



Filling the Gap

Discussion Paper



Filling the Gap

Authored by:

Paula Chegwiddden and Amanda Thompson

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Granville Multicultural Community Centre
8 Factory St
Granville NSW 2142

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Filling the Gap



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Filling the Gap

“Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested”.
African proverb

Executive Summary

Young people who come to Australia, as refugee and humanitarian entrants are experiencing difficulty when transitioning from intensive English Centre to mainstream high school. The Filling the Gap project was developed from this observation by NAYSS caseworkers and other community workers/educational support staff.

This paper argues that the recent cohort of refugee young people have more complex needs than previous groups. These are a result of little or no prior schooling and torture and trauma experiences. Inadequate resources are available to support these students during and post transition from IEC to mainstream education. This paper recommends that refugee young people be given more time to attend the supportive environment of IEC, and that their exit be determined by an agreed measure of English proficiency.

Filling the Gap encompassed a qualitative research component and a participatory photography project. The photography project enabled young people to participate through recording their experiences of school through still images, as interviewing young people proved a challenge due to issues such as trust, familiarity and language barriers.

Granville Multicultural Community Centre and Auburn Youth Centre conducted the project. These two organisations have a partnership to provide the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service in the Parramatta and Auburn areas. NAYSS is a federal government initiative which provides support to young people, predominantly refugees who have been in Australia for less than five years, and who experience difficulties with education, training, employment, housing and family breakdown.

Refugee young people and their families want to succeed at school, and value the opportunities available in Australia. These young people have dreams as all young people do, and want to succeed. A common finding from this report is that young people wish to succeed in Australia so they can return to their country of origin to help out, or send money.

Learning English in Australia is an essential skill to be able to succeed in both education and employment. Filling

the Gap found that the needs of refugee young people are complex and have a significant impact on their ability to learn English and succeed at school. The resources to support newly arrived young people, and in particular refugees from African backgrounds are inadequate.

While more support is required for students in building their language skills, refugee students also need support with the other complex issues. These include torture trauma, family breakdown, and finding their place within their families and Australian society. All young people struggle with adolescence, but refugee young people face the additional challenges of their settlement and at times their families' settlement. Teachers, youth workers and other support workers need training to be able to understand the challenges that refugee young people are facing, so they are better able to support the young people they are working with.

The aim of this paper is to raise awareness and create discussion of the complexity of issues facing young people from refugee background within an educational context, and encourage policy makers and service providers to reflect on the programs and services developed to assist refugee young people. While there are new programs being trialled and piloted which provide these services, these programs need to be funded as ongoing programs and expanded, to ensure that refugee young people have the same opportunities to education and employment that young people have a right to.

Nyegeng Dut (15yrs)



I chose this photo because when I was at school I walked this street every single time. I used to sit next to the gate and wait till 3:30 with friends for my little brothers to come from school. This is a good memory for me. Now I don't go to school, I go to TAFE.

Introduction

Learning English is an essential skill for migrants and refugees who come to Australia. English is the key to education, employment and participation in broader Australian society. In acknowledgement of this there are a wide range of programs to assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to learn English.

For newly arrived young people, English is the key to success at school.

Education for all is a right set down in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 – ‘Everyone has the right to education...’ (UN 1948). This paper looks at the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds, particularly those from African countries. For many, their first experience of school is an Intensive English Centre.

Newly arrived young people that GMCC NAYSS program has encountered since its inception two and half years ago, have complex needs including dealing with torture and trauma, needing to learn English, needing to learn how to be at school, and needing to make up for the time they have missed out on education in their country of origin and through their refugee experience. We argue in this paper that the current supports for this group are inadequate to address this issue and achieve the students potential for lifelong learning.

John Kuot (17yrs)



I used my school stuff to show how it kind of fit in with the journey of life. To me education is the passport to a better future.

Background

Filling the Gap is a research project on newly arrived young people's experience of transition from Intensive English Centre to mainstream education. This project was conducted as a part of Granville Multicultural Community Centre's (GMCC) Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS), funded by the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

GMCC provides NAYSS in partnership with Auburn Youth Centre and works across the Parramatta and Auburn Local Government areas. NAYSS targets newly arrived young people aged 12 to 21 years that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The project aims to improve engagement of newly arrived young people with family, home, education, training and work.

The NAYSS initiative is focused on refugee and humanitarian entrants, and programs have been funded by FaHCSIA in locations where the Dept. Immigration and Citizenship statistics have identified that high numbers of refugee young people have settled.

Australia has experienced a number of migration 'waves' from a variety of regions, this migration has built Australia's multicultural identity. The most recent 'wave' is coming from Africa.

the communities coming from Africa are challenging governments, service providers and communities.

The NAYSS clients are mostly from Sierra Leone, Sudan and Liberia and a small number of clients in Auburn are from Afghanistan and Iraq.

The GMCC NAYSS program identified a disproportionate number of clients who were experiencing challenges during and post transition from Intensive English Centre (IEC) to mainstream education. Too many clients were being referred to NAYSS at the point of transition that did not have the literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them the same opportunities as other students.

A Community Reference Group meets with the NAYSS program quarterly. It is made up of other local service providers who also work with the NAYSS target group, including representatives from the local Catholic high schools, DET, TAFE, Juvenile Justice and Centrelink and is lead by GMCC as the project auspice. The issue of transition was discussed with the Community Reference Group (CRG), and together it was decided a research project would be carried out, along with a participatory project to engage young people in the process.

NAYSS has a strong focus on Action Research. The action research process of observe, reflect, plan and act is incorporated into all aspects of the NAYSS program – from work with individual clients to the overall program. The CRG agreed that the issue of transition from IEC to mainstream warranted a more formal research process, fitted with the aims and objectives of the NAYSS initiative, and would benefit both the communities and young people.

Filling the Gap was designed to further explore the issue of transition, attempt

to identify some best practice models, and to raise awareness of the experiences of the refugee young people we were working with. The CRG, GMCC and AYC were aware that this issue is bigger and requires a more comprehensive response than our joint agencies were able to provide. Through this discussion paper, we hope to share our learning and experiences on this issue and generate discussion.

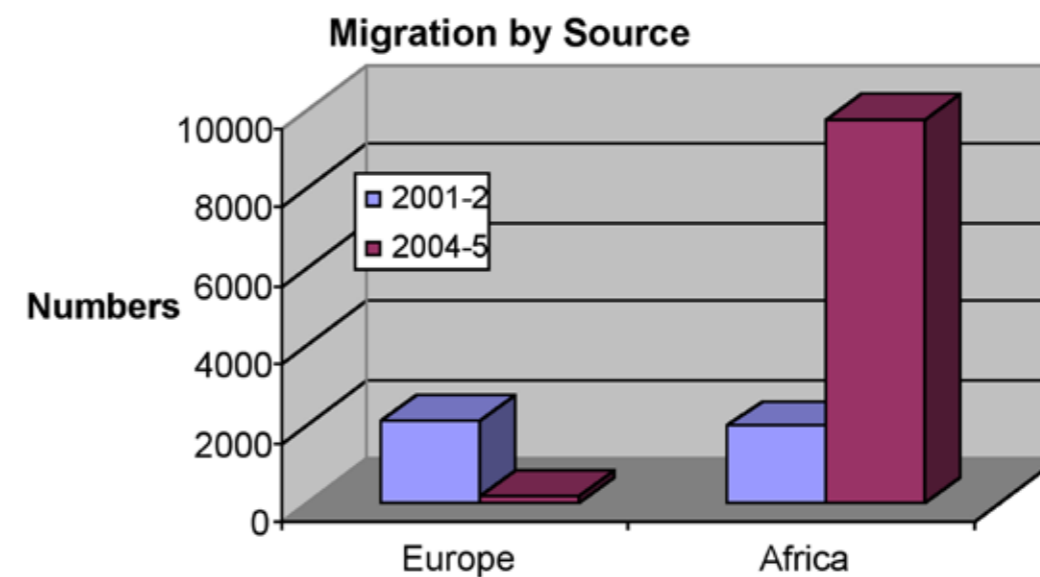


Figure 1: In 2001-2002 there were 2127 humanitarian entrants from Europe, and 1957 from Africa. In 2004-2005 there were 188 humanitarian entrants from Europe and 9762 from Africa, making up a total of 74% of the humanitarian program (CRC, 2006:87). Approximately 50% of the refugees who arrived in NSW during the past 5 years were under 25 years old (DET Presentation, June 2008). This recent shift, and the complex needs of

The methodology used for this project was influenced by a number of factors. These included the time available to undertake the research, the subject matter, and that a key component of the NAYSS initiative is Action Research. More traditional methodologies for research were used in addition to action research, including qualitative data collection and a literature review. Through the course of the project the methodology was adapted to fit with the changing circumstances.

Initial elements identified included participation by the young people, the work being done within the Catholic school system, and some discussion of best practice models. The CRG, and links to the Catholic school system, allowed their data and models to be included in the project.

The initial timeframe for the project was two months. However, due to a range of circumstances, the time frame was extended to four months, though it is acknowledged that this timeframe for such a paper is still very short.

In the project design we were keen to find a mechanism to enable the young people who had inspired this research to participate and have their experiences included in the project. A photography project was planned, with the aim of giving the target group an opportunity to photograph their experience of transition. The results of the photography project compliment the paper, giving young people a voice within a more formal discussion paper.

Project Staff

This project was undertaken by a group of people with different roles and skills. The roles and skills of the individuals involved influenced their contributions, and the components of the project they worked on. For this reason, the different roles within the project are outlined below:

Researcher

An external researcher was engaged to assist with components of the project. The researcher undertook interviews with clients and other stakeholders.

NAYSS Project Workers

At the beginning of the project, there was a NAYSS project worker based at Auburn, and a second based at Granville. Both staff are employed by GMCC. Early in the project, the worker based at Auburn resigned, and was not able to continue with their involvement in the project. Also in the early stages of the project, there was a casual NAYSS worker employed, who assisted with the photography component of the project. The worker at Granville was instrumental in data collection and

discussion components of the project, and together with the GMCC Manager, wrote the project report.

Photography Facilitator

A facilitator was engaged to assist with the photography component of the project.

GMCC Manager

The GMCC Manager oversaw the project, and worked with the Granville NAYSS worker on preparing the project report.

AYC Executive Officer

The AYC Executive Officer was involved in the final write up and editing of the paper.

Write up of the project was done outside each person's normal workload.

NAYSS Community Reference Group

The NAYSS CRG are stakeholders who work with the NAYSS target group. The group assisted with information, statistics, and participated in interviews for the data collection component of the project. Members of the CRG also commented on the draft of the report. Both GMCC and AYC managers would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Community Reference Group members.

Action Research

Action research is a feature of the NAYSS project, and is used in the project work on a daily basis. In the context of NAYSS, Action Research is

:"... A participatory, collaborative approach to service delivery that combines action with research and evaluation.... Action research is a key methodology employed by the NAYSS initiative." (www.cmyi.net.au/NAYSS/ActionResearch, accessed 24 July 2008)

Action Research is a cycle of observe, reflect, act (Bulmer, 1977; Huba and Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 1990; Wadsworth, 1997; Colombo, 2003), and is a key methodology employed by the NAYSS initiative. It was through action research that it was identified that there were a number of NAYSS clients who were facing challenges in transitioning from IEC to mainstream high schools. This observation was discussed with the Community Reference Group, and it was agreed to do a more formal research project into this question.

Focus on African refugee and humanitarian entrants

The target of this research project was defined by the

NAYSS project, and the clients that the project works with.

Initially the project broadly looked at the experience of these newly arrived young people and their experiences of transition from IEC to mainstream schools. During the early stages it became clear a focus was forming on young people from African backgrounds. This was acknowledged and justified by the literature review that identified refugees and humanitarian entrants from African countries were experiencing challenges with school and language acquisition in all age groups.

There was concern about focusing this research on the experience of African refugee and humanitarian entrants, as a resistance to further marginalise young people from African background is maintained.

Some contact with clients from Afghanistan and Iraq who were also experiencing challenges in transitioning from IEC to mainstream education occurred, though they were in smaller numbers than the clients from Africa. Thus while the focus of the project was on African students, it is not exclusive; Afghani and Iraqi participants were also involved in interviews and the photography project.

It is acknowledged that concern exists in the sector about using the term 'African', when talking about people from this continent. We use this term acknowledging the diversity of communities coming from Africa. Clients and communities we work with use this term and have supported our decision.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection methods were used for this project with the exception of some statistical analysis of arrival numbers and school enrolments.

Semi structured and unstructured interviews with clients, young people, and other service providers were the main tool used. Interviews were recorded by notes only as time constraints prevented transcripts being developed of taped interviews.

Data collection methods evolved through the project. Initially, the researcher who was unknown to the young people conducted semi structured interviews with a number of young people on an individual basis. The researcher found that the young people were reluctant to discuss their experiences in an open manner. On reflection, causes for this were identified as trust issues relating to having an unknown authority figure with a pen and paper asking questions about the young person and his/her experience.

The researcher was able to gather more data from workers who were working with the target group, and

knew of the young people's experience of transition. These workers included youth workers, staff from Migrant Resource Centres, teachers and other education support staff. The Granville NAYSS project worker also conducted further interviews. Interviews with workers were often conducted over the phone, and notes of interviews were prepared and approved by the interviewee.

Working through a secondary source is a useful data collection technique as the young people targeted for this research are a vulnerable target group, often with histories of torture and trauma. Although the data may be tainted through second hand accounts this technique reduces any possible risk of harm from interviewing young people directly. The data gathered from these workers also expanded on the data gathered through more informal methods directly with young people.

To overcome the reluctance of young people to speak with the researcher, the data collection strategy was changed. The NAYSS project worker conducted unstructured interviews with young people as opportunities arose. The project worker in most cases was known to the young person, and the interviews were often conducted while undertaking other activities – playing pool, during the photography project or sitting on computers doing homework or using Bebo (Social Networking Website). Appointments were not made for interviews.

Notes were not taken during these unstructured interviews, which was useful in building trust, however the project worker had to rely on their memory after the interview to write up the notes, and this resulted in some data being lost.

This data collection technique also meant that some of the young people who were interviewed for the project were not fully informed on the purpose of interview or the research, and data on participants country of origin, cultural background, gender and particularly age were not verified from paper records. Statistics have been sourced from other areas, and the focus of the interviews was to gather qualitative data and the experiences of the young people.

While we acknowledge that the data collection method has limitations we believe it was an appropriate methodology to use with this target group.

Sampling

Participants for the project were chosen initially from our client group, and then snowballing was used to expand the sample. This meant that during interviews with participants, they were asked if they knew friends or relatives who had been through IEC, and if we could

talk to them. Convenience sampling was also utilised via soft entry points, such as drop in at the local youth centre where project staff would approach young people who were present, asking if the young person had been to IEC. This resulted in a proportion of the sample group being quite widely drawn to include refugee young people not within the vulnerable NAYSS client group.

The sample group was over represented by young men making up majority of young people participating. This is a clear result of using the youth centre as a sampling location, as the youth centre is accessed by more males than females - possibly associated with cultural/religious norms of the client base.

Participation

The participation of young people in this project was crucial to its success. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People assert that participation is not just about giving young people a say, but also listening to them. (NSW CCYP, 2001:3).

The photography project was a key component of the project in engaging participation. Young people who were existing and past clients of the NAYSS project in both Auburn and Granville along with a number of young people known by other key workers to have attended IEC were recruited to participate in a photography project. The photography element of this project aimed to document young people's experience of transition through still images, whilst facilitating education around photography.

The photography project maintained a strong action research focus and as such changed and developed along the way. Through three action research cycles (see Appendix) the project evolved to include 10 young people receiving show bags containing a folder of photography tips, a disposable camera and a brief to take picture of "what does school mean to me?"

The young people engaged for the project were from various countries of origin, 5 participants identified Sierra Leone as their country of origin, 3 Sudanese and 1 Afghanistan. 8 participants were male and 2 female, all aged between 14 and 18.

Cameras were returned to the project worker and photos developed. During the school holidays a two hour workshop was held for participants to come, pick their favourite photo/s for the exhibition and write a commentary on the photograph. Participants who completed the workshops received movie vouchers for their time. 9 out of the 10 participants engaged completed the project.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with participants throughout the photography project, particularly during the final workshop to compliment the visual documentation made within the photographs.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the main data analysis tool used for this project. Main themes were identified from interviews and the literature review. These themes were further developed into sub themes during the course of data collection.

This mechanism for analysis was deemed most appropriate given the overall methodology was qualitative and the data being collected was subjective in nature. A series of recommendations were developed in response to the findings of interviews and literature review, a number of which support recommendations made in other reports.

Abdullah Mutadi (14 yrs)



I took this picture because I think school for me is a place that goes on and on. The more deep you think about it, the more you know and learn. You can never get to its end.

Akuien Agang (18yrs)



This photo shows me catching the train to school. Everyday I catching the train from Lidcombe to Granville. The first thing I read and music. When I took this photo I was thinking about the train map and how it weaves, school is like this to me.

This review examines six key themes identified throughout the literature. Through describing the characteristics and experiences of the cohort of interest, namely young refugees from Africa this review examines what is required to support these young people to make their transition from IEC to mainstream education a fruitful one.

Issues faced by refugee young people

The issues facing the most recent group of refugee young people are more complex than previous refugee groups to Australia. A number of articles undertook some level of statistical analysis of migration data to Australia in recent years, demonstrating that the predominant refugee group was coming from Africa and confirming their complex needs (Cassity and Gow, 2005, Vickers, 2007, Community Relations Commission, 2006). Both the complexity of needs, and the increase in refugees from Africa match with our experience.

Brough et al., 2003, identify a range of factors, which have contributed to the complexity of needs faced by African refugee young people, including:

- Disrupted education
- Experience of torture and trauma
- Experience of war and conflict in country of origin, and for some young refugees, on their journeys
- Diversity of the communities coming from Africa
- For some, long term residence in refugee camps

The complexity of these factors has a significant impact on the ability of the latest wave of refugees to successfully settle in Australia, and a number of the articles looked at the strategies that refugee young people were using to overcome these challenges (Brough et al., 2003; Kirk and Cassity, 2007). Some of these strategies included support from friends, and support from schools. School was seen by some young refugees and by some authors as a place of security and safety (Cassity and Gow, 2005; Kirk and Cassity, 2007).

Experience of torture and trauma

For young people in western societies such as Australia, adolescence is described as a time of turmoil and experimentation. Adolescence is framed in developmental psychology terms as when a person develops an identity and explores boundaries within society. High school is a central and common experience for majority of western adolescents and remains a place not only for education but also for exploration and growth.

Aroche & Coello (1994) discuss the complex interaction between problems associated with the aftermath of traumatic experiences in the context of organised violence, the problems related to the exile, migration

and resettlement processes, and the trials and difficulties that are part and parcel of the human life cycle (cited: Thompson 2007)

Along with the tumultuous mix of adolescence and settlement, young people from refugee backgrounds have been exposed to traumatic incidents as a result of war in their home country and the migration experience, including first country of asylum and travel to Australia. These traumatic incidents can include losing loved ones such as parents; watching parents being intimidated and tortured or spending several years in refugee camps fighting for survival.

"45% of refugees have lived in a refugee camp for more than 5 years, with 32% living in camps for more than 10 years" (DET, 2008).

Prior to 2002, Sierra Leone experienced civil war for eleven years. Sudan, and in particular Southern Sudan, has experienced civil war since 1983, and despite a peace agreement in 2005, the war continues. Liberia has experienced two civil wars between 1989 and 2003. These countries are in the top ten countries of birth for offshore visa grants for refugee and humanitarian entrants (Burgoyne and Hull, 2007: 54). This demonstrates that the majority of refugee and humanitarian entrants who have arrived in Australia in the past five years have experienced torture and trauma due to the situations in their countries of origin.

Although refugee children and young people are generally considered resilient, their experiences can also make them vulnerable and may result in difficulties adjusting to Australian society and leading a 'normal' life. Despite this, with a bit of support they can learn to adapt to their new environment and enjoy life again (VFTS, 1996 cited: Thompson, 2007).

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (1996:89) state young people are most susceptible to internalise the way they are treated. When these young people are being exposed to state based terrorism and violence the effects are immense, despite individual resilience (Cited: Thompson, 2007).

Social isolation and cultural dislocation are compounded by resettlement. When individuals and families are settling in Australia isolation is a serious issue, as barriers such as language and geography exist along with the effects of enforced distrust and fear resulting from the trauma of war.

Some issues young people may experience as a result of torture and / or trauma are best understood when broken down into three main categories; physical, psychological and social.

Some physical effects experienced are sleep disturbances, inability to concentrate, excessive crying, screaming, trembling along with physical ailments such as poorly healed broken bones. Some psychological effects may include fear and anxiety, depression or aggression and nightmares. Social effects of trauma are endemic, social isolation through withdrawing; truancy, acting out, and difficulty making friends are common experiences for refugee young people. Drug and alcohol misuse can also be an effect of torture and trauma on young people.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition that develops as a result of an extreme traumatic stressor, the condition is characterised by re-experiencing the event, increased arousal, and numbed general responsiveness (DSMIV, 2000 cited: Thompson 2007).

A longitudinal study identified PTSD rates of 74% upon refugees' initial arrivals in the US. These rates lingered one year after resettlement at 44%. (Weine, 1998)

Some symptoms of PTSD may include intrusive recollections, traumatic dreams, psychological numbing, avoidance of thoughts/feelings/situations associated with trauma, reduced interest in usual activities, feelings of detachment, restricted emotions, memory loss, increased irritability, difficulty in concentrating, hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle response, guilt, worry and fear. (STARTTS, 2007)

Experience of Education

The experience of education prior to coming to Australia for many refugee young people has been disrupted. The Community Relations Commission Report into African settlement states that literacy rates in refugee populations have dropped significantly in recently years, and the number of years of schooling prior to arrival has also significantly dropped - *"The average years of schooling for African people declined from 5.2 years in 2003-2004 to 1.6 years in 2004-2005."* (DIAC quoted in CRC 2006:107).

As a result of these civil conflicts, educational systems may be disrupted. Schools are either shut or not safe, and communities move from one area to another to find safety. Some people go to refugee camps, some of which are established with schools. It is in these refugee camps that many young people have their first experience of education. For students who have left their country of origin into a country of asylum, education in the refugee camps are run by non government organizations, and usually in a different language to the student's first language. Cassity and Gow (2006:53) note that safety is an issue for schooling in refugee camps, particularly for young women and girls. In addition to education being

unavailable, young people living in situations of conflict have to deal with issues of torture and trauma discussed above, malnutrition and disease.

Despite the war, some countries had education available to some, however it was only to primary level such as year 5/6, and poorly resourced, with large class sizes and inadequate basic resources such as books, chalk and blackboards (Burgoyne and Hull, 2007:72). Stories have been relayed from students who have been in classes of 60 to 100 children, under a tree, learning in a second language. There are also differences in the understanding of the purpose of education. In southern Sudan, the expectation of education is that it will teach the religious ideas and moral values of the Koran, teachers do not need to be qualified to teach and school is not compulsory (Burgoyne and Hull, 2007: 73-74). This is considerably different to a western expectation of education.

The result of disrupted education and reduced literacy is that some students have never participated in a formal education system, and so when they arrive at school in Australia for the first time they need to be taught to hold a pen, and participate in class in a socially acceptable way by sitting still, listening and other basic pre literacy skills. For teachers not trained in ESL or the refugee experience, supporting students with these basic pre-literacy skills, and dealing with students who do not have the expected conflict resolution skills can be very challenging (DET in CRC 2006:104).

The 2006 submission to DIAC, 'Need for Increased Support in NSW State Schools' prepared by the Ethnic Communities Council has a detailed and referenced discussion of the length of time it takes to gain proficiency in English. The submission cites work by Jim Cummins (1980) who coined the terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins found that it takes most students about two years to learn sufficient English to participate in social situations but it typically takes five to seven years to acquire the academic language to successfully participate in mainstream content classrooms. See also DIMI, 2003 'Statistical Focus' paper.

Language learning is continuous, beginning in an IEC and continuing into high school where students, with ESL teaching support, can access mainstream content learning. However refugee students who have experienced severely disrupted schooling will require intensive English support over a longer time before transferring to high school. Research shows that ESL students with minimal or disrupted schooling can take up to 10 years to achieve a level where they have equivalent English to their peers. (Collier, 1989)

School counsellors reported teachers sending students from refugee background to them for IQ and Cognitive testing, however low IQ is not the explanation for poor results at school. Torture trauma issues, poor language, literacy and numeracy skills as a direct result of a lack of prior education are the reason young people from refugee background are struggling. IEC can give students some English language and social learning skills, but cannot make up for 7 or 9 years of lost schooling.

Inadequate resources

More resources are required. This was particularly identified in the areas of English language provision and support. Both Vickers, 2007, and the CRC report 2006, undertake an analysis of the funding of English language support programs such as IEC and ESL, and public education in general.

There is consensus on the issue of inadequate funding for ESL programs including IECs; additional ESL teachers are required. In particular, mainstream schools are inadequately resourced to provide the required support or assistance to African refugee students (Gavrielatos, 2006). Recommendation 19 of the Report of the Community Relations Commission (CRC) Investigation into African Humanitarian Settlement in NSW 2006 proposed:

'That the Australian Government increase support to the NSW Government to address current inequalities in funding for intensive English provision for school-aged new arrivals.'

Vickers (2007) makes an argument that public schools are educating a higher proportion of 'high cost' students – students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, refugees, students with disabilities, and students from low-socio-economic families, than non-government schools are. The current funding policy – Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC) would need to be significantly changed to enable public education to receive the funding it needs to educate these 'high cost' students, without a significant amount of money being directed to non-government schools.

The STARTTS, 2008 submission on the 2008-09 migrant intake makes a note regarding young refugees as; "There is a need for early intervention and prevention programs that target newly arrived young refugees, who are at risk of developing mental health and behavioural problems, and may be at risk of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. There is a need for improved and better coordinated support for children and young people, who may have been traumatised themselves or who are suffering from secondary traumatisation. This should occur through inter-agency partnerships that

involve both specialised mental health services, the school system and youth services." They also make a point that adequate training of the service providers is required, including cultural competence training.

Argy (2007), suggests that "Longitudinal studies across the world indicate that education success rates at school and post-school are in good part determined by social class origin – in particular parents' wealth, occupational status, education and aspirations. Education inequality then flows to employment inequality."

Research studies are showing that government initiatives to improve transitions from school and adult learning outcomes can yield big gains in workforce participation and hence higher incomes per capita and that completing year 12 in Australia can greatly reduce the risk of unemployment

Where we lag behind most other developed countries is not in average standards but in levels of education access by the more disadvantaged. The differences in academic performance between our highest and lowest performing students (and even between the lowest and the median) are large in Australia and more dependent on the influence of class, family and social background than in many other countries such as Canada, Ireland, Austria, Korea, Finland and other Scandinavian countries.

Importance of Relationships

Relationships are important in assisting refugee young people to achieve their potential at school. Most refugee students reported the support and assistance provided through the IEC system to be helpful, and that once they reached mainstream education, they needed to find alternate support systems to enable them to cope in this environment (Cassity and Gow 2005, 2006). Of significant note is that Cassity and Gow found that young refugee students reported that the transition from IEC to mainstream education was the most difficult transition they had made since arriving in Australia.

Relationships between students and their teachers were described as important, as were relationships with parents and refugee communities. This was noted as challenging, as parents and refugee communities struggle with their own settlement issues, language barriers, and often their own limited experience of school. For some parents engaging with their child's high school can be confusing, given that students have a different teacher for each subject. (Cassity and Gow, 2005).

Another challenge for students was in negotiating the requirements of education with the expectations to help out at home with family responsibilities. For some students, this was particularly difficult when family

Current Situation

members were not coping with settlement or have mental health issues (Brough et al., 2003).

Difference in oral languages and written languages

One of the most limited areas of discussion in the articles reviewed was in the difference between oral based languages and visual / written languages. Some articles did not note this challenge at all (Brough et al., 2003; Couch, 2007), while other articles noted this issue very briefly (Cassidy and Gow, 2005). Burgoyne and Hull (2007) have the most developed discussion on the issue of oral and written languages, though most of their work is quoting Nicholas and Williams (2003). Children living in a culture dominated by a visual / written language, build pre-literacy skills such as holding a pen and understanding the significance of symbols, whereas a child growing up in a culture where oral / aural language is valued would have no need for such pre-literacy skills. This area requires further research to understand better the impact that this issue has on learning by African refugees, many of who come from oral based cultures.

Many of the cultures in Africa are oral based, and highly value the oral tradition (Burgoyne and Hull, 2007: 77). While the literature review found little discussion on this issue, and the development of pre-literacy skills, our data would suggest that this area requires more detailed research in order to develop educational strategies to support refugees who come from oral based cultures. This finding is further evidenced by DET's own research priorities document for 2008, identifying the question: "How should the specific needs of new arrivals and refugee students be best addressed?" (DET Research Priorities document, accessed 29 July 2008).

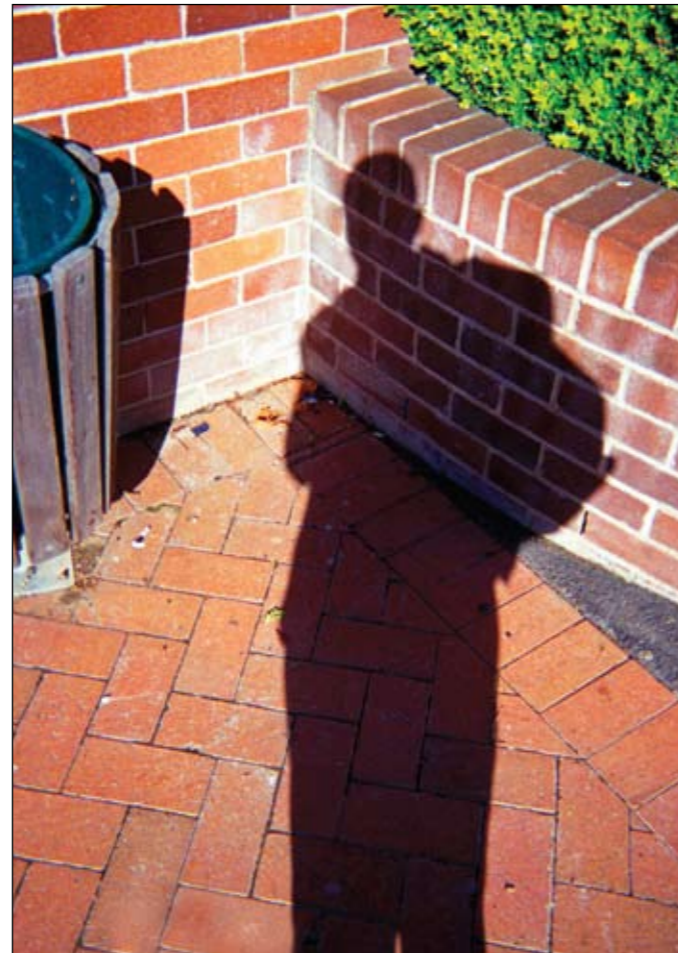
Individuals that are literate in their first language find it easier to learn a second language and become literate in that second language at a quicker rate (Rousseau et al. 1996). However communities that come from Oral traditions such as Somalia have no concept of literacy therefore find it extremely difficult to reach a level of language, literacy and numeracy required to complete high school successfully. In 2002/3 27% of refugees settling in NSW in the last five years stated they could read their first language well compared to 7% in 2005/6 (DET Presentation, June 2008).

Conclusion

The literature demonstrates that there are a small number of academics looking at the issues of refugee young people, and fewer still looking at this group in regard to education. A number of common themes can be identified. These include the complexity of issues facing refugee young people; inadequate resources available to support them; oral cultural backgrounds

and the importance of relationships in assisting young people achieve success at school. The literature available on the subject was limited, and focused on a small number of research projects and submissions to various reports and inquiries. It is acknowledged that some have critiqued the Community relations Report cited in this report, however this report has quoted only submissions made to that report.

John Kuot (17yrs)



I took this photo because it portrays how life is like and what type of objects you need to get through to have a complete life. When you are in school to me it means you are still invisible. If you build your life (like the bricks represent) you will be happy and visible. There is a wall to get over to have a complete life.

Intensive English Centres are run by the NSW Department of Education to provide newly arrived students whose first language is not English with intensive English tuition, preparing them for high school. To be eligible, young people must be permanent residents, or an approved temporary resident, enrol within six months of arrival, not have completed high school in their country of origin, and intend to continue their education in a government school. (YAPA Fact Sheet – IEC, accessed 26 July 2008).

The Catholic Dioceses of Parramatta and Sydney run similar centres within their education departments. Eligibility for enrolment is in line with government IECs.

Of the 2259 young people enrolled in Government Intensive English Centres across NSW in 2007 some 648 were refugees, and 721 were students the NSW Department of Education and Training identified as having refugee like experiences (DET, 2008). The top five countries of origin for students enrolled in IECs in 2007 were China followed by Afghanistan, Korea, Vietnam and Sudan. The Catholic Intensive English Centre system in Sydney is divided into two areas, Parramatta Diocese and Sydney Diocese. Both Dioceses are represented in the area covered by this NAYSS project. Approximately 80 enrolments were accepted in 2007 within the Parramatta Diocese and Sydney diocese received 98 enrolments, 37% of students were on refugee or humanitarian visas.

There are 14 Government Intensive English Centre's within Sydney and Wollongong, along with one Intensive English High School. There are two Catholic Intensive English Centres, one in Parramatta Diocese and one in Sydney Diocese.

A range of personnel and programs support students in IECs including refugees with high support needs. Counsellors/support staff in IECs provide welfare programs and support to assist students to settle into their new learning environment and to feel safe and secure. Using the IEC Curriculum Framework, an outcomes-based language curriculum, IEC teachers develop the language and literacy skills of a range of ESL students with varying levels of English proficiency, schooling and literacy. Bilingual school officers provide key classroom and settlement support.

When these students transfer to high school after completing their IEC course, they continue to receive ESL support to assist them to meet the challenges of the high school curriculum. It is in this transition stage that students, in particular refugee students are most vulnerable and require targeted transition support programs.

Young people aged between 18 and 25 are generally not able to enrol in Intensive English Centres as the students enrolling must have the intention of continuing education within the public education system on completion of an intensive English program (DET, 2004).

One senior college in Sydney accepts young people over the age of 18 to its college campus as well as newly arrived eligible young people over the age of 18 to the Intensive English Centre. Students enrolling in this program must be over 15 years of age. (Khattar, 2008).

In government IECs, students classified as Special Needs include those with little or no schooling, physical disability and those who have experienced trauma. Such students may stay in an IEC for up to 45 weeks with an additional 10 weeks extension for students such as refugees with high support needs. In total these students may stay for up to 55 weeks before exiting the IEC.

Prior to 2008 the Australian government provided per capita funding for each eligible migrant or refugee student to cover 6 months intensive English tuition attending government schools.

There was no additional provision for refugee students with significant needs resulting from experiences that included minimal schooling and trauma. The CRC Report noted that it has been estimated that intensive English support for refugee students should be at least three times the amount currently provided by the Commonwealth Government (2006).

In 2008 the Australian Government has doubled the per capita payment for refugee students attending government IEC to cover 12 months intensive English provision. However the increased funding for refugee students is still less than the estimated triple funding amount required. The cost of providing additional intensive English in an IEC is met by the NSW Government and is based on the needs of each student for a period up to 55 weeks. Assessment of a student's level of language proficiency, previous education, literacy skills and welfare and settlement needs are all factors in determining a student's level of need.

Sydney Catholic IEC reports that students from refugee backgrounds usually remain in the Centre for 50 weeks. Additionally, the Catholic Education Office Sydney established the Literacy Transition Program (LTP) in February 2007 at the Catholic Intensive English Centre (CIEC).

The LTP is a new literacy transition program developed to address the needs of Sudanese students entering secondary schools who were considered 'at risk' because

of a background of trauma and interrupted schooling. The program is for Year 6 students who have been in the country for less than two years, and are entering Year 7. Students are who are accepted into the program are able to spend a year in CIEC between year 6 and year 7. Evaluation of the 2007 program found that particular features of the LTP such as the small class size, the use of a specially designed curriculum, teachers' responsiveness to students' learning styles, integration of language with content and explicit teaching of English language, literacy and learning skills resulted in students progressing in the ESL scales.

Catholic Education, Parramatta Diocese provides the only IEC in Sydney that does not limit a student's stay. Students attending Parramatta Catholic IEC are not subject to mandatory exit after a maximum of 40 or 50 weeks. Nineteen percent of students that exited Parramatta Catholic IEC during the period 2006 to present stayed over two years or 80 weeks, along with two percent of students that remained in IEC over three years or 120 weeks. Without time limits students would be able to transition on to high school based on competency, not time limits.

Alternative pathways to Intensive English Centres are available for young people to learn English since any legal obligation for enrolment in high school ceases at age 15 in NSW. Options such as Adult Migrant English Program's are available for people aged over 15 years.

Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is a federally funded program that encompasses 250 locations Australia wide. AMEP teaches migrants and refugees basic level English through a minimum of 510 hours (Dept. Immigration, 2008). According to the Australian Centre for Languages (ACL), a leading and local provider of AMEP, refugee and humanitarian entrants under 25 who have had disrupted schooling are eligible for up to 910 hours training (ACL, www.acl.gov.nsw.au accessed 13th July 2008).

The number of young people who choose these options when eligible for IEC however are minimal. ACL reported in an interview for this report that if they had enough young people, they would establish a specific class for young people, though sometimes this required the students to travel from a range of suburbs to a central location. The number of youth specific classes run by ACL was limited due to limited requests. This demonstrates the low numbers of under 18 year olds accessing Adult Migrant English Programs. Young people who have enrolled in IEC are not permitted to access AMEP, and many students and their families see great importance in the opportunities provided by education at school.

Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) is another option for young people who are over 15 and currently on Centrelink payments. LLNP is federally funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The focus of this program is to increase participant's literacy and numeracy levels in order to assist them to gain access to the labour market. The program is only available for young people who have not attended IEC, therefore excluding those who have completed forty weeks and require further literacy support (LLNP website, DEEWR 2006, cited 20th July 2008).

Transition support programs for students in high schools, in particular refugees who have exited an IEC include:

- The provision of ESL support. The ESL Targeted Program teaching allocation includes a weighting for refugee students
- Bridging programs to provide more intensive language and literacy support to assist students, to access the mainstream curriculum.
- The After School Tuition Program operating in 12 high schools with ESL teachers supported by bilingual officers providing language, literacy and homework support to refugee students.
- The nationally accredited Certificates II and III in Spoken and Written English courses to support senior-aged ESL students at risk of not completing senior high schools years.
- The Refugee Action Support (RAS) Program piloted in 4 schools in 2007 by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the Department with UWS tutors providing after school homework and literacy tuition. In 2008, following program review, UWS tutors support refugee students in 8 schools both in school and after school half a day per week. (Curriculum Leadership Journal, 2008:2)

(Support for Refugee Students in NSW Government Schools. DET 2008)

In 2008 additional transition strategies have been implemented to support refugee students in transition to high school. These include:

- A pilot Transition Program for Refugee Students providing an additional ESL teacher allocation of 2.5 days to deliver transition support to refugee students in 7 high schools in South Western Sydney and Western Sydney.
- The establishment of 3 Refugee Support Officer positions for 3 years in to provide advice and support to schools with significant numbers of refugee students enrolled in schools.

Students can also access a number of community service homework support centres such as Granville Youth and Community Recreation Centre, Auburn Youth Centre, Young Christian Workers, and library-run homework

centres, which provide outside school hours support, and are at times staffed by volunteers.

TAFE NSW is well utilised by young people from refugee background. Granville TAFE provides a program called the Migrant Youth Access program. The program provides literacy and numeracy to students who have been referred to TAFE by IEC's and who do not have adequate literacy and numeracy to participate in other TAFE programs. Migrant Youth Access is available to students aged 15 to 21 years, and takes up to 80 students each year. The program uses innovative teaching strategies such as song writing and performance art to engage the students, with the aim of students entering Year 10 or other TAFE courses. On completion of this program, teachers support students to identify other appropriate vocational courses within TAFE, including courses such as English for Special Purposes, which is run in conjunction with vocational courses and provides three hours learning support. The Migrant Youth Access program is only run at Granville TAFE, and funding for this program is limited.

Options for young people arriving in NSW include IEC, AMEP and LLNP. Intensive English Centres are the most common option accessed by young people under 18 years old and remains the focus of this paper. The IEC system is one that young people speak highly of and often reminisce about once attending mainstream high school. Some private options may be available, but were not scoped for this paper, as they are relatively expensive, so not accessible by students who are refugees and humanitarian entrants.

Mohamed Jalloh (15yrs)



The reason why I chose this picture, because it shows my classroom, my teacher, my work and includes myself. It's a fun place and it's a special place for me to be. I really enjoy going to school and I hope that everybody have the right to go to school and have a better life that they always dream about.



Foday Kamara (17yrs)

This is some of the things I have won in my life since I arrived in Australia and they mean a lot to me and my family and friends too. My best memory at school was being selected by the school football team. I felt so proud of myself to be part of that team because the boys were so into sport and that's the type of people that I will like to hang around with. I will like people out there to around with those types of people because they give good advice to me and other people around the school and they love their sport.

Affects of Torture Trauma

During interviews for this project, the effects of torture and trauma were paramount, workers; teachers and young people identified this as a central theme both directly and indirectly throughout interviews. Young people tended to identify affect of torture and trauma in subtle ways through discussing experiences and feelings. This discussion examines what torture and trauma means in this context along with some affects.

Young people from refugee backgrounds experience adolescence along with their Australian peers, however they are also adjusting to a new country and new society with different rules and norms. A young person from refugee background explained the phenomena of coming to Australia having never caught trains before, never been to a western style school before and knowing very little English as being exciting and scary.

"I just wanted to go to school, I see them with their uniforms on and I want to go too." Young person interviewed, aged 16

Many young people and their families identified migration as a mixed experience. Young people discussed the opportunities they were to have in Australia, the chance at a better life and education. A majority of young people interviewed identified education as the most important aspect of their life as it is a source of hope and future. Young people were also faced with dealing with encompassing levels of grief as many have lost loved ones. Family members have either been killed or remain in the homeland. One young person from Congo explains she and her family had no idea what or where Australia was before arriving. She stated she likes it here, but misses Africa and her friends from there too.

"Sometimes I wish I never came here its so hard, at least in Africa I knew people..." Young Person Aged 16

People who come to Australia as refugees have generally fled their homeland, meaning they have not been able to bring possessions or loved ones. Leaving is not a choice for most, but rather a necessity. Young people in particular will find this hard to come to terms with as they are usually a part of family unit and have even less power and opportunities for decision making than their parents.

"I feel so alone, my family back home I will do my education to get job and send money to them." Young Person aged 15

The physical, psychological and social affects of torture and trauma notably affect student's ability to learn.

"Sometimes when I sit in class I can't hear the teacher talking cause I get a big headache" Young Person completing year 12

Regarding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), most young people interviewed had experienced at least one suspension from school during their time in Australia. When asked why they were suspended the majority of young people reported it was for fighting but backed up the response by specifying it wasn't their fault. Growing up in war and surviving refugee camps results in learnt survival behaviour, for some young people survival means reacting with violence. Defending ones honour at all costs is something that teachers identified they had witnessed in the school playgrounds. Students from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds have not learnt the conflict resolution skills that are expected of students in Australian school grounds.

Teachers interviewed discussed listening as an ongoing concern for young people; simple equations are not heard and therefore cannot be answered. During an interview an ESL high school support teacher provided this example of issues with listening and numeracy. The following equation was read out to a group of 8 newly transitioned young people in years 10 and 11.

"If Heather studied from 8:30am until 10am and then 3pm until 4pm, how long did Heather study in total? " Young people were required to identify how many hours in the morning and how many hours in the evening and then add them together. All 8 young people stated Heather studied 2 hours in the morning. They heard the 8 and the 10 only. ESL high school support teacher

This example demonstrates the level of language and the analytical skills some young people are exiting IEC and entering high school with. A causal relationship can be argued between poor listening skills and trauma, as described psychological effects of torture include PTSD, which is signified by numbness and re-experiencing the traumatic event.

We would draw the conclusion that students who are dealing with torture and trauma issues at the same time as learning a second language, and the social expectations of school need more support and a longer period of time to gain a level of English proficiency to enable them to succeed at school.

Experiences of Education

Disrupted Education

The literature review demonstrated that the levels of education achieved by refugee and humanitarian entrants at time of arrival, in recent years is significantly less than previous groups of refugee and humanitarian

entrants – a reduction of 3.6 years between 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 to an average of 1.6 years (DIAC quoted in CRC 2006: 107). The significant disruption to education experienced by refugees and humanitarian entrants is predominately due to the conflict experienced in their country of origin.

As a result of these civil conflicts, educational systems may be disrupted. Schools are either shut or not safe, and communities move from one area to another to find safety. Some people go to refugee camps, some of which are established with schools. It is in these refugee camps that many young people have their first experience of education.

"I didn't go to school for the 7 years we were in the camp, only the boys were allowed." Young person 18 years old

Some young people come to Australia with the wrong date of birth on their documents, for example a 16 year old with a date of birth of a 19 year old, or a 10 year old with the date of birth of a 14 year old. The complexities of this issue are compounded within educational institutions. Schools accept enrolment based on documents, and therefore it is foreseeable that a refugee young person can transition from IEC into an inappropriate class. Community services and some schools support students to change documents, enabling them to access the appropriate level of education.

Another example of different expectations to education is attitudes to homework. A support teacher described attitudes of some of their students to homework.

"They [students] think that the work they do in class along with a bit of homework at lunchtime is enough, but the school expects a lot more from them" Teacher Government High School

A young person described the reason he doesn't like homework is that he "cant be bothered and wants to play soccer" however after some probing explained that he could not understand the work and got frustrated and angry, so he just didn't do it. This young person is at risk of not receiving his year 10 certificate due to not handing in homework.

Cassity and Gow (2006:36 - 37) identify homework as an issue parents had with high school, largely due to their inability to help their children due to their own limited language, and limited education. A Somali community member explained that girls are often required to care for younger siblings after school and therefore are unable to attend homework support centres. These

young girls may find homework especially difficult due to time constraints and a lack of assistance.

There are also differences in student's expectations of tasks. Students will sometimes say that they have done a particular task, but not have done it to the expected educational standard. A teacher we interviewed talked about an assessment task set for a student. The teacher discussed the task with the student, and the need to use a range of resources including the Internet and encyclopaedias. The student returned the task believing it to be complete, but had only used one source of information.

Further complicating refugee student's experience of education is the transition from IEC to High School. When young people transition to mainstream high school most are required to change schools. For example, Holroyd IEC is within the grounds of Holroyd High School, this IEC is the local Government IEC for students living in the Auburn, Parramatta, Granville and Holroyd areas. When students complete IEC they are exited into their local high school, which is not Holroyd for many.

Changing schools is a transition in itself as new uniforms must be purchased, new bus/train routes established along with new relationships built with teachers and support staff. For those who remain at the same school that the IEC is situated in they are able to wear the same uniform, travel the same routes and most stated they knew teachers from the high school from assembly and other school activities.

Oral V's Written Languages

Pre-literacy equates to an individual never holding a pen, sitting at a desk or participating in a class activity. A focus on oral traditions and minimal or no schooling has seen a large number of young people entering Australia, primarily from Africa and Afghanistan, being pre-literate.

Difficulties for some refugee students in socialisation and adjustment to formal learning procedures including classroom routines can lead to the emergence of discipline and welfare issues that present as challenging behaviours. As a result some students, both in IECs and high schools, may face suspension or other disciplinary measures.

In addition to language development, most refugee students, particularly from Africa, also need to learn basic knowledge of world concepts. One teacher interviewed by Burgoyne and Hull (2007) talked about needing to teach students what a telephone was before teaching the students how to use the phone, press the right buttons and listen to what the other person was saying. (2007:

27). This extends to computer skills, an essential skill at high school now. Lack of computer skills is a major issue for newly arrived young people; teachers identified this as a major barrier to keeping up with the class in high school. Many young people from refugee backgrounds arrive at IEC without ever seeing a computer before. Computer skills are something that are taken for granted by most teachers within high schools and students are expected to have a functional level of computer skills to be able to complete assignments and do homework.

Young people discussed using the Internet and using sites such as Bebo and MSN to learn computer skills. A teacher interviewed explained the frustration that these young people encounter with computers.

“They don’t know how to send an email and definitely not using an attachment. Its really hard as everything in school these days is based around computers and these guys just don’t have the skills to keep up”.
Teacher Government High School

Aboriginal communities share with many African communities a respect for oral tradition. There may be opportunities to use strategies developed in teaching literacy in Aboriginal communities to teach and support literacy development with other oral based traditions including some African communities. There is a significant amount of research and projects that have worked with Aboriginal communities on building literacy, which may assist in the development of appropriate strategies for refugee African communities.

Combined with a highly disrupted education, torture and trauma, and an oral based tradition, it is understandable why refugee young people find acquiring English proficiency so challenging.

Relationships

Relationships were a central theme found throughout this project. Relationships take many forms and participants identified strongly with three types of relationships that affected young people’s education and in particular transition from IEC to mainstream. School community relationships including relationship with school as an institution was discussed, as were family relationships and the role of peers in young people’s experience of school and life. These three sub themes will be discussed within this section.

Relationships within the school environment are essential to healthy learning. Young people experience many types of relationships during their high school years and adolescence.

School – Community Relationships

At school young people form relationships with teachers, principals, support teachers and workers. Young people

attending IEC and those reminiscing their times at IEC, discussed relationships with teachers and support staff warmly. These young people identified counsellors and at least one teacher or support person that was imperative to their stay at IEC. Teachers interviewed for the Making up for Lost Time Report noted that the relationship they developed with some students was important emotional support as well as curricular support (Cassity and Gow 2005:11).

The complexities of relationships at school and supporting school are an important element in assisting refugee young people to be successful at school. Several young people interviewed described relationships with community workers as important to them. Community workers such as youth workers at Migrant Resource Centres, NAYSS workers and generalist youth workers at youth centres were identified as people that encouraged them and assisted in determining achievable goals. A majority of young people also discussed workers from homework support centres as important. During IEC homework given to students is minimum, however in high school homework levels reportedly swamped young people. Workers outside school can provide young people with more support for their education, and in particular assist refugee young people negotiate peer relationships, as well as provide important programs such as homework help.

Family

African community members interviewed for this project discussed the differences between school in Africa and school in Australia, one participant explained.

“School in Africa is a place for discipline as well as learning, parents don’t have to be involved in it”
Sierra Leone Community Member

Families of newly arrived young people found schools intimidating: Parents stated that when contacted by the school their initial thoughts were “what’s wrong?” (Cassity and Gow, 2006:37). High school was even more confusing for parents, as students have a number of different teachers. Burgoyne and Hull (2007) recommend that schools nominate one teacher as a liaison with the community, to make it easier for families and communities to contact the school.

Bilingual support staff in Intensive English Centres provide a wide range of support to students and their families including facilitating communication between the IEC and the students’ parents and other caregivers interpreting and translating.

When young people move to high school, only generic letters are translated and available on the DET website. This results in difficulties in communication between

parents/ guardians and schools. A strategy to support parental involvement with schools identified by Cassity and Gow (2006) was that parents of newly arrived young people would prefer a telephone call rather than a letter sent home through the young person. This would support families who may have little or no literacy in their first language, due to their own limited experience of education.

The understanding of family in many African communities is broader than most Australian schools are used to. In a number of African communities, issues such as disciplinary matters are dealt with by the whole community, and mediated by community elders. Students interviewed by Cassity and Gow (2006) identified this as the ‘correct’ way to resolve issues. Mediation by an elder may assist when parents have limited English and a fear of what some parents perceive to be the authority of schools.

The transition between IEC and high school is difficult for all refugee young people, and is particularly difficult for young people who experience family conflict and/ or breakdown after arriving in Australia. Some young people live with a relative they first met on arrival in Australia, and so there is a limited relationship with this person. In these situations, support for the young person and their education may be limited, as the proposer may be unwilling or unable to provide this support.

Some young people who live with their families may receive limited support, as their family addresses their own settlement issues, support other children, possibly work, and deal with their own language barriers. Some families break down after arrival, as the stressors of adolescence, settlement, dealing with torture trauma issues, and trying to maintain cultural traditions from the family’s country of origin becomes too difficult.

NSW no longer accepts unattached minors: young people who travel to Australia alone, for settlement. However detached minors; young people who travel to Australia with a relative or friend and soon after arrival may be forced to leave the guardian’s care due to relationship breakdown, are commonly reported in the experience of the NAYSS program.

These young people, and young people who have left their family or other support may be living in youth accommodation without any family support, or only a sibling of similar age as support. They face unique challenges along with unified challenges of all young people transitioning from IEC to mainstream. Young people in this situation in our experience cling to the stability provided by school, as it is the young person’s link with peers, and adult support. There have been a number of young people the NAYSS program have

worked with who have been homeless and their main concern is their ability to continue to attend school.

Young people interviewed discussed what school meant to them, for most it meant a new future, opportunity and success. Families reportedly have been known to take their child out of IEC, prior to completing 4 terms, against the advice of teachers and support staff as parents fear their child is missing educational experiences and opportunities for success in the high school. Students have also been withdrawn from other support programs such as ESL support, as families believe their child is missing out on important education.

Young people identified career options they wish to pursue on completion of high school. Many young people identified doctors, engineers and lawyers as chosen professions along with a high number aspiring to be professional soccer players.

When explored why young people chose these options they discussed the prestige of a good job and the money. They identified sending money back to home country as well as a wish to return to their home country and help as being very important. Young people and their families have a limited understanding of the career options available in Australia. The jobs that were considered prestigious in their country of origin were often the jobs that families wanted for their children in Australia. The young people and their families were not able to recognise the need for a high level of English language proficiency and academic results to be able to be successful in getting the qualifications necessary for these jobs.

Counsellors and community workers interviewed discussed this phenomenon as one that is passed from family members to young people. Workers explained that pressure is placed on young people to succeed at school while maintaining responsibilities at home.

Responsibilities in the home differ for girls and boys. Youth workers at the local youth centre reported an over representation of boys at the centre for homework and drop in activities. Workers equated this to two reasons - one that community members perceive youth centres as a place for boys as girls are not allowed out unsupervised in some communities. Secondly that girls have a lot more home duties to perform after school.

Young people may take responsibility for parents and / or older relatives during and after settlement. Corvo and Peterson (2005:13) found that younger family members expressed feelings of concern and responsibility for their parents or older relatives who they perceived to be fearful and/or depressed (cited: Thompson 2007).

Community workers interviewed furthermore described family dynamics they had witnessed such as young people taking on an adult role and caring for parents. Workers identified mental health concerns as a reason for this role reversal along with the speed that children versus adults acquire the English language. Young people are at times required to miss school to assist parents or family members with daily activities.

"I sit in class and think about my mum a lot, I just want her to be able to speak English so I wouldn't have to worry so much."
Young Person year 12.

Peers

Friendship and peer relationships are arguably the foundation of school life and adolescence in general. Newly arrived young people interviewed identified this by pointing out the best parts of school for them as being on the playground, during lunchtime or playing soccer after school with friends.

Young people identified positive and negative aspects of peer relationships; one young person explained without friends at school "it would be horrible". Another young person who found himself in fights often described a technique he found to resolve this.

"When its lunchtime at school I go and train, it keeps me from fighting"
Young Person Aged 16

Peer pressure is an issue young people discussed, identifying the need to have the latest technology as a major issue for them. Newly arrived families often experience financial hardship due to lack of employment opportunities and time required to learn English for employment. This posed an issue when young people found themselves the victim of peer pressure and ridicule for not having a mobile phone, being unable to use computers and "Chat on Bebo and MSN".

Community members interviewed discussed peers as being problematic for their children. Some individuals identified young people who had been in Australia longer as leading their child astray and influencing them in Australian culture to the detriment of their own culture. Peers that have been in Australia longer often take on a superior role and introduce newer young people to the way of life and how to fit in at school.

"He always wants the money, he has been places I never have dreamed of in Australia."
Father of 15 year old boy.

Herman (1997:55) states that traumatic events shatter the sense of connection between individuals and community.

A tool used by the perpetrators of violence in war is to create distrust between individuals and communities. The effects of this type of violence is noted in high school playgrounds, young people find it hard to make friends at first and some young people identified that they preferred to make friends with people outside their community, others stayed close to their community and felt they were unable to mix with young people from different background through fear.

Transition from primary school to high school for all students is acknowledged as difficult. However, transitioning from IEC to high school differs because young people exit IEC at different times throughout the year depending on when they were enrolled. This means that when young people transition they are often leaving behind peers and friends made at IEC and entering an entirely new environment, needing to form new peer relationships. They also need to 'break into' established peer relationships within the new school.

"I knew my cousin at the school in year 10 so it was ok, if he wasn't there it would have been scary."
Young person Aged 15

This demonstrates that knowing someone at the new school young people are moving into is imperative to a smoother transition experience. Racism from other students is another issue that was raised by young people in regards to high school. Young people discussed the difference between levels of racism at IEC and high school. High school students were identified as likely to tease newly transitioned students for being from IEC and not knowing anything.

Cassity & Gow (2006) discuss similar issues in 'Making up for Lost Time' report finding that IEC students reported being teased for being "Dumb IEC's that can't speak English".

Relationships are a crucial factor in supporting refugee young people to achieve their potential at school, though are complex and sometimes difficult to negotiate. Some relationships can be supportive of a young person's learning, while others can make learning more difficult. This is true of most young people within schools, but is especially important for refugee young people, whose relationships with family may have been destroyed or may be particularly difficult.

Inadequate resources

This report clearly demonstrates that the resources for supporting refugee and humanitarian students in schools are inadequate. This reflects the recommendation made by the Community Relations Commission in its report on

African Humanitarian Settlement in NSW (2006) that the Australian Government increase support in funding for intensive English provision.

As a result of their experiences prior to coming to Australia and their levels of education, these students need more time and resources to reach education standards that are comparable to their Australian peers. To achieve comparable education standards, refugee students need the language, literacy and numeracy to be able to participate and engage with mainstream education. We argue that refugee students need more time at IEC to enable them to exit with these skills.

An example of the positive outcomes achievable by additional time at IEC is demonstrated by Parramatta CIEC, with comparatively small enrollments reporting positive learning outcomes for students staying longer in the IEC to further develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills. The Co-ordinator of Parramatta CIEC explained that she has witnessed students achieve better results when attending high school or TAFE as they are exiting with adequate levels of language literacy and numeracy to engage with these institutions. One young person interviewed who attended CIEC for one and half years discussed his experience as positive, he now attends a Catholic school in Western Sydney and reported:

"I keep up with most of the class work and hand in my assignment, with help from homework help at Granville"
Young person Aged 17

While all government IECs have counselors to support the welfare and settlement needs of students, more counseling support is required, particularly in high schools to support refugee transitions. A number of students interviewed spoke of the impact of their experiences on their learning including difficulties in concentrating in class.

School counsellors interviewed discussed their significant workloads. Most counsellors in mainstream high schools are employed 2-3 days per week. They are required to see all referrals for the entire high school population, not including IEC, and must prioritise DOCS referrals.

ESL support is arguably necessary and exceptional support for young people in high schools, however as DET has noted within Priority Research Areas document (Viewed 29th July 2008) a need exists for more comprehensive support due to the nature of refugee young people entering NSW schools, with little or no previous schooling and higher levels of complexity than has been seen in the history of Australians Humanitarian Settlement program.

The Refugee Transitions Program pilot provides additional support to the students who are in mainstream education following IEC. The schools for this program were selected using enrolment data from DET that highlighted seven schools as having the greatest number of students from refugee background. Four of the schools identified by DET are also participating in the RAS program.

The Refugee Transitions Program is a pilot program and demonstrates the need for committed resources to this group of students. The program, if continued, is under staffed with support workers only available 2.5 days a week. This includes administration and is limited to schools with highest number of refugee students. The caseload carried by the staff of the program is 12 students, which is high considering part time hours and the needs of the students.

A Refugee Transition Program teacher noted that students often don't want to leave class to access the support classes provided. The students reported they feel they are missing out on opportunities in the classroom by attending out of class support activities. However without extra support classes these young people cannot keep up with other students in class.

This is the case with a Capoiara-Angola program being run by GMCC for newly arrived young people both in IEC and post transition at a Government High school. Students have reported they are concerned they are missing valuable education whilst in the group and have often not come due to class commitments.

Abdullah Mutadi (14 yrs)



School gives you a better start of life and is a place that brings friends together in a great place. It also brings love and peace amongst people.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That refugee students are given more time in IEC, and that their exit be determined by an agreed measure of English proficiency to be developed and implemented.

As noted in the literature review on experiences of education, and in the work by Cummins gaining functional English takes up to 2 years. ESL students with minimal or disrupted schooling can take up to 10 years to achieve a level where they have equivalent English to their peers. Students acknowledge the benefits of the supportive environment at IEC. While we acknowledge that IEC cannot replace lost years of education or mainstream education, students who are given more time at IEC have an opportunity to build better language skills, which will enable them to participate more fully in mainstream education.

Recommendation 2

That the State and Federal governments adequately fund English language provision and support within IEC and mainstream schools

Addressing the issue of inadequate resources to support refugee and humanitarian entrants at school is a complex one, and has been discussed by the CRC report of 2007, and by Vickers (2007). The issue crosses both state and federal responsibilities. Some Catholic dioceses have made commitments to the students in their schools to provide the additional resources. We support the recommendation 19 made by the CRC report – “That the Australian Government increase support to the NSW Government to address current *Inequalities in funding for intensive English provision for school-aged new arrivals.*” (2007)

Recommendation 3

That community agencies are funded to provide support and therapeutic programs for refugee young people outside the school environment.

As noted in the torture trauma section, dealing with issues related to torture and trauma can take many years. Students are unwilling to leave class and school to attend counselling appointments at specialist services such as STARTTS. Students need support outside the ‘normal’ classroom environment to be able to learn important social skills that support their ability to succeed at

school, such as conflict resolution skills. Community organizations such as STARTTS, GMCC and MRC’s provide in school support and therapeutic programs for newly arrived young people, however these programs usually involve young people within IECs. Once a young person makes the transition to mainstream high school few programs are available in school for support. It is also more difficult once at mainstream high school to program class time for such programs, and as noted above, students are reluctant to leave class to attend such programs.

Recommendation 4

That training is provided to teachers working in mainstream education on the challenges faced by refugee students.

Teachers, particularly those working in mainstream education need to have more training to understand the challenges that refugee young people face while they also deal with the challenges of adolescence and high school. There are a number of excellent resources available for teachers to give them some understanding of the refugee experience, such as *Surviving War Surviving Peace DVD* (UNSW, 2007).

As refugee and humanitarian intakes change it is imperative that teachers, support staff and community workers learn about the cultures of those they are working with. It is particularly important that teachers understand the impacts of torture and trauma on refugee students; given the impact that torture trauma has on student’s ability to concentrate. Students report being in a classroom and experiencing flashbacks, being unable to hear or concentrate on the work happening in the classroom.

Recommendation 5

That services such as AMEP and IEC be given more flexibility in their guidelines to enable students to move in and out of these programs, to ensure that the outcome is that the student achieves an outcome of functional English.

The number of young people who choose these options when eligible for IEC however are minimal. ACL reported in an interview for this report that if they had enough young people, they would establish a specific class for young people, though sometimes this required the students to travel from a range of suburbs to a central location. The number of youth specific classes run by ACL was limited due to limited requests. This

demonstrates the low numbers of under 18 year olds accessing Adult Migrant English Programs. Young people who have enrolled in IEC are not permitted to access AMEP, and many students and their families see great importance in the opportunities provided by education at school.

Recommendation 6

That additional support services be developed to support refugee young people in their transition from IEC to mainstream education. That the support be both educational support, and welfare / social support.

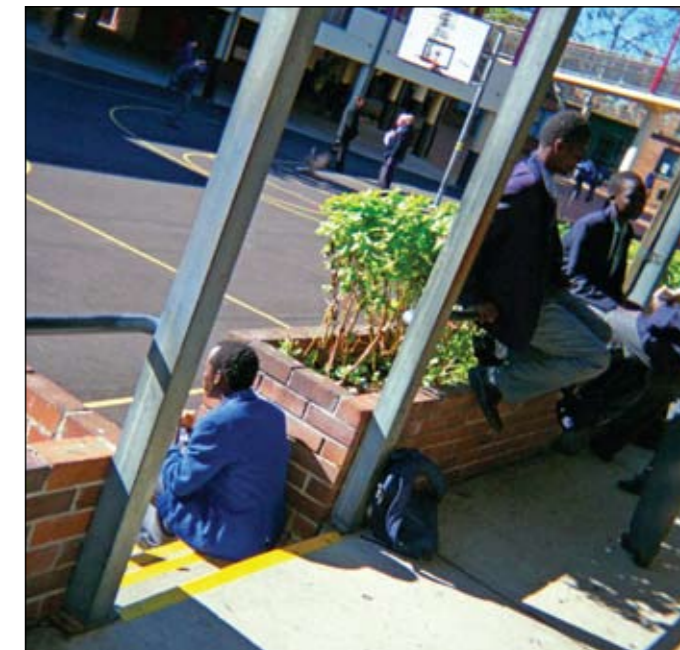
The Refugees Transitions Program currently being piloted by DET provides additional educational support to refugee students within mainstream schools. We support the continuation and expansion of this program. Counsellors within mainstream schools find it difficult to provide welfare and social support to refugee students given their workload. We affirm that school counsellors be provided more time and resources to fulfil their roles.

Chewtor Jalloh (15yrs)



The reason that I took this picture is because school makes me happy and is a place that I can have fun and educate. I like school because you learn much things like respecting people, parents, etc. So I wish to finish school and be a soccer player. Anyway school is a special place to be because you be educated and you can have a good future. I wish everybody go to school.

Atem Agang (17yrs)



I chose this picture because it tells us about school and what kind of things you face when you are a student. School is always about good and bad things. These are the things that you can deal with, being lonely or being in a group with your friends.

Nancy Kamara (17yrs)



I chose this photo because it shows the good and bad part of school and how students interact with each other. Also how multicultural the school is and the way students behave with one another.

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ACL	Australian Centre for Languages
AGSRC	Average Government School Recurrent Cost
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
AYC	Auburn Youth Centre
CCYP	NSW Commission for Children and Young People
CIEC	Catholic Intensive English Centre
CRC	Community Relations Commission
CRG	NAYSS Community Reference Group
DEEWR	Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	NSW Department of Education and Training
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship. This Department has changed names, and may be referred to as DIMIA or DIMA.
DOCS	NSW Department of Community Services
DSMIV	Diagnostic Statistical Manual 4th Edition
ECC	Ethnic Community Council of NSW
ESL	English as a Second Language
FaHCSIA	Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
GMCC	Granville Multicultural Community Centre
GMCC NAYSS	Used to describe the NAYSS project run by GMCC in Parramatta and Auburn, and distinguishes the project from the national initiative
IEC	Intensive English Centre
LLNP	Language Literacy and Numeracy Program
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NAYSS	Newly Arrived Youth Support Program
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAS	Refugee Action Support
STARTTS	NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
TAFE	Technical and Further Education – “TAFE” NSW
UWS	University of Western Sydney
VFTS	Victorian Foundation of Survivors of Torture Inc
YAPA	NSW Youth Action Policy Association

Action research Cycles

Action Research Cycle	Comments on the Process
Stage 1	
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large numbers of young people stating they were having problems with transition from IEC to mainstream education • Increase in referrals to NAYSS of young people just prior to transition.
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should talk to the CRG about this issue • We should discuss with young people how they would like to be involved
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRG discussed and approved of idea for research project. • Met with young people who agreed that a photography project would be good
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed a facilitator to organise and run workshops with young people • Filling the gap research project began
Stage 2	
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops began teaching young people digital photography whilst documenting transition stories in still images • Attendance first week with support of NAYSS project worker 8, different 6 young people following week
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should talk to young people and look into other options
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decided to try one more week of workshops, if unsuccessful, change project • Spoke to young people about what they thought of workshops • Looked into alternatives
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people agreed workshop was good but couldn't commit • Held third workshop, no young people attended
Stage 3	
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people liked photography but couldn't commit to workshop after school, while drop in and homework help were on in same centre at same time. • Young people were confused by transition discourse
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should give them camera to take away and shoot photographs • We should simplify the brief to school as all young people had transitioned • Young people should be rewarded for participating

Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified 10 possible participants • Purchased 10 disposable cameras • Facilitator developed a folder of photography tips in plain English with pictures to include with cameras in show bags (lollies included) • Purchased double movie passes for when young people completed program
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided 10 young people with show bags to go away for a week and photograph "what does school mean to me?" • Requested young people attend a 2-hour workshop in school holidays where they would choose their favourite picture for exhibition and write a blurb why they chose it. • Young people were told they would receive double movie passes for completion.
Stage 4	
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people were excited to take photographs with the new cameras • 9 out of 10 young people returned cameras • 7 out of 9 young people attended workshop
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives work as an engagement tool • We should meet with 2 young people who missed workshop to finalise project
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contact with young people and organise meeting time
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting held to go through photos and write blurb on why that photo was chosen for exhibition.
Stage 5	
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 photos ready to be mounted for exhibition
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people should be invited to report launch/exhibition • A Participant of the photography project should launch the report if they were willing
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitations formally sent to young people • Schools notified that students would be absent • Participant identified to launch report and assisted to write speech.



Filling the Gap