



**youth affairs network qld**

"Working together to improve the quality of life of young people in Queensland  
and thereby improve the quality of life of society."

## **Submission Response from**

**Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)  
to the**

***RRAC Refugee Youth Strategy Discussion Paper***

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## **1. About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) and the Non-English Speaking Background Youth Issues Network (NYIN)**

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing over 400 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, YANQ promotes the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs, projects and research that are responsive to the needs of young people and we promote and support cultural diversity.

The NESB (non-English speaking background) Youth Issues Network (NYIN) is a statewide community based network which began its life as a YANQ working party in 1992 to improve the quality of life for NESB young people at local and state levels by promoting the issues pertaining to NESB young people and enhancing their access to services and resources. Today, NYIN continues to identify and develop actions on issues affecting NESB or culturally and linguistically diverse young people through its core strategic placement and operations within YANQ.

NYIN is composed of organisations, services, workers, and service providers committed to multiculturalism and improving the opportunities and outcomes for NESB young people in Queensland. NYIN is convened and resourced by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) who employs a NESB Policy and Network Officer to assist in the representation, convening, and resourcing of this peak statewide issue based network, its actions, and continued development.

## **2. Introduction**

YANQ welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) Refugee Youth Strategy Paper.

Various youth sector programs, networks, organisations and individuals have given direct and indirect input to YANQ as the youth sector Peak Body through the Non-English Speaking Background Youth Issues Network (NYIN) in regards to this submission response.

## **3. General Comments**

Members exhibited a positive overall reaction in regard to the RRAC Refugee Youth Strategy Paper and were pleased that a focus on young refugees and their particular needs and issues are the focus of future actions. There is no doubt that there are a critical number of challenges facing this diverse group of young people, and it is also the hope of NYIN that further responsive and integrated services will indeed be created through the development of this paper and the initiation of targeted responses.

Members would wish to highlight their considerable agreement with the statement that, *“Young refugees are a potentially a particularly vulnerable group who may have difficulties accessing mainstream support services due to a range of cultural, health and*

*language barriers and these needs are not currently being addressed across government in a co-ordinated and strategic manner.”*

### **Definitions**

Members also requested that a clearer definition of “Youth” be incorporated to avoid confusion about who the target group is in relation to age, and to be ‘upfront’ regarding this target group.

They also commended the definition of ‘refugee’ in its broader context for this strategy, although they strongly believe that education regarding this broader definition is important in the context of most people’s understanding of the concept in the narrow focus and thus avoid confusion and ensure equity for all CALD young people falling under this strategy’s broader definition.

Members also wished to note that while commending the broad encompassing definition of ‘refugee’ it is vitally important to remember that the broad definition has the potential to blur individual experience and thus not acknowledge the complexity and diversity of experience and issues being faced by the variety of groupings and experience incorporated in the ‘refugee’ definition.

## **4. Specific Content Comments, Concerns & Issues Raised**

### **4.1 Challenges and Stresses facing refugee young people in resettlement**

Members would wish to note that in the section “*Number of refugee young people in Australia*”, that while it is a documented generalized picture, it should also paint a more accurate picture of how numbers might differ across Australia and where different groups are situated. This is an important piece of information which assists in assessing needs, and lobbying and advocacy functions for services and resources, and we suggest that further information can be included that provides a more accurate picture.

Further in this section, paragraph 3 under the subheading of “*the Settlement experiences of refugee young people*”, is a very simple, understandable and basic dot-point list of likely experiences of refugee young people. Members commented that the realities are much more complex, and that the interlinking and interrelationship of these and a number of other factors compounds the settlement experience of young people, be they refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation young people. Members suggested that an acknowledgement of these interrelationships and complexities would be beneficial without making the strategy paper too complex.

The section on “*Juvenile Justice and Social Disconnection*” raised significant discussion among NYIN members and a number of grave concerns.

There was a vehement concern regarding the opening sentence, “*There are strong social and economic forces such as family and community disconnection, unemployment and lack and recreational activities which may propel refugee young people into circumstances leading to criminal activity and experiences with the juvenile justice or adult correctional system.*”

Members would wish to respond by noting that there are also many more indicators and forces impacting on refugee young people which **do not** lead to criminal activity and experience with correctional systems. Indeed there was some grave concerns regarding what the above statement is based on, and the fact that it appears to suggest (perhaps not intentionally) a direct causality between social marginalisation and disadvantage and crime when social marginalisation and disadvantage may not lead to criminal activity or the juvenile justice system at all.

On a broader level, members would wish to ask what the research/evidence base is, that is referred to in the strategy, and whether this can be noted, as well as some recognition of the various levels of risk to various sub groupings that exist under the broader definition of 'refugee' used in this strategy paper.

#### **4.2 What services are available to help Refugee Young People in Australia**

Members wish to note that this section is not a comprehensive overview of services offered to refugee young people under the broader definition of this discussion paper, and would strongly recommend that a more comprehensive overview be provided rather than a website referral to The Source website. This website does not list the "whole range of human services, of which DIMA funded settlement services are a small and complimentary part", yet the broader definition of Refugee offered for this discussion paper, begs for the wider multicultural sector services to be listed.

#### **4.3 "Brokering" Access to services for Refugee Young People**

The final sentence in the first paragraph of this section notes "*an example is providing individual guidance through the range of Commonwealth services available to young people.*" Members would wish to ask – by whom? Who will be providing individual guidance through a range of commonwealth (and other) services available to young people?

First, again the broader refugee definition used in this paper impacts on the broader understanding of services in the community and impacts on a much wider range of multicultural services than those funded by the Commonwealth Government. What level of further resourcing and assistance will be given to this broader range of community services who already are dealing with refugee young people on a variety of levels?

Secondly, given the competitive tendering system – how can authentic and effective collaboration between Commonwealth services, other multicultural services, youth services, and specific targeted programs on both a state and commonwealth level be encouraged and maintained for the benefit of refugee young people? This is a core question, but one which seems to have been overlooked in the context of the discussion paper.

Members agree that the individual case management approach may indeed provide the optimal approach to supporting refugee young people through the various points listed, however to achieve this there are a number of issues which must be addressed such as ensuring authentic collaboration, increased resourcing levels, and development of further services throughout the sector.

#### **4.4 A guide to good practice in the delivery of specific and generic services to Refugee Young people**

Members would wish to agree that it is “*likely that refugee young people will be accessing mainstream services for their education, employment, housing, training and support needs*” although again the breadth of realities and complexities facing refugee young people need to be acknowledged in the strategy paper.

Access and equity is a constant issue in the area of NESB young people accessing mainstream services, where the need to consider ones practice, organizational policy, worker understandings of the complex issues facing refugee young people, and appropriate pathways of action, are often beyond the scope and resourcing ability of many community services. As a result there is often little ability for mainstream services to respond to the needs of young refugees.

Members strongly believe that for this strategy to be effectively implemented there must be increased levels of resourcing to key agencies to enable them to assist the sector in building the capacity of the sector to deliver specific and generic services to refugee young people by overcoming the barriers listed above.

Members would also wish to note that in the various examples of good practice illustrated, there was no Queensland example, although there are some good models and programs dealing with refugee issues in Queensland. We would hope that the final paper will include a Queensland example.

#### **4.5 Education**

Members noted that there was no specific focus on the critical issue of education and would request that this be addressed in the final strategy document. The gap was significantly noticeable given the Commonwealth governments’ focus on educational opportunities as a key facet of its Pathways initiatives.

In 2001, two key milestone activities for YANQ (the release of the *Coping in a New World* research report & the *Voices From The Edge CALD Self Harm and Suicide Seminar*) both noted recommendations and strategies focusing on education with outcomes for ‘refugee’ young people. For example -

- Strategies such as enhanced ESL programs for students with English language barriers
- Culturally appropriate homework assistance programs
- School based youth support/school focused youth service for ‘refugee’ young people
- Peer support programs, life skills development, and enhancement of coping mechanisms
- Alternative education opportunities
- School liaison officers to work with parents and families of ‘refugee’ young people

Members would hope that the importance of education and the addressing of ‘refugee’ young people educational needs will be addressed in a final strategy document.

## **5. Conclusion**

As earlier stated members exhibited a positive overall reaction in regard to the RRAC Refugee Youth Strategy Paper and were pleased that a focus on young refugees and their particular needs and issues are the focus of future actions.

Other than specific concerns which are outlined above, there was also a general feeling that the strategy paper must be careful of generalizing too broadly the issues and concerns of refugee young people. The strategy must find a balance between honoring individual experience and acknowledging the complexity and diversity of experience and issues being faced. At times the strategy paper painted a too rosy view of services, pathways, and responses to issues being faced, which from the grass roots perspective is far from accurate, where services are under-resourced, thin on the ground, and in some regional areas of Queensland non-existent.

It would be the sincere hope of members that the final strategy document will lead to an enhanced ability of the sector to meet the needs of refugee young people, especially in our context in regional and remote Queensland.

## **6. Postscript**

Both YANQ and members of NYIN would also wish to note, that considering and commenting on this strategy paper, is in no way an endorsement of various Commonwealth actions and policies in regard to refugees and asylum seekers.

In particular we would wish to note our opposition to the policy and practice of mandatory detention, the TPV category and treatment of TPV holders upon release into the community, the holding of children in detention, the recent pacific islands solution policy and practice, and recent changes to immigration laws.

It is our strong belief that these actions are inhumane and damaging to individuals, violations of our obligations under the UN Refugee convention and CROC, as well as other fundamental human rights instruments, basic justice principles, and Australia's commitment to multiculturalism.