

Good Practice Principles

Refugees young people

GUIDE FOR **WORKING WITH REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE**

A project of the **Victorian Settlement Planning Committee**



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INTRODUCTION

Refugee young people

What is the Good Practice Principles document and why was it developed?

The Good Practice Principles document is a tool to assist services with limited experience in working with refugee young people, and to support consistent and responsive services across Victoria. It was developed as a result of discussions amongst workers from public and community sector agencies who identified gaps in the provision of service delivery to refugee young people, particularly a lack of specific policies or guidelines to direct practice. This document is not prescriptive but recognises the uniqueness of the experience of refugee young people and how this might impact on them accessing services.

It sets three core values:

- 1) **Understanding,**
- 2) **Trust,** and
- 3) **Social Justice and Access.**

For each core value, the Guide expands with Principles, followed by suggested practical actions and case studies.

Who can use Good Practice Principles?

This document is for people who work with refugee young people and their families either in government or non-government organisations, and educational institutions. It can help them ensure that their services are responsive to refugee young people and assist them to plan services, formulate policies and/or allocate resources.

Who is a refugee young person?

Refugee young people are faced with multiple challenges, namely: the refugee experience, their adolescence and the settlement process.

The Refugee Experience

The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme¹ defines the 'refugee experience' as: exposure to political, religious or inter-cultural violence persecution or oppression, armed conflict or civil discord that incorporates the following basic elements:

- a state of fearfulness for self and family members,
- leaving the country at short notice,
- inability to return to the country of origin, and
- uncertainty about the possibility of maintaining links with family and home.

Not all refugee young people enter Australia with a refugee visa. A person sharing refugee-like experiences may enter under other streams of migration. Consideration of the uncertainty experienced by young people without permanent status must also be taken into account.

In this document any young person escaping persecution and violence will be included in the term 'refugee young people'.

¹ Coventry, L., Guerra, C., Mackenzie, D., & Pinkney *Wealth of All Nations* National Youth Affairs Research Scheme Hobart 2002 p.15

Statistics on refugee young people in Victoria and their countries of birth are in Appendix 1.

Adolescence and young adulthood are times of transition when many changes take place. The term 'young people' in the context of this report, includes those aged between 12 and 26.

Adolescence

Young people are often confronted with challenges, relating to:

- identity formation
- gaining independence
- finding their place in the community
- religious beliefs
- developing relationships with peers and family
- determining life goals, and
- discovering their sexuality.

All these factors play a pivotal role in the development of the young person. 'The process of identity formation which is part of adolescence may be particularly complex for young people being affected by the overlay of the refugee experience, cultural adjustment and the practical demands of resettlement.'²

When refugee young people settle in Australia, they have a range of needs because they have suffered the trauma of persecution and displacement. Their pre-settlement experiences may include denial of human rights, forced separation from families, witnessing family members being tortured or killed, exposure to violence, physical and sexual abuse, illness and exploitation.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2002 *Refugee Resettlement – An International Handbook to Guide Resettlement and Integration* p.264



The Settlement Experience

A number of settlement issues are shared by all young migrants:

- learning English,
- restarting schooling or finding work,
- adjusting to a new culture,
- separation from extended family,
- navigating unfamiliar systems and environment, and
- forging new social networks

The inherent lack of stability arising from these experiences presents many challenges during the difficult times of adolescence and young adulthood.

Diversity

There is a diversity of experiences among refugee young people and how well they settle in Australia. Experiences can vary between individuals and between different ethnic groups. Settlement success can depend on their ability to speak English and their level of education, the support networks available for themselves and their families in Australia, and their age when they arrive. Despite these adversities, young refugee people demonstrate a great deal of resilience and adaptiveness.

What informs good practice principles?

1. Australian Context Commitments

The Good Practice Principles document has been drawn from a number of sources. A mapping exercise identified existing practice principles. Examples of practice principles were sourced from professional bodies such as:

- The *Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics*,
- Australian Government documents, such as the *Charter of Public Service in a Diverse Society* and
- *A Good Practice Guide – For Culturally Responsive Government Services*, both produced by DIMIA. They outline strategies for ensuring that services are culturally responsive.

This Good Practice Principles document should be read in conjunction with broader multicultural service guidelines such as those mentioned above.

2. International Obligations

Consideration should also be given to Australia's international obligations. Australia is a member of, and adheres to several Human Rights Treaties. Allowing people to exercise their human rights is integral to Good Practice Principles, particularly as refugees' human rights have been oppressed/violated pre-settlement.



**GOOD PRACTICE
PRINCIPLES**

**refugee young
people**

UNDERSTANDING

The value of **understanding** involves making an active attempt to learn about what is important for the refugee young person and what their life experiences mean for them.

Understanding requires sensitivity and involves both intellectual and emotional processes. Understanding includes an appreciation of the needs of a refugee young person as well as what the implications are for service delivery – for the service as well as for the individual. Do not expect that refugee young people will "get everything" immediately – settlement is a continuous process. It is critical to recognise the intersection of the following principles when working with refugee young people.

PRINCIPLE 1: To understand and acknowledge the qualities of strength and resilience refugee young people have developed during their journey, and how these qualities developed.

What you can do:

- Focus on the strengths of refugee young people.
- Listen to young people's stories to learn the ways that they have used their strengths to deal with traumatic experiences. Encourage the expression of their story in their own words.
- Find out how refugee young people can have a voice.
- Help refugee young people identify skills and abilities that they have gained as a result of their unique experiences.
- Recognise that refugee young people have similar social, emotional, spiritual and financial needs to those of all young people.
- Develop culturally appropriate programs that bring refugee young people together and foster a sense of belonging eg. Gender based swimming programs, soccer clubs.

PRINCIPLE 2: To understand the importance of being sensitive to the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of young refugee people.

What you can do:

- Develop a working knowledge of refugee experiences by accessing information from lead agencies.
- Provide training on the experiences of refugee young people and settlement issues.
- Provide flexible services to accommodate refugee young people's past and present experiences, ages and life stages.
- Identify the barriers that refugee young people experience in getting access to services and programs, and develop strategies to overcome them.
- Find out what is unique to the refugee young person including family context and culture as refugee young people are a diverse group with different needs and experiences.

PRINCIPLE 3: To understand the issues and circumstances that may affect a refugee young person's sense of well being.

What you can do:

- Avoid making assumptions about the young person's stages of life, roles within the family, and connections to community and religion.
- Understand the way in which differing visa status affects the wellbeing of refugee young people.
- Understand the way in which media depictions, events happening in a young person's country of origin, poverty, and the consequences of formal education policies and practices, income support and employment can affect a refugee young person.
- Develop and maintain a dialogue with refugee young people on a range of issues, not only issues driven by service providers.

PRINCIPLE 4: To understand the best ways to negotiate with the refugee young person's family and community.

What you can do:

- Find out about various roles and responsibilities that a young person may have in their family.
- Find out how decisions are made in the family/community.
- Identify how to engage and build trust with a young person, family and community.
- Balance the refugee young person's need for independence with their family and cultural connections.
- Recognise that the young person may be balancing varying understandings/levels of familiarity with their cultural heritage and community while also having to negotiate their host culture.
- Identify the specific needs of refugee young people who do not have family in Australia or have tenuous connection to their family.

CASE STUDY – UNDERSTANDING

An 18-year-old who had been in Australia for two years was referred to the youth refuge worker at a community centre. The young man was originally from Afghanistan and was on a Temporary Protection Visa. He initially presented with housing concerns.

The worker had previously developed an understanding of the issues relating to the impact of this particular visa status and the way in which the young person may be in Australia without family and/or have no remaining family members.

Housing options needed to be explored in a very sensitive manner. (Principle 3) Prior to a referral being made to a youth refuge, the worker discussed with the young man, his dietary requirements and ensured that halal food would be available at the refuge.

As further housing options were explored, the importance of understanding the young man's need to be located near his community, culturally appropriate food shops and mosque were addressed, in consultation with the young person. (Principle 2)

While he was being supported in addressing his immediate needs, he also began to discuss fears and uncertainty regarding his visa status. Understanding the barriers and consequent impact that the visa had upon him, informed further exploration of options regarding education and employment.

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The worker understood the need to discuss what was available to him in a sensitive manner within the context of his uncertain future and the importance of creating a supportive, trusting 'holding' environment with the young man while these issues were looked at.

Also, assisting the young man to identify his strengths despite such barriers became an important component of the casework. Working at developing informed strategies that addressed barriers to services in consultation with other agencies was further recognised as being a way in which an understanding of issues could become an active part of program and policy development. (Principle 1) Even with the difficulties he faced, he enjoyed learning and was doing well in his studies. He was a keen soccer player too.

TRUST

The organisation is committed to establishing an environment that engenders **trust** from the first point of contact when working with refugee young people.

This value is in recognition of the fact that refugee young people have experienced traumatic life circumstances pre-settlement in Australia where they have felt vulnerable or have experienced loss.

A refugee young person may require support to settle successfully and to deal with the consequences of a traumatic experience such as: the loss of family members, friends or community; witnessing or being the subject of persecution by the military, police or government; or being socially and economically uprooted.

The refugee experience can impact on the capacity to trust; therefore it is important to actively rebuild trust through interactions with the refugee young person.

PRINCIPLE 1: The trustworthy nature of the agency is reinforced in the way in which you provide your service to refugee young people.

What you can do:

- Become aware of appropriate greetings according to age, gender, religion and culture of the refugee young people and their families.
- Maintain confidentiality and be clear about what you plan to do, as this establishes the appropriate conditions for engendering trust.

- Be aware when your support and advocacy may be necessary, even if the refugee young person may not sufficiently trust you to ask for help. Actively engage the young person in what you plan to do.
- Clearly explain what you can and cannot offer the refugee young person by being aware of your organisation's boundaries and climate.
- Build and maintain trust and be clear about the ending of your contract, and ensure that the refugee young person is aware of alternative referral points.
- The receptionist can be the first point of contact for young refugee people who access mainstream services. Ask yourself is your agency "refugee friendly"?

PRINCIPLE 2: The organisation integrates the young person's refugee experience and settlement needs into their service policies and procedures.

What you can do:

- Ensure that the consequences of the refugee experience are included in program planning and resource allocation.
- Ensure that your organisation recognises the connection between the experiences of the refugee young person, their settlement needs and their confidence in the organisation.
- Ensure that the organisation is sensitive to the possibility that the refugee young person may fear authority figures and systems of authority.
- Be aware that refugee young people who are survivors of torture and/or trauma may need time to establish trust.
- Engage the refugee young person in practical activities that build trust and help to break down barriers.

PRINCIPLE 3: When using an interpreter you cannot assume that a climate of trust exists.

What you can do:

- Do not assume that the refugee young person will immediately trust the interpreter. You may have to spend time with the client and interpreter to build a climate of trust.
- Ensure the refugee young person is aware of the interpreter's role and how the session will be conducted.
- Stress the importance of confidentiality as the refugee young person may come from a small community and know the interpreter in a social context.
- Ensure that the interpreter is clear about his or her role and boundaries when communicating with the young person.

PRINCIPLE 4: The organisation offers the refugee young person direct support and advocacy to access relevant services.

What you can do:

- Your organisation should offer the refugee young person practical and active support such as going with the young person to an appointment and introducing them to a service provider.
- Ensure that your organisation recognises that if refugee young people are in a safe/familiar and comfortable environment they are more inclined to trust.
- Your organisation should consider the resource time allocation required to provide direct support and advocacy to a young refugee who may be at risk.
- At the first meeting, ensure that your organisation clearly articulates to the young person (and their family if appropriate) what type of direct support and advocacy your organisation can offer.

PRINCIPLE 5: The organisation acknowledges that refugees belong to a persecuted minority. As newly emerging communities they are at risk due to limited social and family support available to them and any supports they do have may be less developed with minimal or no social infrastructure.

What you can do:

- Ensure that your organisation can identify the specific needs of refugee young people who have arrived in Australia on their own as unaccompanied minors.
- Ensure that your organisation acknowledges that refugee young people are vulnerable to racism and racial vilification, which can undermine their capacity for building a trusting relationship.
- Promote that your organisation supports anti-discrimination laws and does not affiliate with groups or associations that support the persecution of refugees.

CASE STUDY – TRUST

Nyajot was newly arrived from Sudan. I met her at English Language School when I was introduced to her class. She didn't smile much and sat on her own a lot. The teacher raised her concerns with me about Nyajot as she often missed school.

One day when she was sitting by herself watching the others play soccer I went up to her and introduced myself. I asked her what her name was and asked her if I could watch with her. Her English was very limited. She said she liked games. I got out a piece of paper and taught her how to play noughts and crosses. We laughed and laughed.

At the end I asked her if she knew what I did at school. She said no. I explained that I help people with problems at home and if there was anything I could help with, I would be available every Friday. (Principle 4) She said "But I don't speak good English". I told her we could use an interpreter and mimed if she wanted a telephone interpreter or face to face. The following week she was waiting for me when I arrived.

Discussion

As a case manager working with refugee young people and families, it is fundamental to understand how trust works.

Every interaction can contribute to the building of trust but the purpose of your relationship will influence the amount of personal information you need to obtain from them. It's important to create a trusting environment even if you don't need to elicit personal information. (Principle 1)

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Refugee young people and families have all had their trust broken in the past, which makes their 'Trust bank balance' in the red. It is important for workers to spend time building trust with refugee young people. Things that can inhibit trust are: lengthy forms, formal settings, and writing while speaking. Workers within formal services can alleviate this by clearly explaining the functions/roles of the service/workers. For example the worker can explain to the young person why the forms are required or perhaps share their notes with the young person if they need to write during an interview. Another thing that can improve trust is providing a more casual atmosphere. Refugees have often experienced corruption from formal services particularly police, army and governments. If your service appears formal it can create a barrier. (Principle 2)

Workers also can help clients to exhibit trustworthiness. For instance asking clients to contact them if they need to change an appointment. This is building a relationship through reciprocity.

SOCIAL JUSTICE & ACCESS

The value of Social Justice and Access means refugee young people are able to exercise their right to fully participate in mainstream society. Young people are provided with the necessary services and resources to enable them to achieve equitable outcomes. The injustice of the refugee experience is redressed to enable refugee young people to settle and reach their full potential.

Making services and programs fully accessible to, and inclusive of, refugee young people ensures their basic social justice rights are being met. Ensuring access and equity involves breaking down a number of barriers, such as physical, organisational, communication, cultural and personal. It is crucial in breaking down the isolation of refugee young people and connecting them with the support they require. This assists them in rebuilding their lives.

Social Justice and Access are integral to all aspects of service provision: broader policy, cross sector planning, resource allocation, service planning and evaluation, organisational guidelines and procedures, customer service, community work, provision of education and individual care and assistance.

PRINCIPLE 1: Refugee young people have the right to be provided with accurate information that is communicated in a way that is accessible and sensitive to their needs.

Information needs to be communicated in a way that is suitable to their age, gender and cultural and linguistic background. In addition to this, communication and information aspects of services need to be well resourced and allocated appropriately.

What you can do:

- Train staff in effective cross-cultural communication and anti-discrimination issues and techniques.
- Use effective and appropriate language and translation services.
- Use appropriately trained and suitable (in terms of language, ethnicity and gender) interpreters and bi-lingual workers.
- Use appropriate channels for linguistically assisted communication (by phone, in person). Give the refugee young person the option of a telephone interpreter or an on-site interpreter.
- Ensure that your agency, through information and data, has the knowledge of current issues relating to and affecting refugee young people.
- Provide and promote information to refugee young people in appropriate ways and in accessible formats.
- Ensure two-way communication (including consultation), is maintained between relevant agency workers and the refugee young person in the development and implementation of services. When appropriate, involve the young person's parents and community in the communication/consultation process.
- Make young refugee people aware of the limitations of your service.

PRINCIPLE 2: Involve refugee young people in decision-making processes about the planning for, and delivery of services to ensure the agency's practice is informed by them. Ensure that services and programs are delivered in a flexible and appropriate manner, to provide young people with preferred service options and frequency.

This principle acknowledges that refugee young peoples' lives have been profoundly disrupted and that each individual needs personalised assistance in order for equity to be achieved. Service and program design must therefore take into account each person's complex and dynamic needs.

What you can do:

- Encourage refugee young people's participation and provide them with the opportunity to be represented in organisation management or in an advisory level capacity.
- Ensure services are provided at convenient and appropriate locations and at suitable times (eg. after-hours). It is important that refugee young people receive a service in venues where they will feel secure and welcome.
- Consider the need for gender-specific, ethno-specific, faith-specific or other specific services.
- Advocate and establish ways to adequately resource services that meet specific needs of refugee young people. Provide tailored responses.
- Establish methods within the agency to enable training in, and planning for, appropriate and responsive resource allocation.
- Find realistic ways in which young refugee people can actively participate in the decision-making process.

PRINCIPLE 3: Agencies and organisations are committed to working in coordinated and collaborative ways.

This is to ensure that refugee young people do not become disoriented and further destabilised as a result of being assisted in a system where services are uncoordinated and inconsistent. This also ensures that scarce resources are expended in a more planned and efficient manner leading to more equitable service outcomes.

What you can do:

- Develop cooperative relationships with other agencies to ensure that services are provided in a more all-encompassing way, and that secondary consultation and referral protocols are established.
- Establish ways to obtain information and data on the needs of refugee young people and share this with other agencies.
- Encourage inter-agency training and staff support (eg. mentoring) amongst organisations working with and for refugee young people.

- Encourage agencies to work cooperatively and not competitively to overcome funding limitations to continued service delivery. Ensure that resources are shared and targeted to ensure sustained service delivery. Engage agencies in cross-agency and cross-sector advocacy and planning to obtain resources and utilise these resources efficiently.

CASE STUDIES – SOCIAL JUSTICE & ACCESS

Case study 1

WYPIN has had young people on its Committee of Management since 1989, who meet on a monthly basis. Regular consultation and having young people raise their specific issues has made the organisation more responsive and better able to meet young people's needs. (Principle 2) For example, based on this model young people have identified issues such as the need for greater educational assistance. The young people have then spoken with schools, community agencies and local politicians to advocate and establish an after school homework program.

Other examples include the establishment of low cost soccer programs for young men and addressing racism in the community. Young people themselves have also provided cross cultural training to community workers to educate them about working more effectively with refugee and migrant young people.

"When I raise an issue at the COM meeting it is based on my experiences as well as my friends'. It is very positive for me to be able to then take an issue and work with others to look at solutions."
(Eritrean young woman).

Involving young people in decision making is both good for the organisation and empowering for the young people. (Principle 2)

Case Study 2

In the City of Maribyrnong an increasing number of newly arrived young people residing with their families with limited support resulted in the WYPIN and City of Maribyrnong working together to offer an after school service. Combining the resources of the two organisations assisted in advocating and highlighting the needs of these young people. (Principle 3)

After the initial program, other service agencies have combined to offer more programs. Programs for parents have also been introduced.

For more information

You can investigate statistics regarding refugee young people living in Victoria or in your Local Government Area by accessing DIMIA's Settlement database at:

<http://www.settlement.immi.gov.au/settlement/enterSelectReport.do>

You can obtain information regarding multicultural youth issues at:

<http://www.cmyi.net.au>

You can access information regarding survivors of torture and trauma at:

<http://www.survivorsvic.org.au>

You can access information regarding refugee young people and education at:

http://www.immi.gov.au/settle/publications/resource_gateway_2004.htm

Appendix 1

Top 10 Birth Countries of Young Refugees

(Aged 12-26 arriving to Victoria between 01/07/2001 & 30/05/2005)³

Top Ten Birth Countries (ABS)	FINANCIAL YEAR OF VISA ISSUE							
	2001-2002		2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005	
	Number	% of whole intake ⁴	Number	% of whole intake	Number	% of whole intake	Number	% of whole intake
FMR YUGOSLAVIA	138	20.4%	92	9.6%	49	4.7%	24	2%
BOSNIA-HERZEG'NA	24	3.5%	9	0.9%	3	0.2%	-	-
CROATIA	33	4.8%	30	3.1%	8	0.7%	-	-
INDONESIA	3	0.4%	-	-	45	4.3%	7	0.6%
BURMA	11	1.6%	1	0.1%	9	0.8%	23	1.9%
TURKEY	15	2.2%	25	2.6%	4	0.3%	-	-
IRAN	14	2.1%	22	2.3%	46	4.4%	57	4.8%
IRAQ	87	12.8%	203	21.2%	115	11%	108	9.2%
SUDAN	114	16.8%	308	32.2%	474	45.6%	594	50.6%
AFGHANISTAN	6	8.6%	58	12.2%	117	13.5%	141	14.2%
SOMALIA	43	6.4%	27	2.3%	35	3.3%	17	1.4%
ERITREA	22	3.3%	16	1.7%	16	1.5%	11	0.9%
ETHIOPIA	56	8.3%	64	6.7%	59	5.7%	58	4.9%

³ Includes those whose applications were processed onshore. The above figures have been extracted from DIMIA's Settlement Database (SDB). While the SDB collects information from a range of sources, there are limitations in that it does not capture information on internal migrations (where people have moved interstate for example). Age groups were calculated at date of arrival, or at date of visa issue for those applications processed onshore.

⁴ Percentages calculated on whole intake for the financial year. Countries listed are top ten for arrivals for each year. Therefore percentages listed will add to less than 100%.

The Victorian Settlement Planning Committee is grateful to the working group members who have contributed efforts and expertise to the development of this *Good Practice Principles* guide.

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- Department of Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs (Secretariat)
- Centrelink - Multicultural Services
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
- Springvale Community Aid & Advice Bureau
- Dianella Community Health
- Ecumenical Migration Centre
- Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities
- Darebin Youth Services
- Western Young People's Independent Network

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refugee young people



Department of Social Services
Department of Immigration and
Multicultural Affairs



Centre for
Multicultural Community Affairs

