AMEP National Forum Report

Meeting youth settlement needs

10 & 11 November 2005

La Trobe University, Melbourne
INTRODUCTION:

This Forum was convened over two days to discuss the settlement needs of young learners in the AMEP and included representatives from a wide range of provider, community and government organisations who are involved in service provision to this group of students. Many of the issues raised were closely linked and, consequently, interconnected discussions frequently continued across sessions and throughout the two days of the Forum.

This report summarises the main issues and suggestions emerging throughout the two days of presentations and discussions and is organised under the three main themes of the Forum:

1. Understanding the Lives of Young Refugee and Immigrant Learners;
2. Educational Pathways for Young Refugee and Immigrant Learners; and
3. Organising Learning for Young Learners in the AMEP.

A list of participating organisations is included at the end of this report and the full program and PowerPoint slides of presentations are available at http://www. nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/nat_for/F2_05program.html.

THEME: 1. UNDERSTANDING THE LIVES OF YOUNG REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT LEARNERS

EMERGENT ISSUES

Two main issues regarding the context of program delivery for refugee and immigrant young people were at the forefront in presentations on the first day of the Forum. Firstly, participants widely agreed that meeting the educational and settlement needs of refugee and immigrant young people requires holistic delivery models and increased cooperation among programs and agencies. Secondly, case studies and delivery models presented throughout the Forum clearly showed that collaborative partnerships which link state, federal and community sectors are a key factor in enabling more coordinated, efficient and successful program provision to refugee and immigrant young people.

Young refugee and immigrant students’ specific needs

Refugee and immigrant young people arrive in Australia having frequently experienced long periods of severe trauma and upheaval. These previous experiences, together with their entry into young adulthood, limited schooling as well as the language barriers and financial and cultural differences they face as migrants make their settlement in Australia both complex and multifaceted.

Key educational responses identified throughout the Forum as crucial to the successful settlement of refugee and migrant young people were in close agreement with published literature in the field and included:

• gaining English language proficiency as quickly as possible
• adequate bilingual support
• the central role of the AMEP in encouraging students to develop a positive sense of the future
• a safe and supportive educational environment which balances welfare and learning needs
• a curriculum which incorporates issues of relevance to young peoples and which focuses on real life tasks and settlement needs from a youth perspective
• teachers who are trained to understand the specific needs and backgrounds of refugee and migrant young people
• a classroom structure appropriate for adolescents where routines and boundaries are clearly delineated
• socialising and fun activities which help develop social skills and networks and rebuild self-esteem
• establishing relationships with friends and teachers, particularly in the first year after arrival, and fostering ongoing social relationships throughout settlement. Providers reported that young people enrolled in the AMEP but without parents and/or family support can become socially disconnected from both their own community and the wider Australian community
• recognising that refugees from a particular area/country are a heterogeneous group in all aspects of service provision. Providers reported that internal tensions within some communities, from where young learners in the AMEP come, is an emerging challenge for providers
• recognising that young people often have family responsibilities which affect their class attendance and ability to concentrate.

Building on existing networks and forming new partnerships
There was widespread agreement among Forum participants that increased collaboration between agencies would enable better sharing of skills and expertise and encourage innovations in service delivery. A cooperative networking and referral system would also increase the overall efficiency of provision to refugee and immigrant young people as gaps and duplications in service provision would be more readily identified and avoided.

However, identifying ways of cooperating remains difficult despite this widespread recognition of the benefits of forming partnerships. Firstly, developing networks requires dedicated resourcing which is not available in existing budgets. Secondly, developing in-house models of best practice takes considerable time and other resources and represents a significant financial investment by providers. Therefore, whilst sharing of general principles with other providers is possible, dissemination of best practice strategies and procedures is limited by the competitive nature of tendering.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION/PRACTICE
Forum participants suggested that better coordination between settlement services and the AMEP could be achieved by:

- convening forums of representatives from state and federal government, provider and community organisations to discuss instigating more cooperative arrangements for flexible, innovative delivery for young learners in the AMEP.
- identifying and developing a (where possible) already existing collaborative mechanism to facilitate collaboration across sectorial boundaries.
- DIMIA incorporating collaboration and partnerships into organisational structures and contracts in recognition of the importance of partnership-building and as a way to facilitate its extension.
- appointing specialist Refugee Youth Officers, possibly to shared positions between IHSS and an AMEP provider, to develop a coordinated regional approach involving all interested groups including government, community organisations, local businesses, sporting clubs, hospitals etc. in mutually beneficial partnerships.
- developing online forums and webpages to facilitate distribution of information on existing youth programs.
- sport is a very effective engagement tool for refugee and immigrant young people but access is an issue. Findings presented from the CMYI ‘Multicultural Sports Project’ suggest that providers may need to rethink their approach and work gradually towards long-term goals. The three stage program outlined builds multiple partnerships and provides an important delivery model which enables these young people to initially participate on their own terms in separate programs in separate environments, before gradually moving to playing sports within the wider Australian community.
- further suggestions for meeting young learners’ educational and settlement needs in the AMEP will be discussed in the remaining two sections of this report.

**THEME: 2. EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT LEARNERS**

**EMERGENT ISSUES**
Two interconnected issues arose during discussions of educational pathways for young refugee and immigrant young people: one concerns their educational aspirations and the second concerns structural inflexibilities at the contractual level which limit students’ choices and successful educational outcomes.

Firstly, students and their parents are frequently unaware of the multiple educational and career pathways existing in Australia. There is a strong desire among many refugee and migrant young people, including some over 18, to attend High School and obtain a year 12 certificate. Moving from secondary school to university is generally perceived as the preferred option. Consequently, the AMEP and TAFE are often viewed negatively and students miss out on career and educational opportunities that may better suit them and could have been accessed via the AMEP.
Secondly, the SPP youth category is a very heterogeneous group of students requiring many strategies to address their varying and complex needs. The 16-18 age group, in particular, fit into multiple places but face restrictions in their choices due to tensions between state and federal government jurisdictions, as well as budgetary constraints. Current provider contracts specify that 16-18 year olds will normally enrol in the secondary school system, which further reinforces their preference for enrolment in secondary schools over the AMEP. However, direct entry into mainstream schooling may not always be feasible for some of these students who would be better serviced in the AMEP, for example:

- 16-18 year old young mothers who wish to study with their extended family and peers and in a more adult environment with childcare facilities.
- or students who are 16-18 but whose interrupted schooling and/or life experiences mean they may not cope with secondary school and may wish instead to chose the more flexible delivery options offered in the AMEP.

The transition to High School and/or university remains a huge challenge even for young refugee and immigrant students with up to 7 years of previous schooling. Contractual arrangements may, in some instances, allow students to begin their enrolment in a High School but then switch to AMEP classes if secondary schooling does not meet their needs. This is not always an accessible pathway because of strict funding guidelines. Under some circumstances, students may also actively resist redirection to the AMEP, viewing it as punishment for failing in the school system.

AMEP providers have shown themselves to be innovative in meeting emerging student needs within contractual arrangements. However, the complexity of dealing with the emotional, family, cultural and resettlement issues of young learners in the AMEP whilst providing English learning is severely straining their resources and limiting student choices and successful outcomes, for example:

- Students classified as SPP Youth clients can be offered up to an extra 400 hours of tuition in the AMEP. However, provision of funding to cover both tuition and childcare is calculated on provider’s advance estimates and if more students enrol and/or greater numbers of childcare places are required than initially estimated, substantially less than 400 extra hours tuition may in fact be offered to students.

Some providers have worked out strategies addressing the needs of particular groups of young learners in the AMEP but other providers feel that provision of services is difficult to translate across different contexts.

Currently there is a huge welfare support burden on teachers due to reasons as varied as IHSS/provider coordination difficulties, case worker overload and students developing bonds with and trust in particular teachers.

Students will continue to go to teachers for at least some of their resettlement needs and a system of referrals, networks and support needs to be in place and information disseminated to providers and teachers.

Although of adult age, refugee and immigrant young people often exhibit juvenile behaviours which may be age inappropriate. They require support as “adolescents”
and placement in classes according to their educational level rather than their age. Nevertheless, their age-related needs have to be addressed at the same time.

School sector New Arrival programs can provide crucial breathing space in early settlement. The length of time students spend in these programs varies depending on:

- different polices and practices in the states and territories
- student choice
- advice given to students by teachers in the educational sector.

Adequate bilingual assistance, together with the use of first language support, contributes to successful programs. However less bilingual support is used than needed, partly because of the heterogenous nature of classes where students from multiple language backgrounds are routinely present and partly due to budgetary constraints.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION/PRACTICE**

In discussions responding to presentations and issues, participants made the following suggestions for organising learning in the AMEP:

- integrate ongoing discussions of alternate educational and career pathways into refugee and immigrant young people classes to enable students to make better informed choices as their lives change and as they develop new understandings. First language support, at least initially, may be very helpful.
- use case studies, modelling and stories to illustrate different vocational experiences, the salaries that can be expected and the potential advantages and disadvantages (short- and long-term) of a particular job
- offer career “tasters”, similarly to those already offered by TAFE in Victoria, or invite guest speakers to provide onsite information sessions as opportunities for students to try out/hear about different occupations
- be very clear and upfront about educational standards required for further study and employment training
- working with High School careers officers and with Learning Centre coordinators can be very helpful in familiarising both AMEP providers and students with available choices and pathways
- introduce the concept of lifelong learning and continually reinforce the idea that jobs will change over time
- repackage CSWE courses to look more like a school curriculum in order to hold the interest of young adult learners in the AMEP
- support families by involving parents in relevant sessions so that they can develop an understanding of the Australian education system, the role that system expects parents to play in the education of their children and career pathways that may be open to all family members
- increase teachers’ awareness of educational and job pathways with specifically-targeted professional development
- investigate ways to provide greater SPP youth resourcing, particularly in relation to interpreter support and increased funding flexibility to allow students to change their choice. Delivery flexibility which enables students to
change direction and choose other educational outcomes is paramount in enabling best provision of services and successful student outcomes.

- the next section also details further more wide-ranging suggestions for organising learning in the AMEP for refugee and immigrant young people.

### THEME: 3. ORGANISING LEARNING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS IN THE AMEP

#### EMERGENT ISSUES
The issues grouped here are shaped by and bring together many of the points raised earlier in the Forum. Areas covered in discussion included:

- locating these students learning within clear educational and career pathways that responds to their needs is particularly important in helping them achieve successful educational and settlement outcomes in the AMEP (discussed in depth in the previous section of this report)
- appropriate topic content, which covers both cultural issues and educational outcomes relevant to young learners’ lives, is vital in encouraging both academic learning and successful settlement
- the majority of AMEP providers include both settlement information and practical help in their programs as their clients both request and urgently need this sort of assistance
- adequate and specific professional development for teachers is required to enable them to both understand and develop the necessary sensitivities and skills to address the needs of refugee and immigrant young people
- there are few services responding to the needs of young men under 30 in the AMEP and further programs addressing their specific needs are required. The AMEP may also be perceived as a women’s support network by young male learners and efforts to overcome this negative image are needed.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION/PRACTICE
Educational approaches recommended in order to support young learners in the AMEP included:

- teaching study skills and Australian cultures of learning, such as:
  - Australian education systems and social rules
  - appropriate behaviours and life skills
- inclusion of sport, and also camps and excursions, as part of AMEP provider programs to accommodate youth interests and include some of the most fun aspects of school life.
- ensuring that classes are cohesive and operate with clear disciplinary boundaries and curricula which develop routines and set achievable goals is important in maintaining motivation for refugee and immigrant young students
• using visual aides and real life examples which focus on concrete and practical examples, rather than abstract concepts is particularly important in initial learning
• integrating learning outcomes with day to day issues and settlement needs provides practical help as well as achieving required educational outcomes
• demystifying institutions and familiarising students with how they operate by liaising with local support agencies to arrange class talks and excursions to eg. CentreLink, Medicare, and local community organisations such as the Migrant Resource Centre and libraries
• inviting parents and community members to classes breaks down cultural barriers and introduces them to the AMEP learning environment
• the AMEP represents an appropriate and safe place for students and teachers to address social issues as they emerge, eg. internal community tensions, within some groups from which AMEP students come, were identified as needing to be addressed in classes
• the classroom is an especially significant place of social connection and interaction for many young learners and the AMEP has an important role in fostering their social networks
• using mentors/buddies to build social networks, provide peer support or mentoring and to simulate family/community support for students without parental or community support
• in consultation with students and their communities develop new programs aimed at addressing issues of specific interest to young men, for example, a mentoring or buddy system and study units covering topics such as Australian social rules, mental health issues, and the law and the justice system
• suggestions for professional development for teachers were very wide ranging and included:
  - regular information exchanges between states
  - development of websites and online resources with visual materials showing teachers how to teach content-based materials
  - special support for rural teachers
  - opportunities to observe peers and work in teams. An important corollary noted here was that teachers and providers need adequate time and funding to deal with the complexities of service provision to refugee and immigrant young people and to implement these strategies
• using volunteer teaching aides or team teaching enables young adults normally in mixed-age classes to meet together on a regular basis and provides a youth environment where their specific needs can be dealt with. Separate youth specific electives or self-access materials were also suggested as ways to ensure young adults’ particular needs are met.
LIST OF PROVIDER REPRESENTATIVES PARTICIPATING IN THE FORUM

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<th>Provider Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACL Pty Ltd</td>
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<td>AMEP Charles Darwin University</td>
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