriate support needs, highlighting their marginalised and vulnerable position in the community.

Further research into the range of experiences of refugees and newly arrived young people, as they manage the transition to the mainstream education system is needed, in order to develop strategies that will ensure greater and equal opportunities for social and economic participation.

This research project aimed to:

- Identify the difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people face during settlement and particularly in regards to education.
- Consult with newly arrived and refugee young people and a range of stakeholders, to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties, both at a local and regional level.
- Improve collaboration between local school and agencies to meet the needs of newly arrived and refugee young people.

## **1.3 Literature Review**

Research has been conducted exploring the impact settlement processes have had on newly arrived and refugee young people, however these studies have focused on wider regional issues. A study into the settlement and successful integration of refugees and newly arrived young people in the Goulburn Valley for example found that issues such as education, income, health, housing, employment and transport were critical. Factors impacting on the success in the education sector in particular included English language difficulties and lack of

access to language tuition, lack of translated materials about educational systems and institutions, the need for better vocational information training and advice, the impact of interrupted schooling and resulting low literacy rates and lack of clear pathways to further education and training (CMYI 2002).

The Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) Refugee Young People and Transitions Working Group (2002) urgently called for better transitions into mainstream schooling. The Working Group identified the vulnerability of young refugees from newly arrived communities, the impact of trauma and the refugee experience, lack of ongoing support and the need for coordinated approaches by service providers as issues for the education system in regard to young refugees (Ovens 2003).

The Changing Cultures Project (2003) also found that refugee young people were unable to cope with language and literacy skills required for VCE, faced settlement and acculturation issues, had little or no formal education and often held unrealistic expectations about educational and vocational success, as did their parents (Giddens 2003).

A recent inner northern study found that the Australian school system operates differently to overseas models, making it difficult for parents and teachers to reach common understandings about education. Secondary schools are not aware of the full range of further education options for students with disrupted educations leaving students and parents misinformed, which can be more appropriate for some newly arrived young people with disrupted education (Giddens 2004).

Miller and Affolter (2002) further point out that helping children outgrow war experiences involves helping communities heal from violence and determine their own paths of development. In this way education is a key element within a larger agenda (Ovens 2003). Similarly, Apout (2003) indicates that social isolation for displaced people is profound, having a powerful impact on a young person's ability to learn.

While previous research has identified a range of issues affecting newly arrived and refugee young people within an educational setting, findings predominantly relate to regional contexts with different community capacities. Our research aimed to identify issues that are relevant to young people in Whittlesea, and to design strategies in partnership with key local stakeholders appropriate to the municipality.

## 2. PROJECT DESIGN

### 2.1 Introduction

'Youth participation involves young people being active in decision- making processes on issues that affect them. Young people make invaluable contributions to communities and are empowered themselves when they participate' (YACVIC 2004: 3).

In order to make better decisions about service provision that directly affect newly arrived and refugee young people, participation of newly arrived and refugee young people, was integral to this project. The research methodology consequently incorporated youth consultation approaches, underpinned by principles of empowerment and purposeful engagement.

*Taking Young People Seriously: Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions* (YACVIC 2004) defined empowerment and engagement as young people having greater control over their lives through participation and taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes. Newly arrived and refugee young people were therefore integral to the research methods utilized in this project.

It should be noted however that consultation is only one form of youth participation and other spheres such as service development, provision and evaluation would also benefit from youth participation initiatives.

This research project was conducted over two stages; needs identification through focus groups followed by the development of strategies to overcome these needs through surveying young people as well as relevant support workers in the youth sector.

### 2.2 Ethical Considerations

Consulting with both those working within the youth sector and newly arrived and refugee young people in particular, the following privacy issues were considered.

- **Collecting personal information**  
The type of personal information collected from young people from the research included sensitive information, such as information about a person's racial or ethnic origin (YACVIC 2004). However personal information collected was designed to specifically meet the stated research aims and objectives, and not for any other purpose.
- **Informed Consent**  
As sensitive information was being collected, informed consent was required from young participants. An explanation of the research project was provided and participation was not compulsory. Consent forms were also completed ensuring participants knew that their privacy would be protected.
- **Privacy**  
Information collected did not identify participants and privacy statements were provided before consultations were conducted with both young people and youth sector workers.

The privacy statement included information about Whittlesea Community Connections, contact details, research objectives, how to access personal information participants provided and storage of information.

- **English as a Second Language**

As many of the participants were refugee and newly arrived young people, English proficiency may have been a barrier to participation. Additional support was provided to participants to assist answering questions in both the focus groups and surveys.

## **2.3 Method**

Regional English Language Centres (ELC) provide intensive language and education support to newly arrived and refugee young people for the initial six months upon arrivals. ELCs were initially consulted to determine which schools in Whittlesea newly arrived and refugee young people were being placed. Epping Secondary College, Lalor North Secondary and Peter Lalor Secondary College were identified as the main referral points for newly arrived and refugee young people in Whittlesea. These schools were consequently approached to participate in the project.

### **Identifying Needs: Focus Groups**

The focus groups were conducted through the assistance and participation of Epping Secondary College and Lalor North Secondary. Non-random sampling methods were employed, as the population was largely unknown. Relevant staff members were informed to use purposive sampling to select relevant focus group participants; students who had been in Australia for five or less years. While this method of sampling is less likely to be representative of the whole population, the research aim was rather to gain a detailed picture of the issue, making non-random methods more useful for our research (Burnham et al 2004).

The focus groups followed a set of pre-determined questions (Appendix 1), which aimed to identify the main difficulties and barriers newly arrived and refugee young people faced within local schools and the wider community. The focus group discussions enabled issues to be addressed in greater depth and opened the discussion to issues not normally revealed in individual interviews or surveys. The other advantage of focus groups is that the participants in the research can play a more prominent and empowered role than they do in most other research models (Burnham et al 2004).

The sensitivity of the research issue was an additional reason for using focus groups as a survey may have resulted in a higher level of non-response, undermining the data. Focus groups can also provide a situation where marginalized groups are more able to voice their views and experiences in a more appropriate environment, particularly as students were already familiar with one another (Burnham et al 2004).

The Epping focus group with 2 participants required the support of only one facilitator. The Lalor North focus group, with 23 participants, however was much larger and the ESL coordinator, language and multicultural aides assisted the facilitation of this group.



## **Developing Strategies: Surveying Young People and Youth Sector**

Once the difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people were identified, further consultations were conducted in order to develop strategies that would contribute to overcoming and alleviating the identified barriers.

Two streams of consultations were carried out with newly arrived and refugee young people and youth workers, teachers and other support workers within the youth sector. Non-random sampling methods were similarly utilized in order to consult with the primary target population; newly arrived and refugee young people were therefore selected by teaching staff.

A snowball approach was adopted to reach youth support workers through participating local schools and other key local agencies working with young people. Survey respondents ranged from youth workers, principals, language coordinators, multicultural aides and other community agencies supporting young people.

To give adequate and appropriate voice to both populations, different surveys were designed for young people (Appendix 2) and workers (Appendix 3). Survey questions focused on practical strategies as well as local and regional advocacy issues impacting upon newly arrived and refugee young people. A work experience student at Peter Lalor Secondary College provided further assistance, which proved invaluable in helping newly arrived and refugee young people complete the survey.

### **2.4 Limitations**

The sample was relatively small, reducing the ability to make generalisations to the wider population. Further, some of the open-ended questions were difficult for some young people to complete, which limited the use of some of the information collected.

The larger focus group also raised issues around the capacity of everyone to participate equally, particularly as there were far more male participants. This resulted in the dominance of some participants over others, suppressing the opinion of less dominant personalities (Burnham et al 2004).

While assistance was provided in focus groups and completion of surveys, language barriers for some newly arrived and refugee young people may have prevented full understanding and responsiveness to questions. Seeking funding for translation of material may need to be considered for future consultation processes.

Finally, forming linkages with local schools did take some time and is a factor that needs to be considered in future projects. However partnerships formed with participating schools, and in particular relevant teaching staff, proved invaluable in terms of success of the consultations and knowledge and experience in the research topic. These partnerships may become more important for future strategic developments and project implementation.

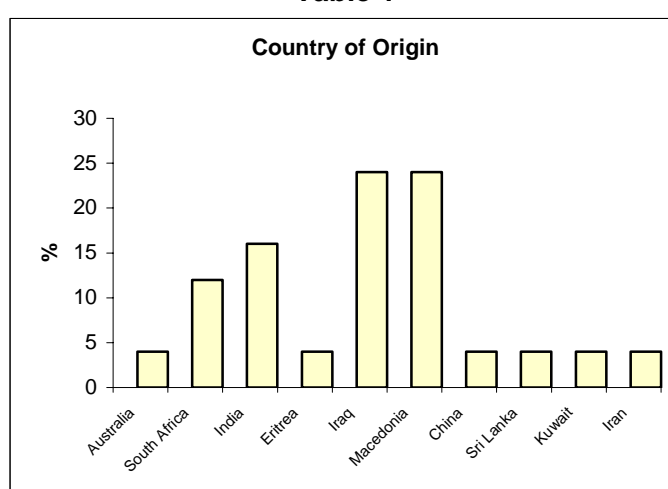
### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Focus Groups

Of the 25 focus group participants, ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, with the median age being 13.5 years. Participants were overwhelmingly male, 84% compared to 16% of female newly arrived young people.

Country of origin for focus group participants (Table 1) was mainly Macedonia and Iraq, which directly correlates with new arrival data for Whittlesea. Other countries of origin included Eritrea, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Kuwait. Ethnicity of participants was broader due to identification with more than one ethnicity and included African, Punjabi, Sudanese, Iraqi, Turkish, Macedonian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Palestinian and Lebanese.

**Table 1**



The main languages spoken at home included English, Arabic and Macedonian. Other languages included Punjabi, Chinese and Singhalese. Some participants also spoke more than one language at home.

Participants were predominantly recent arrivals, with 64% having been in Australia for less than two years and 88% arrived within five years.

#### Issues Identified by Focus Group Participants

##### Learning About New Systems

The Australian school system is a foreign concept to many new arrival young people and their parents. Participants expressed difficulty in navigating the system and adjusting to differences between education in their country of origin and Australia. Participants also highlighted the contrast in structures and teaching methods in Australia.

##### English Language Skills

By far, and not unexpectedly, the most difficult aspect of the transition to mainstream schooling for new arrival participants, were language and communication barriers.

Almost half (48%) of participants had attended an English Language Centre previous to attending a mainstream school. While, many participants found the

Language Centres to be extremely helpful, students felt that the period of support was not extensive enough to fully settle into mainstream schooling.

Moreover, all participants highlighted the difficulty and associated frustration of learning English, whether or not they had attended a Language Centre. Difficulties increased in other language areas other than English, particularly where teaching staff were less aware of student backgrounds.

### **Lack of Cultural Awareness**

Language and communication difficulties newly arrived students faced exacerbated issues related to cultural and religious misunderstandings. There was a general consensus within the focus groups that bullying due to racial and ethnic reasons was a common experience for newly arrived young people.

Lack of cultural understanding was most evident in relations between new arrivals and other students, where many new arrivals were subjected to bullying behaviour as well as racism. Comments about new arrivals' language, pronunciation, race and ethnicity were common, affecting new arrivals sense of belonging and level of participation in school activities.

The impact of bullying upon young people including health, mental health and learning processes have been well documented. An additional layer of racism may heighten these impacts, particularly for young people with refugee backgrounds who have already experienced fear and persecution on racial and ethnic grounds.

### **Isolation & Community Linkages**

Language barriers resulted in feelings of isolation both at school and in relation to the broader community. Participants often found it hard to socialise with other students and both were often reluctant to initiate contact. While language was the main reason for this, cultural and religious barriers and perceptions were also evident.

Social isolation was also experienced in the wider community, particularly with the lack of culturally appropriate recreational activities for new arrival young people in the local area. Some participants travelled extensively to access such opportunities, while others were not linked to anything outside of school at all.

Participants highlighted the need for greater awareness and opportunity to participate locally in social and sporting groups. These links to the community are important more broadly, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing levels of connectedness and participation for new arrival and refugee young people.

### **Family Support Needs**

Newly arrived young people also experienced anxiety and additional stress because of their family's situation. Financial pressures, finding employment and learning English were the most significant issues facing families of new arrival young people. Family conflict between newly arrived and more established family members, due to the financial burden, had also occurred.

Newly arrived young people often had to manage their parents' affairs, such as accessing and advocating with services, due to their higher level of English language skills. Providing links, information and referral to parents to appropriate support services including English language tuition, training and employment ready programs will also support the settlement of new arrival young people.

### Issues of Permanency

Participants who were studying on non-substantive visas were also concerned over the permanency of their situation and whether or not they would continue to be living in Australia in the near future. The inability to plan for the future placed additional strain on newly arrived young people affected by this issue.

### 3.2 Survey of Young People

There were 21 young participants in the survey, with 53% in the 12- 14 and 47% in the 15- 17 age- group. Most participants were female, 71 % compared to 29% male. Eleven countries of origin were represented including Iraq, Sudan, Albania, Liberia, Bosnia, Egypt and India.

More than half of respondents (62%) had arrived in Australia in the last two years and 91% in the last five years. Around 14% identified as being a refugee, however this could be higher as a further 39% were not sure of their refugee status.

Many respondents (57%) did not understand how the education system operated when they first came to Australia and yet would find such information helpful.

*“My parents don’t really know what happens after secondary college and about VCE points.” (15- 17 years from Bosnia)*

However, provision of information about the education system occurred in only half of the cases. Teachers were the most common contact that provided this type of information, while family, the Vice or Principal and friends were also mentioned. Responses indicated that there is no clear method or policy of informing newly arrived and refugee young people about the education system in an Australian context.

Other types of information that participants would find useful to access included, travel & travel concessions, support services, Medicare, local shopping particularly for certain cultural foods, banking and finance, ID cards & employment and post-compulsory education pathways. This indicates that there is a lack of information and translated material for newly arrived and refugee young people regarding a range of settlement needs.

*“How to apply in universities, information of the ways to blend in with the crowd, more programs of welcoming them and to help them get started, make them aware of the changes happening around them.” (15- 17 years from India).*

*“More and more programs that may educate the new immigrants about ‘Australia,’ where to shop, where to buy food, how to bank, how to use public transport, and to make them aware that all these kinds of programs were running for them.” (15- 17 years from India).*

While only half (52%) of respondents indicated that they experienced initial difficulties learning English, a little over half felt that additional language help was needed and all provided responses as to what would be useful in improving their English. Responses were fairly even between homework clubs and additional

ESL teachers, while only a few felt after school tutors would be helpful. The general feeling is that more could be done to improve language skills, despite reluctance of some respondents to indicate that they had experienced difficulty.

The surveys confirmed focus group responses that bullying and racism are common issues faced by newly arrived and refugee young people. Around 48% of respondents felt that bullying was a problem at school generally and nearly a quarter (24%) were bullied because of their cultural background, lack of English skills, religion or race. An additional 19% could not be sure if they had been bullied due to racial reasons. A third (33%) also felt that other young people did not understand where they had come from and been through, while one respondent indicated that this was not the case with everyone.

There was a high level of response regarding ways to reduce the level of bullying and racism within schools. Most indicated that activities helping students understand and learn about other cultures, followed by celebrations of different cultural backgrounds and education around the migrant and refugee experience would be helpful.

*“Refugees in South Australia were treated very different, special for example from my experience we were put in a school only for learning English with all other nationality and every time we celebrate own country so everybody knows its culture.” (15-17 years from Sudan).*

*“[Activities] to make everyone aware that everyone are equal.” (15-17 years from India).*

*“There should be activities for all new students through the school. And there should be meeting with another new students in other schools.” (12- 14 years from Macedonia).*

*“They can help them by helping to get new friends, work to improve their English to play with some of the other students and volunteer in activities.” (15- 17 years from Macedonia).*

Community participation rates were high with 44% involved in some activity outside of school. However more than half (56%) of participants were not involved in activities, correlating with 50% who would like to be involved and have information about other activities. Respondents indicated that there is a high level of capacity and willingness of newly arrived and refugee young people to become more involved in community participation opportunities. The broader community needs to capture this interest by providing appropriate opportunities to involve newly arrived and refugee young in the community, also serving to reduce cultural barriers that contribute to social exclusion based on racial and cultural grounds.

Most young people (86%) felt they had someone to turn to when they needed help, suggesting that informal support networks are in place for many newly arrived young people. This correlates with 76% of respondents that highlight family members as being important in helping young people with problems they may have experienced. Conversely, 76% of respondents indicated that their family were linked into appropriate support networks. However the small proportion of young people that felt they and their family had no support at all

needs to be addressed, particularly as over half (57%) wanted more information about support services that young people and families could access.

### 3.3 Survey of Youth Sector

Fifteen people within the youth sector participated in the surveys. The youth sector within this research framework included teachers, principals, youth workers and agencies with a particular focus on young people.

The current range of support provided to newly arrived and refugee young people through local schools varied but included strategies such as language support, teaching aides, youth workers, information and referral to settlement support services and social support through parent associations and coffee groups.

According to participants within the youth sector, the main difficulties most commonly identified as impacting upon newly arrived and refugee young people were English language, social isolation and bullying and racism. Lack of support networks outside of school, incapacity to participate in the wider community and family breakdown, while identified as relevant, were not seen to be the most significant difficulties for new arrival and refugee young people.

*“One of the biggest issues for refugees is generally their poor educational background.”*

*“The students I see as having high needs are those who have spent extended periods in overseas camps where family ties have broken down and a teen’s allegiance is greater to peers in their group. This can lead to a ‘bully in a gang’ mentality or isolation due to removal from close friends in order to attend a new secondary college setting. Language is a barrier initially but learning often progresses quickly.”*

Additional factors included housing and income support, particularly where relationships with sponsors break down. This forces reliance on mainstream welfare services that may not be sensitive to refugee and settlement issues. Finally, mental health issues were also considered barriers to settlement for new arrival and refugee young people.

Participants were asked to rate a range of strategies in order of priority in overcoming difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people face. Ratings were placed on a five- point scale, 1 being very low in importance and 5 very high. Scores were then aggregated to determine priorities for implementation.

The highest priority was given to enhancing cross- cultural understanding of teaching & youth support staff. Improving language support for newly arrived young people, providing education and information about the laws, systems and services in an Australian context and enhancing cross- cultural understanding of young people also rated quite high. While establishing sporting, recreational and social opportunities that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people was allocated the lowest priority, it was still seen as an important strategy. Respondents raised the difficulty of prioritising these strategies due to the urgent need to implement a range of initiatives as part of an overall coordinated plan. This is particularly the case as little focus has been

given to addressing the needs of new arrival and refugee young people in Whittlesea to date.

Respondents were also asked to develop additional strategies that could be undertaken by different stakeholders such as schools, community agencies and government bodies.

Recommended strategies for schools were:

- Provide education on refugee and political issues to all young people.
- Acknowledge experiences of pre- settlement experiences to help teachers understand the reality of issues facing new arrival and refugee young people during settlement.
- Provide information to new arrival and refugee young people about resources and available support as well as education about their rights and responsibilities in Australian legal contexts.
- Facilitate cross- cultural and communication training on emerging communities for teaching staff.
- Monitor progress and address the needs of refugee students including the use of roles such as multicultural and integration aides.
- Establish specific programs for new arrival and refugee young people such as culturally appropriate support groups.
- Encourage community agencies to play a greater role within schools.

Recommended strategies for community agencies were:

- Better promotion of mainstream support and youth services to new and emerging communities.
- Facilitate cross- cultural and communication training on emerging communities for local agencies.
- Provide information about the education system and further education and training opportunities appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people. It is also important for parents to be aware of this information as well.
- Provide advocacy and other links to essential settlement services including emergency relief for those in financial crisis.
- Provide information to young people and their families about local support services.
- Increase community resources and community building capacity to meet growing community demand, including specific support for new arrival young people.
- Develop programs targeted at newly arrived young people and their families.
- Improve social participation opportunities appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people.
- Address issues around mental health and post- traumatic stress to prevent new arrival and refugee young people falling through the gaps and leaving their needs unaddressed by mainstream services.
- Invest in capacity building within new and emerging communities to facilitate leadership and mentoring models that will enhance skill development and accelerate the settlement process for young people.
- Improve community networks and partnerships to better plan and deliver services for young people and their families
- Enhance connections between support services and local schools.

Recommended strategies for government bodies were:

- Increase funding for multicultural and language aides within schools.
- Alleviate the financial burden of education for migrant and refugee families.

- Develop and implement a specific plan to meet the needs of new arrival and refugee young people that improves coordination between services.
- Communicate trends and settlement issues of emerging communities to schools and local governments.
- Better coordinate the efforts of key stakeholders.
- Support projects specific to new arrival and refugee young people.
- Commit to the idea and value of community capacity building.

The need for further coordination between community agencies and local schools is exacerbated considering the low utilization of settlement services. Most respondents had not used a settlement service before because they were unaware how to make appropriate referrals. However those who had used settlement services had found the service useful for new arrival young people.

Additional comments were made in relation to greater linkages between schools and community agencies.

*“Outside agencies should have more of a role working with schools, eg, a worker coming into the school to run/ work with staff on programs within the school environment.”*

*“Perhaps more cross- connection between sectors- we are also over- stretched that the service seems segmented.”*

*“Continue to encourage networking and development of links and programs between youth services, CALD services and other agencies.”*

### **3.4 Discussion of Findings**

New arrival and refugee young people in Whittlesea are facing a range of settlement issues including learning to navigate the education system, English language barriers, lack of wider community cultural awareness, resulting in racial tension, which has exacerbated feelings of isolation for these young people.

It is evident that new arrival young people, as well as their families, are not comprehensively informed of the education system in an Australian context and in a coordinated way. Young people are therefore not fully aware of appropriate education pathways and options, nor are their parents. This is particularly important for young people who confront English language barriers in accessing competitive higher education options. While teachers have been generally helpful in providing such information to young people, it is important for the system as a whole to consider targeted responsibilities. Schools also need to be aware of the range of options specifically designed for refugee young people that provide smoother transitions to mainstream further education and training opportunities.

The range of settlement issues that young people face indicates that provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate settlement information would also be of benefit to emerging communities. Information on how to access public transport, support services, health and income related issues would help address settlement needs of young people and their families. The importance of family within young people’s support networks indicates that information and support provided to young people should also take into account family issues. This is particularly the case as new arrival young people assume greater family



responsibility due to language barriers. Access to translated material regarding essential services also needs to be provided.

Young people's responses to English language barriers contrasted to those from within the youth sector. Young people were more reluctant to indicate they had experienced difficulties learning English, however were vocal in their response to possible strategies in overcoming difficulties learning English. Strategies such as homework clubs and after school tutors were highly favoured, possibly due to easy accessibility. The youth sector more strongly identified learning English as a major difficulty for new arrival young people and focused on additional school resources such as greater ESL and language aide support. Overall it is clear that language is a major barrier for young people and should be addressed by a combination of strategies.

For new arrival young people to overcome issues of dislocation and resettlement, racism and bullying within schools also needs to be urgently addressed, particularly due to the impact of racism on a significant proportion of new arrival young people. Addressing racism will become increasingly important as migration patterns continue to diversify. Greater numbers of migrants are arriving from non- European countries meaning racial, ethnic and cultural differences will become more evident.

To create and improve understanding of refugee and settlement issues, both young people and teaching staff need further information and education. Indeed, provision of cultural awareness training was given the highest priority within the youth sector. This indicates the capacity teaching staff, has to facilitate change and cohesion within the school setting. However teaching staff needs to be given appropriate support and encouragement from the wider system to ensure sustainable participation in such initiatives.

Celebrating cultural diversity, education about the refugee experience and activities to help students understand and learn about other cultures were also seen to be important strategies to address racial and cultural misunderstanding by young people. Formal education was also suggested by the youth sector, through the inclusion of refugee and political issues within a range of learning units.

Addressing racism within schools is essential for new arrival young people to feel part of the community, reduce feelings of isolation and enhance the capacity of new arrivals to form links with the wider community. Racial tension may also impact on young people's learning and exacerbate mental health and well - being issues.

It was encouraging that many new arrival young people were involved in some form of community participation activity, indicating the willingness and eagerness of new arrivals to become involved in the wider community. However the majority of new arrivals were not linked into any other activity outside of school, yet indicated their interest to do so. Community participation assists the settlement process including the acquisition of language skills, learning about service providers and providing important health outcomes. This points to a community need and potential in the development of future community participation projects, particularly if these projects were accessible and appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people.

In the development of strategies to overcome barriers and difficulties experienced by new arrival and refugee young people, a major theme expressed throughout the youth sector was greater collaboration and linkages between community agencies and local schools. Forming and maintaining these links will be integral to the success of strategies implemented. It is also positive that the youth sector is committed to establishing these links in order to provide better support to new arrival and refugee young people.

To enable schools to better plan and support new arrival young people it is also important for the education system to have access to information about migration planning, community needs and settlement issues. Improved information networks that involve settlement services will enhance referral processes and accessibility to settlement support for young people and their families. This will also assist schools that may not have the resources to support young people with a range of complex needs.

Improved coordination can be achieved by linking schools into service networks such as the Whittlesea Multicultural Issues Network, enabling the education system to have better access to local migration patterns, service developments and appropriate supports for new arrival and refugee young people. This is particularly important, as many schools were unaware of settlement support services or how to link into such services. Formal service networks also lead to collaborative approaches across sectors.

Community agencies also need to take a greater role in advocating on behalf of and for the needs of new arrival and refugee young people. In particular the need for greater English language support and specific programs for refugee young people are critical in Whittlesea.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were identified by refugee and new arrival young people and prioritised by support workers within the youth sector.

1. Enhancing cross- cultural understanding of teaching & youth support staff:
2. Improving language support for newly arrived young people through more accessible homework clubs, after school tutoring programs and ESL support:
3. Providing education and information about the laws, systems and services in an Australian context:
4. Enhancing cross- cultural understanding of young people:
5. Establishing sporting, recreational and social opportunities that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people:

Additional recommendations highlight the needs for schools to work in partnership with community agencies to:

- Establish intake procedures within local schools to ensure that the needs of newly arrived and refugee young people are appropriately assessed, education is monitored and assistance provided as required.
- Provide information about further education and training pathways that are appropriate to young people with language barriers and in particular, disrupted schooling.
- Provide settlement information to new arrival and refugee young people that will assist with improving linkages with the broader community.
- Provide information to parents of newly arrived and refugee young people about the education system in an Australian context, as well as appropriate support services they are able to access.
- Provide advocacy and other links to essential settlement services including emergency relief for those in financial crisis.
- Provide advocacy and other links to essential settlement services.
- Address bullying and racism within schools through initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity and improve teaching and student understanding of refugee and settlement issues.
- Introduce wider cross key learning area units on international politics and refugee issues to increase young people's awareness of refugee communities within the local community.
- Establish effective partnerships between local schools and community organisations in order to provide appropriate and coordinated settlement support to new arrival and refugee young people.
- Improve local social participation opportunities that are appropriate and accessible to new arrival and refugee young people.
- Invest in capacity building within new and emerging communities including the facilitation of leadership and mentoring programs.

Advocacy issues that need to be addressed include:

- Better planning must be developed and implemented by governments in relation to newly arrived and refugee young people to ensure schools are aware of new and emerging community needs and in order to provide sustainable support for refugee groups.
- Enhance funding opportunities for local schools to provide adequate and appropriate support for newly arrived and refugee young people, particularly multicultural liaison, language aides and ESL support.
- Provide greater support to refugee families to meet the financial burden of settlement and schooling.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evident that new arrival and refugee young people in Whittlesea are facing many settlement issues consistent with young people in other regions. Difficulties such as language barriers, lack of appropriate settlement information, racism and isolation are clearly impacting on the settlement outcomes of these young people. This research indicates that a range of strategies could be implemented to address the settlement issues of young people, and promote communities that are better connected and resourced.

In order to ensure that the recommendations developed through this project are implemented, Whittlesea Community Connections, in partnership with local agencies and schools, will continue to work towards meeting the needs of new arrival and refugee young people in Whittlesea.

## REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) '2001 Population and Housing Census' ABS. Canberra.

Apout, M, C (2003) 'Moving Refugees into Mainstream Schooling' *Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues*. Melbourne.

Burnham, Gilland, K, Grant, W & Layton- Henry, Z (2004) 'Research Methods in Politics' *Palgrave Macmillan*: New York.

City of Whittlesea (2004) 'Strategic Plan for Human Service Delivery in the City of Whittlesea.'

Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (2005) 'Settlement Reports' [www.immi.gov.au/](http://www.immi.gov.au/).

Estridge, O & Cornell, N (2003) 'Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis' *Praxis Consulting*. Melbourne.

Giddens, A (2003) 'The Changing Cultures Project: Enhancing the mental health of refugee young people through education and training' *Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE*. Melbourne.

Giddens, A (2004) 'The Good Futures Project: Informing parents of education pathways for newly arrived and refugee young people with disrupted education' *Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE*. Melbourne.

Ovens, C (2003) 'Community Building for Young People from the Horn of Africa' *Maribyrnong & Moonee Valley Local Learning & Employment Network*. Melbourne.

Marston, G, Morgan, L & Murphy, J (2003) 'Human Service Gaps at the Interface between urban and rural' *RMIT Centre For Applied Social Research*. Melbourne.

Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (2001) 'Promoting Refugee Health: A Handbook for doctors and other health care providers caring for people from refugee backgrounds' *Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and Department of Human Services*. Victoria.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (2003) 'Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of New Arrival Communities: Learnings and Promising Practices' *Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*. Melbourne.

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2004) 'Taking Young People Seriously: Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions' *Department of Victorian Communities*. Victoria.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Broadmeadows English Language Centre  
Address: Belfast St Broadmeadows  
Phone: 9309 1488

Brunswick English Language Centre  
Address: 47 Dawson St Brunswick 3056  
Phone: 9380 6889

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues  
Address: Level 1 380 Drummond St Carlton 3053  
Phone: 9349 3466

City of Whittlesea- Youth Services  
Address: Shop 111 Epping Plaza Epping  
Phone: 9401 6614 or 9217 2170

Collingwood English Language Centre  
Address: Cambridge St Collingwood  
Phone: 9419 7633

Ecumenical Migration Centre  
Address: 95- 97 Brunswick St Fitzroy 3067  
Phone: 9416 1827

Epping Centrelink  
Address: 713 High St Epping 3076  
Fax: 9401 8099  
For Centrelink information and help in other languages other than English phone:  
13 1202

Frontyard Youth Services  
Phone: 9345 5888 (General Enquiries) 9611 2409 (Clinic)

Higher Education and Regulation Division  
Phone: 9637 2808

NMIT  
Address: Cnr Cooper & Dalton St Epping  
Phone: 9269 1082 (Epping) or 9269 1200 (Preston)

The Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre  
Address: 95 Brunswick St Fitzroy 3065  
Phone: 9483 1144

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture  
Address: 6 Gardiner St Brunswick 3056  
Phone: 9388 0022

Whittlesea Community Connections  
Address: Shop 111 Epping Plaza Epping 3076  
Phone: 9401 6666

## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **FOCUS GROUPS QUESTIONS**

1. What was your school experience in your country of birth? Up to what year level did you study?
2. Did anyone experience interrupted study and if so for how long?
3. Did you attend a Language Centre when you first arrived in Australia?
4. When you entered High School, what difficulties did you face?
5. What support was provided at school? (eg ESL classes etc).
6. What were the things or people that helped you settle into school the most and what didn't help?
7. Do you think teachers were and are aware of your backgrounds and needs and do you think they need to be?
8. Did you receive support from agencies outside of school, and if so, which ones?
9. What difficulties do you face now including home life, relationship with parents etc?
10. Has the process of improving English proficiency been long and how has it affected other aspects of your life? Eg) Learning in other subjects, making new friends.
11. Do you have connections to other groups, social support, sport clubs etc? How have they helped you settle in Australia?
12. Is there a lack of such groups in your local area and if so what would you like to see established?
13. What other things do you think would help future students and yourself now?

## APPENDIX 2

### Information For Students

*Community Information Whittlesea is a not-for-profit organisation that provides information referral and advice, volunteer placement, emergency relief, free computer access and settlement support for newly arrived migrants and refugees.*

Many newly arrived migrants and refugees in Whittlesea are young people aged between 10 and 19.

Community Information Whittlesea would like to understand young people's needs and make sure your opinions are heard, so we can make better decisions and improve services for you and other young people arriving from other countries.

#### **Research Goal**

The goal of this research is to deliver better services and appropriate support for newly arrived and refugee young people.

#### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research is to determine:

- What support is currently accessed by young people newly arrived to Australia
- What additional support and information needs to be provided to make sure newly arrived and refugee young people get the help they need
- What support should also be provided to newly arrived parents
- What can be done about bullying and racism within schools

#### **Privacy**

Information being collected will not identify you and will only be used to inform the research goals and objectives. All completed surveys will be stored in a locked cabinet, where no one can access them.

If you would like further information or to obtain the information you have provided then please contact Emma Antonetti at Community Information Whittlesea on 9401 6666.



## Consent Form

I understand the purpose of the research and give consent to provide the relevant information required.

I will provide this information with the knowledge that all my personal information will be kept confidential and all my responses will remain private.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_/\_\_/05

**What and how do newly arrived migrants and refugee young people think they should be supported?**

**Demographic Data**

1. What is your age?

12- 14  15- 17

2. What is your sex?

Male

Female

3. In what country were you born?

4. What is your ethnicity? (For example, you may have been born in one country but speak the language and follow the traditions of another culture).

5. What year did you arrive in Australia?

6. Did you come to Australia as a Refugee?

Yes

No

Don't know

7. What language(s) do you speak at home?

---

**Questionnaire**

1. a) When you came to Australia, did you understand how the school system worked? (For example, what are the differences between primary and secondary school, what is VCE, what Centrelink benefits I am eligible for or how do I apply for university?)

Yes

No

b) Was information given to you about the education system? (For example printed information, brochures, advice from people you spoke to or agencies you had contact with).

Yes

No

c) If yes, who gave you this information?

Teachers

Family

Friends

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d) What kinds of information did you find helpful when you came to Australia?

Information about Youth Allowance

Information about how to travel to school and travel concessions

Information about how the education system works (when do you go to primary and secondary schools, what happens after etc)

Information about where to go for help

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e) Having been in Australia for a little while, what kind of information do you need, or think you might need, now or later on? (For example, what do I do after secondary school?)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. a) Did you find it difficult to learn English when you first started school?

Yes

No

b) Is learning English still difficult and would you like more help?

Yes

No

c) What would be useful in helping you improve your English?

More ESL teachers

After school tutors

Homework clubs

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. a) Do you feel that generally bullying is a problem at school?

Yes

No

b) Have you ever been bullied because of your cultural background, lack of English skills, religion or race?

Yes

No

Not sure

c) Do you feel that other young people understand where you have come from and what you have been through?

Yes

No

e) What do you think would reduce the level of bullying and racism? (Tick as many options as are relevant)

Activities helping students understand and learn about other cultures

Celebrations of different cultural backgrounds

Education around the migrant and refugee experience

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. a) Are you involved in activities outside of school?

Yes

No

b) If yes, what are you involved in?

Sport

Music

Volunteering

Religious

Other \_\_\_\_\_

c) Would you like to be involved in other activities?

Yes

No

d) Would you like more information about other activities you could become involved in?

Yes

No

5. a) Do feel you have someone to turn to when you need help?

Yes

No

b) Is your family important in helping you with any problems you may have at school?

Yes

No

c) Does your family have people or services to go to for help?

Yes

No

d) Would you like more information about other people or support you and your family can access whenever you need to?

Yes

No

6. Do you have any other ideas about how agencies, schools and the community can help newly arrived young people through school?

---

---

---

---

---

---

## APPENDIX 3

### Refugee & New Arrival Young People in Whittlesea

*Whittlesea Community Connections (formerly known as Community Information Whittlesea) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides information referral and advice, volunteer placement, emergency relief, free computer access, legal advice and settlement support.*

Settlement support services help newly arrived migrants and refugees by:

- Providing information, orientation, referral and casework services to new arrivals, helping them to settle in Australia and gain access to mainstream services (direct client services)
- Assisting newly arrived communities to develop their capacity to organise, plan and advocate for their own needs (community capacity building); and
- Developing settlement planning and service delivery networks to encourage delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate services by mainstream service providers, including playing an advocacy role (service planning and development).

#### **Background**

Newly arrived and refugee young people represent a growing part of the Whittlesea community. Almost one third (29%) of refugee and new arrivals in 2003-04 were under the age of 19, and the 10- 19 age group comprised 16% of the total new arrival population (DIMIA 2005).

Almost one fifth (18%) of newly arrived migrants and refugees had had 10 years or less of education in 2003-2004, indicating that many are completing their formal education through the local school system (DIMIA 2005). These figures may be under-stated however, as nearly half (45%) of new arrivals did not know how many years of education they had completed (DIMIA 2005). The education needs of newly arrived and refugee young people are further complicated by low English proficiency and disrupted schooling.

In 2003-04 over half (54%) of all new arrivals in Whittlesea were of the two lowest English Proficiency levels, that is, three and four (DIMIA 2005). Fifteen percent were also humanitarian entrants, revealing that some young people may have had refugee experiences including disrupted schooling and long absences from formal education (DIMIA 2005). Appropriate and adequate support from the mainstream education system as well as other relevant services is critical in providing equal education and training opportunities for newly arrived and refugee young people.

However how community agencies and local schools are responding and need to respond to the specific needs of new arrival and refugee students' in Whittlesea remains largely unknown.

#### **Previous Research Findings**

The Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council strongly identified, 'young refugees as a potentially vulnerable group...because of a range of cultural, health and

language barriers' (CMYI 2002). CMYI (2001) highlighted the impact of resettlement and unresponsiveness of Australian mainstream service systems as additional participation barriers confronted by refugee young people.

The Victorian Settlement Planning and Information Consultation (2002) therefore recommended that transitional education and employment programs and social connectedness enhancement initiatives were needed. The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (2002) identified improving community understanding and cultural awareness as important strategies in fostering participation of newly arrived and refugee young people.

The Research Scheme also recommends continuous improvement by consultation with young refugee people, indicating that major gaps in service provision and quality improvement exist in Whittlesea, where neither of these has occurred for newly arrived and refugee young people.

### **Aim**

There is a lack of analysis or discussion regarding the needs affecting young refugees and new arrivals in Whittlesea, highlighting their marginalised and vulnerable position in the community. Further research into the experiences of refugees and newly arrived young people, will lead to the development of coordinated strategies to overcome these difficulties for present and future new arrival young people at a local level.

### **Method**

Focus groups were held in February 2005 in schools with high proportions of newly arrived and refugee young people, identified from English Language Centre referrals. The focus groups enabled newly arrived and refugee young people to explore the settlement difficulties they had experienced.

In order to develop strategies to overcome the difficulties identified, newly arrived and refugee young people will be further consulted to ensure their opinions inform decisions about service provision and improvement.

The following consultation with teaching and youth support staff will also be conducted to establish current support mechanisms and to identify local partnership- based strategies that will address the issues experienced by new arrival and refugee young people.

Analysis and distribution of the findings will lead to the development of an action plan, in order for the research recommendations to be implemented.

### **Privacy**

Information being collected will not identify you and will only be used to inform the research goals and objectives. All completed surveys will be stored away in a locked cabinet, where no one can access them.

If you would like further information or to obtain the information you have provided then please contact Emma Antonetti at Whittlesea Community Connections (formerly known as Community Information Whittlesea) on 9401 6666.

## Refugee and New Arrival Young People Questionnaire

1. What type of organisation do you work in?

Secondary School

Community Organisation

Local Government

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your role?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Currently what does your organisation provide specifically for newly arrived and refugee young people to make the transition to mainstream education in an Australian context easier?

Language Support (ESL)

Youth Worker

Referral to Settlement Support Services

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. The issues listed below are difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people experienced and identified themselves through initial consultations conducted by Whittlesea Community Connections. What do you think are the main difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people face at school as well as outside of school? (Tick as many options as are relevant).

English Language

Bullying and racism

Social isolation

Incapacity to participate in the wider community

Lack of support networks outside of school

Family breakdown

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



5. From the issues identified by newly arrived and refugee young people (listed in Q4), a range of possible strategies to overcome these difficulties are proposed below. What priority do you place on the following in overcoming difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people face?

**1= Very Low    2= Low    3= Moderate    4= High    5= Very High**

Rate 1-5

- Enhancing cross- cultural understanding of young people
  - Enhancing cross- cultural understanding of teaching & youth support staff
  - Improving language support for newly arrived young people
  - Establishing sporting, recreational and social opportunities that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to new arrival and refugee young people
  - Providing education and information about the laws, systems and services in an Australian context
  - Other
- (Please specify)

---



---



---



---



---

6. How do you think the difficulties newly arrived and refugee young people experience should be overcome through (a) schools, (b) community agencies and (c) the government?

(a) Schools:

---



---



---



---

(b) Community agencies:

---



---



---



---

(c) Government:

---



---



---



---

7. Have you ever referred young people and parents to settlement support services? (For example, NMRC or Community Information Whittlesea).

- Yes     Go to Q 8  
 No     Go to Q 9

8. If yes, which agency did you refer to?

Whittlesea Community Connections

Migrant Resource Centre

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

b) Did you find the settlement support service useful?

Yes

No

b) Could any improvements be made to the settlement support service? (Please specify).

---

---

---

---

9. If you have not used settlement support services before why not? (Tick as many options as are relevant).

Was not aware of the services

Was not sure of how to make appropriate referrals

Referred elsewhere

Other (Please specify)

---

---

---

---

b) What do you think can be done to improve linkages to settlement support services or to provide more appropriate support to newly arrived and refugee young people within your organisation?

---

---

---

---

---

---