

# Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People

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A DATA UPDATE AND REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

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WITH A FOCUS ON 'WHAT WORKS'?

# Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People

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## Acronyms

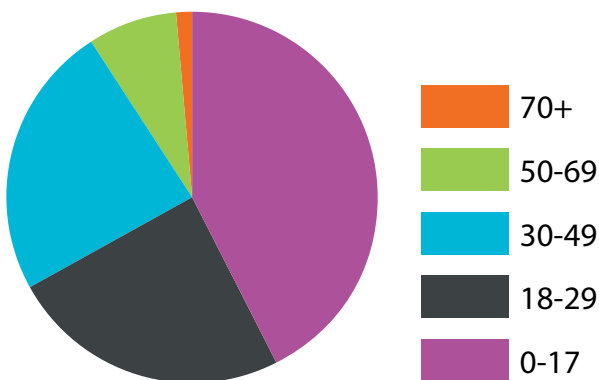
The following acronyms are used throughout this report:

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	JSA	Job Services Australia
ASCL	Australian Standard Classification of Languages	LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Networks
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	LSIA	Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Australia
CMY	Centre for Multicultural Youth	UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship	VEOHRC	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
ESL	English as a Second Language	YRC	Youth Research Centre
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia		

## Introduction

In recent years, approximately 13,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants have been resettled in Australia annually from a range of countries (13,799 in 2010-11). A significant proportion of refugees and humanitarian entrants fit within conventional definitions of 'adolescents' and 'youth'. For example, of those in Australia's 2010-11 offshore resettlement program<sup>1</sup>, 24% were aged between 18-29 and 43% aged under 17 (DIAC, 2011). Further analysis by Gray et al. (2012) shows that 22% were aged between 15 and 24.

Figure 1: Australia's Humanitarian Program Offshore Grants by Age (Australian Government, 2012)



Young people from refugee backgrounds contribute to an increasingly diverse Australian community. As this report highlights, a review of the most recent Australian Census of Population and Housing data shows the rich diversity of young people in Australia. Many of these people were either born overseas or had parents who have migrated from other countries. They also identify with different cultures and religions and speak a range of languages.

Refugee and other newly arrived young people in Australia undoubtedly bring with them a multitude of strengths and personal resources and many will do well (Olliff and Mohamed, 2007, Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007). At the same time, a growing body of evidence suggests that many young people arriving in

Australia under the refugee and humanitarian program are facing a range of challenges.

As well as experiencing the ongoing impact of pre-migration experiences (for example refugee youth often experience ongoing trauma following their flight from persecution), newly arrived young people and their families often face significant language barriers. In addition, many have had limited or disrupted schooling. They also lack knowledge of the Australian education system and labour market, and the networks that can facilitate finding employment. In this context, it is essential that a range of support services are available to meet a range of needs. However, the data suggest that many young people are falling through the gaps in the current system.

*The policies and practices of host countries such as Australia have a significant bearing on the experiences and outcomes of refugees. They can make the difference between a young person reaching their full potential and a young person experiencing negative outcomes (Cameron et al., 2011).*

When it comes to young people's transition to employment, the current literature indicates that there are a significant number of young people whose needs are not being adequately catered for (Olliff, 2010a). This situation is reflected in high levels of school dropout and consistently higher rates of unemployment (Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007). The literature highlights that there is limited provision of specialised programs to meet the complex support needs of young people from refugee backgrounds. Furthermore, recent research highlights that institutional racism continues to exist in Australia which systematically disadvantages young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. At the same time, pockets of promising programs highlight some key principles of good practice and a range of strategies that have contributed to positive long-term outcomes. Future policy makers and programmers can draw on this growing evidence-base of 'what works' to guide much-needed future initiatives.

Refugee young people and their families often demonstrate strong motivation and drive to pursue education, training and career goals (Gifford et al., 2009). It is therefore critical that the right level of support is available and that appropriate systems are in place to facilitate young people's transition into Australia, to

1. The offshore component of the Australian Government's Humanitarian Program provides resettlement to persons outside Australia who are subject to persecution

address their needs, and to help them work towards their goals and reach their full potential.

The purpose of the report is to guide the development of future programmes including those supported by philanthropy. Section One reviews the recent data and literature to take stock of the current experiences of refugee young people in education and in their transition from education to employment. Section Two looks at the programming context with the aim of drawing out key themes of 'what works' in assisting young people to navigate a pathway between education and employment.

*Key question: What are the experiences of refugee and other newly arrived young people in navigating education and employment pathways?*

*Key question: 'What works' in facilitating positive transitions in education and employment for refugee young people in Australia?*

## Section 1: The Experiences of Refugee Young People in Education & Employment

Research highlights that many young people and their families come to Australia with high expectations and aspirations for their education and career (Gifford et al., 2009). Despite this strong motivation, the reality is that many young people face a range of well-documented challenges in their pursuit of education, training and transitioning to employment. These challenges may be partly associated with past experiences of trauma and dislocation, the effect of which is ongoing for many. Studies show that mental health difficulties are common among some cohorts of refugees, especially those who have fled from war and human rights abuses. At the same time, young people from refugee backgrounds face a range of challenges associated with settlement in a new country. These include language barriers, lack of familiarity with the service system, lack of financial resources, lack of information on educational 'pathways' or options that are available, difficulty gaining recognition for prior qualifications, and navigating application processes (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007, Conventry et al., 2002, Refugee Council of Australia, 2007). In the face of these challenges, which are increasingly well documented in the literature, it is essential that appropriate services be put in place to support the specific needs of refugee young people. The literature also suggests that there are a significant number of young refugee people whose learning needs are not being adequately catered for within the current system.

This situation is reflected in the available data which, although not specific to youth, suggests that some groups of newly arrived migrants and most refugees are disproportionately at risk of unemployment, other forms of labour market exclusion and or 'exclusionary transitions' (Barraket, Ziguras, 2006). For example, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) study found that migrants with limited English were around three times more likely to be excluded from employment than the population average (Ziguras, 2006). Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), which examined the settlement of three cohorts of immigrants arriving in Australia, also suggest that refugees are more disadvantaged than other immigration streams. For the 1999-2000<sup>2</sup> cohort, humanitarian migrants had the lowest participation rate (32%) and the highest unemployment (43%) rate of all of the migration categories – see Table 1 (DIAC, 2006). For new arrivals entering through Australia's Humanitarian Program or through family sponsorship who did gain employment, the positions they held in Australia tended to be less skilled than those they held in their countries of origin (DIAC, 2006).

2. The longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia included three cohorts (1993-95, 1999-2000, 2004-05). Cohort 3 did not survey migrants from the humanitarian stream, therefore the most recent relevant data from this study is from 1999-2000 <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lisia/lisia02.htm>

Table 1: Unemployment for LSIA 2, Wave 1 and 2 (Adapted from DIAC, 2006)

	Wave 1: Pre-arrival - 6 months post-arrival	Wave 2: 18 months post-arrival
Preferential Family/Family Stream	21%	13%
Concessional Family/Skilled-Australia Linked	21%	6%
Business Skills & Employer Nomination Scheme	4%	0%
Independent	9%	7%
Humanitarian	75%	43%

This data is an indication that refugees in Australia are struggling to break into the employment market. For the sake of comparison, the overall unemployment rate for the adult population in Australia is currently estimated to be 5.7% (ABS, 2013). While the data is not youth-specific, it is well documented that youth generally face significantly higher unemployment rates than adults so it would be anticipated that the situation for youth cohorts may be much worse.

While there is increasing qualitative data highlighting the challenges that many young people are facing in their transition to employment, there is a critical lack of quantitative data distinguishing the issues impacting on young people from refugee and other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Boese and Scutella, 2006, Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007). Available data suggests that employment outcomes for refugees of all ages are poor, especially through the early settlement period. We also know that young people tend to suffer higher unemployment rates than adults – the 2012-13 unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year olds in Australia is estimated to be around 24-25% (15-19 year olds looking for full-time work as a proportion of full-time youth labour force), compared to 5.7% for the adult population (ABS, 2013, Parliament of Australia, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to postulate that young refugees may be at a particular disadvantage.

*Box 1: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse?*  
*Many people and organisations now use the broad term 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CALD) to describe people who have a cultural heritage different from that of the majority of people from the dominant "Anglo-Australian" culture. CALD young people may face challenges different from other young people in the Australian population and therefore require specific support from health and social services. However, there are no objective markers to categorise young people as CALD or not. Therefore, it is not possible to look at the available data and disaggregate the data based on the category 'CALD'. Additionally, ABS Census does not ask people to identify individual's immigration status. Therefore, there is no way of disaggregating Census data by refugee status*

This section presents some analysis of the recent ABS Census of Population and Housing Data, cutting the data by age, birthplace and linguistic diversity in an effort to investigate potential patterns of disadvantage. It then

presents a brief review of recent literature, which highlights some of the challenges that young people are facing which impact their transition to employment.

### Education and Employment Outcomes for Refugee Young People: What can the Quantitative Data Tell Us?

While a number of small studies have been carried out, there is no coordinated national approach to collecting data on refugee young people's education and employment outcomes. This means that there are no large-scale data disaggregating outcomes for refugee young people, other migrant young people or CALD young people (see Box 1) from other Australian young people. However, there are some variables in the Census of Population and Housing that can be used to differentiate between different groups in the population. Perhaps the two most useful variables are Country of Birth of Person (BPLP) and Language Spoken at Home. Using these indicators, this report presents key data from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing on young people's education and employment status. The data presented below is generated from ABS 2011 Table Builder. This program is available to the public through subscription and allows simple analysis of ABS Census data. Data can be disaggregated in a number of ways including by Australian State or Territory, age and gender.

For more information, on ABS 2011 Table Builder see: <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/tablebuilder>

### Characteristics of Young People in Victoria: Language and birthplace

In Australia, 18.7% of young people (15-29) speak a language other than English at home. In Victoria, the proportion is slightly higher with just under a quarter speaking a language other than English at home (ABS 2011).

The ABS Census of Population and Housing collects data on the main language other than English spoken at home, if any, coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ABS, 2011). Language spoken at home could be used as one marker of cultural and linguistic diversity.

In Victoria in 2011, there were around 720,443 young people aged 15-24 (See Table 2). Of these young people, just under a quarter (23.4%) are in a household where a

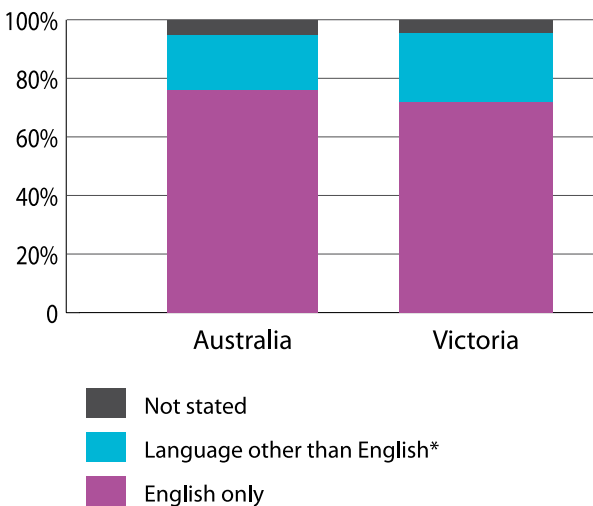


language other than English is spoken<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 2). This compares to national data indicating that in Australia, 18.7% of young people are in a household where a language other than English is spoken.

*Table 2: Number of young people (15-24) in Australia and Victoria (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)*

	Australia	Victoria
15-19 years	1,405,796	345,337
20-24 years	1,460,674	375,106
Total (15-24)	2,866,470	720,443

*Figure 2: Young people in Victoria and Australia aged 15-24 by language at home (English only vs. English and/or other) \* (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)*



\*This variable records the main language other than English spoken at home, if any, and is coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL), Second Edition

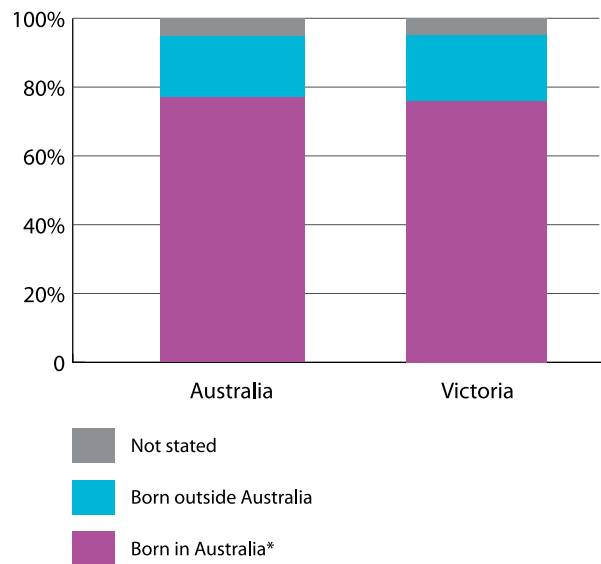
3. Note that this does not mean that English is not spoken. The Census asks 'Does the person speak a language other than English at home?' indicating linguistic diversity in the household.

In Australia, 17.7% of young people (15-24) were born outside of Australia. In Victoria, the proportion is slightly higher –19.3% (ABS 2011).

Data on place of birth is also collected in the Census. This can be used as a marker of cultural and linguistic diversity. This data will include newly arrived young people as well as young people who were born overseas but migrated to Australia as infants or children with their families. It does not distinguish between different immigration streams (e.g. young people who arrived as humanitarian entrants and those who arrived through other migration programs).

Figure 3 looks at the proportion of young people aged 15-24 by birthplace, comparing Victorian state data with Australian national data. In Victoria, 19.3% of young people aged 15-24 were born outside of Australia, compared with 17.7% nationally (See Figure 3).

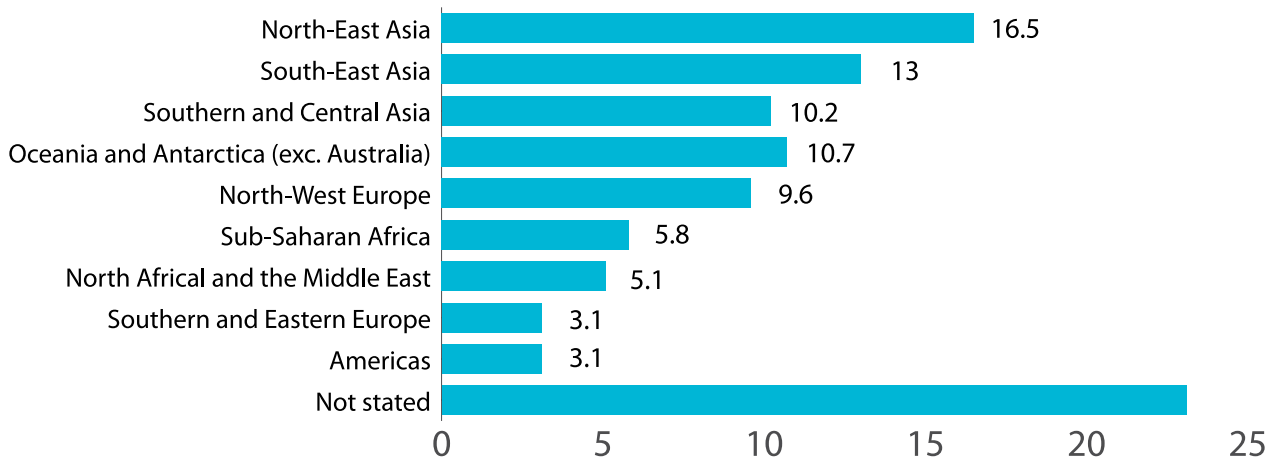
*Figure 3: Young people in Australia and Victoria aged 15-24 by birthplace (born in Australia vs. born outside Australia)*



\*Includes external territories

For those born outside Australia, the majority were born in sub-regions of Asia (39.7%), followed by the Oceania region (excluding Australia) (10.2%) and North-West Europe (9.6%) A smaller proportion were born in North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe and the Americas (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Sub-region of birth for young people in Victoria aged 15-24 who were born outside Australia\*



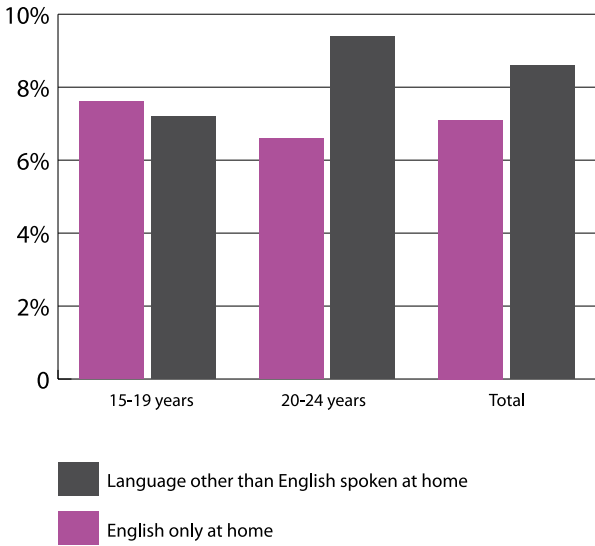
\*Proportions do not include those whose birthplace is 'Not stated'

## Employment Trends by Language Spoken at Home

In 20-24 year olds in Victoria, unemployment is higher in young people from households where a language other than English is spoken (ABS 2011).

Splitting the data between young people who speak only English at home and young people who speak a language other than English at home and then comparing unemployment rates between the two groups reveals some discrepancies. While there is little difference between 15-19 year olds, in the 20-24 age bracket, unemployment is higher in young people from households where a language other than English is spoken (see Figure 5). In 20-24 year olds, of young people who speak only English at home, 6.6% are unemployed compared to 9.4% for young people who speak a language other than English.

Figure 5: Unemployment in young people in Victoria aged 15-24 by age category and language spoken at home (%) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)



Looking at specific languages also reveals some differences. While there is little variance for the 15-19 age group, for some languages, there is a significant difference for the 20-24 year old age group. For example, 20-24 year olds from households where African languages are spoken have an unemployment rate more than double the same age group in English-only speaking households (See Table 3).

Table 3: Labour force status of young people in Victoria by age-group and language spoken at home (randomly selected languages) (%) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)

	Age-Group	Employed	Unemployed	Other
English Only	15-19	42.9%	7.6%	49.4%
	20-24	76.6%	6.6%	16.8%
Italian	15-19	40.5%	6.3%	53.3%
	20-24	78.6%	5.0%	16.4%
Iranic	15-19	16.7%	7.5%	75.8%
	20-24	40.4%	10.8%	48.8%
Chinese	15-19	14.0%	6.2%	79.7%
	20-24	33.4%	10.4%	56.2%
African Languages	15-19	10.5%	7.4%	82.1%
	20-24	41.0%	15.1%	44.0%

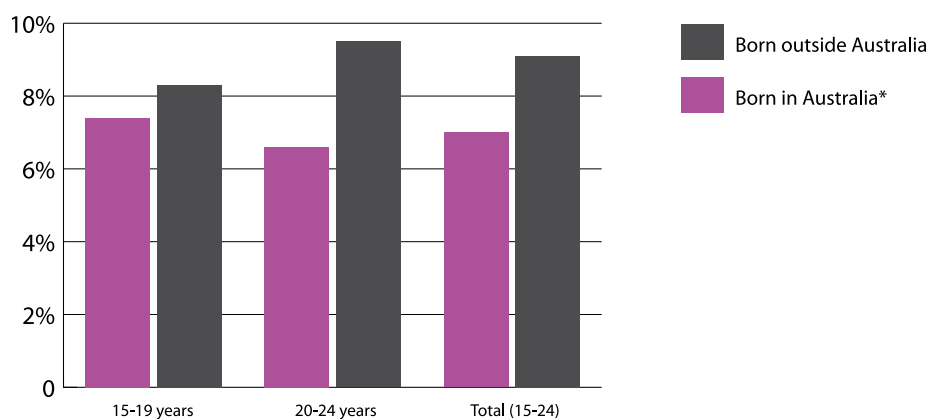
\*'Employed' includes: Employed works full time, Employed works part time; Employed away from work. 'Unemployed' includes: Unemployed looking for full time work; Unemployed looking for part time work. 'Other' includes: Not in the labour force; Not stated; and Not applicable

### Employment Trends by Country of Birth

In Victoria, young people born outside Australia have a slightly higher unemployment rate than those born in Australia (ABS 2011). Young people born in Australia (15-24) have an unemployment rate of 7.0%. Young people born outside Australia have an unemployment rate of 9.1%. There are marked differences in unemployment rates between regions of birth.

Data comparing place of birth with unemployment also reveal some patterns. In Victoria, young people born outside Australia have a higher unemployment rate than those born in Australia. This difference is greatest in 20-24 year olds (6.6% and 9.5% respectively) (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Unemployment rate in young people in Victoria by age-group and birthplace (Australia/outside Australia) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)



\*Includes external territories

Table 4 disaggregates this data by region of birth with comparison Australian-born rates provided. The data reiterates that across all age groups, young people born outside of Australia are often experiencing a higher unemployment rate than those born in Australia. For

example, young people aged 20-24 from North East Asia have an unemployment rate of 10.5% compared to 6.6% for those in the same age group born in Australia. Figure 7 visually summarises this data for the 20-24 year old age category.

Table 4: Labour force status of Victorian young people by age-group and region of birth\* (%) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)

	Age-group	Employed	Unemployed	Other
Born in Australia (includes external territories)	15-19	41.1%	7.4%	51.6%
	20-24	76.2%	6.6%	17.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	15-19	24.5%	8.6%	66.9%
	20-24	59.8%	11.5%	28.7%
North Africa and Middle East	15-19	12.8%	8.2%	79.1%
	20-24	34.6%	10.4%	55.1%
Oceania and Antarctica	15-19	43.9%	8.1%	48.1%
	20-24	76.1%	6.7%	17.2%
North-West Europe	15-19	38.4%	9.1%	52.5%
	20-24	72.9%	7.5%	19.5%
Southern and Eastern Europe	15-19	35.3%	9.0%	60.9%
	20-24	66.7%	8.9%	24.4%
South-East Asia	15-19	17.0%	7.9%	75.1%
	20-24	42.2%	10.7%	47.2%
North-East Asia	15-19	10.9%	6.4%	82.6%
	20-24	29.4%	10.5%	60.1%
Southern and Central Asia	15-19	22.0%	8.6%	69.4%
	20-24	67.2%	7.6%	25.2%
Americas	15-19	32.3%	8.8%	58.9%
	20-24	62.8%	9.3%	27.9%

\*\*'Employed' includes: Employed works full time; Employed works part time; Employed away from work. 'Unemployed' includes: Unemployed looking for full time work; Unemployed looking for part time work. 'Other' includes: Not in the labour force; Not stated; and Not applicable.

Figure 7: Unemployment rate in Victorian young people aged 20-24 by region of birth\* (%)  
(Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)



\*Includes external territories

## Education Trends by Language Spoken at Home

Splitting the data between young people who speak only English at home and young people who speak a language other than English at home and then comparing education status between the two groups reveals some discrepancies. In the 15-19 age bracket, most young people in both categories are attending full-time study

(although slightly less for English only). In the 20-24 age bracket, young people who speak a language other than English at home are around two times more likely to be studying full-time than young people who speak only English, and they are slightly less likely to be studying part-time (see Table 5).

Table 5: Student status of young people in Victoria (15-29) by age-group and language at home (English only vs. English and other) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)

	Age-Group	Not-Attending	Full-Time	Part-Time	Not Stated
English Only	15-19	18.0%	74.9%	5.8%	1.3%
	20-24	61.8%	26.9%	10.0%	1.3%
English and/or Other	15-19	7.9%	87.9%	2.6%	1.7%
	20-24	40.1%	51.4%	6.8%	1.7%
Not Stated	15-19	3.3%	11.0%	0.9%	84.8%
	20-24	6.5%	3.1%	0.9%	89.5%

Table 6 presents data on type of educational institution attending (if any). In the 15-19 age bracket, the main difference is in proportion of young people attending university – 10.7% of young people speaking only English at home compared with 19.7% of young people who speak a language other than English. In the 20-24 age bracket, the same pattern is clear in university study (25.8% and

43.4% respectively) and those who speak a language other than English are more likely to report being ‘other student’ (3.4% and 1.7% respectively).

The data for ‘not applicable’ (implying not studying) across all age groups reiterates the data above that a higher proportion of young people who speak a language other than English are studying.

*Table 6: Type of educational institution attending for young people (15-24) in Victoria by age-group and language at home (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)*

	Age-Group	Secondary School	Tafe	University	Other Student	Not Stated	Not Applicable
English Only	15-19	57.4%	8.4%	10.7%	1.5%	4.0%	18.0%
	20-24	0.3%	8.7%	25.8%	1.7%	1.8%	61.8%
English and/or Other	15-19	57.9%	7.1%	19.7%	1.5%	6.0%	7.9%
	20-24	0.7%	9.4%	43.4%	3.4%	3.0%	40.1%
Not Stated	15-19	7.9%	1.3%	1.2%	0.4%	86.0%	3.3%
	20-24	0.2%	1.0%	2.5%	0.3%	89.6%	6.5%

## Education Trends by Birthplace

Disaggregating the data for young people aged 15-24 by birthplace reveals some key differences. Young people born outside Australia are more likely to be attending education

in both age categories (See Table 7). The difference is profound in the 20-24 age group where young people born outside Australia are almost twice as likely to be studying than their Australian-born counterparts.

*Table 7: Student status of young people in Victoria (15-24) by age-group and birthplace (Australia/outside Australia) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)*

	Age-Group	Not-Attending	Full-Time	Part-Time	Not Stated
Born in Australia*	15-19	16.9%	76.1%	5.5%	1.5%
	20-24	60.9%	27.5%	10.0%	1.6%
Born Outside Australia	15-19	9.5%	85.9%	2.7%	1.9%
	20-24	40.0%	51.8%	6.4%	1.8%
Not Stated	15-19	5.14%	15.6%	1.2%	77.6%
	20-24	11.54%	4.6%	1.5%	82.3%

\*Includes external territories

Regarding type of institution attending, the main difference between those born within and outside Australia can be seen in the university category. In both age brackets, those born outside Australia are more likely to be attending University than their Australian-born

peers (See Table 8). At the same time, a higher proportion of the Australian-born young people are in the ‘not applicable’ category suggesting they are more likely to be engaged in work or other non-study activities.

*Table 8: Institution attending for young people in Victoria (15-24) by age-group and birthplace (Australia/outside Australia) (Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011)*

	Age-Group	Secondary School	Tafe	University	Other Student	Not Stated	Not Applicable
Born in Australia	15-19	57.8%	8.3%	11.3%	1.4%	4.4%	16.9%
	20-24	0.27%	8.8%	26.2%	1.7%	2.2%	60.9%
Born Outside Australia	15-19	55.3%	7.2%	20.6%	2.1%	5.3%	9.5%
	20-24	0.7%	9.3%	43.5%	3.7%	2.9%	40.0%
Not Stated	15-19	10.2%	1.9%	2.0%	0.4%	80.4%	5.1%
	20-24	1.2%	1.5%	3.5%	0.4%	82.8%	11.6%

\*Includes external territories

## Education and Employment Outcomes for Refugee Young People: A Brief Review of Recent Literature

Research highlights that many young people from refugee backgrounds arrive in Australia with high expectations and aspirations for education and employment and indeed have a high potential to have a successful life in Australia. While some young people will find a way through the system and undoubtedly do well, there is a growing body of evidence that many young people are facing a range of challenges in education, training and employment. Specific challenges consistently highlighted in the literature include language barriers, the ongoing impact of trauma and dislocation, lack of family support, disrupted previous education and lack of knowledge about the Australian education system or labour market. Regarding employment specifically, the literature also highlights lack of appropriate skills, limited social and professional networks, limited relevant vocational skills, limited work experience, negative experiences in seeking employment and vulnerability once employed as key challenges.

At the same time, much literature highlights that the employment-related needs of young refugees are not being adequately addressed by available settlement, education and employment services. Issues continually highlighted include inadequate language support, failure to acknowledge and meet psychosocial and emotional needs, racism, discrimination and cultural insensitivity (Jones and Rutter, 1998, Krenn and Limaye, 2009, Olliff and Mohamed, 2007). The literature also paints a concerning picture of a lack of alternative and achievable post-

compulsory education and training pathways, which can lead to young people's disengagement from education, employment and other services (Olliff, 2010a).

If the system is not adequately addressing the very real needs of these young people, it is unsurprising that many are facing poor education and employment outcomes. There is a critical need to recognise these structural barriers and to ensure that adequate support is provided so that these young people can reach their full potential. This section takes a look at recent Australian literature which highlights some of the experiences of refugee young people in education and in transition to employment.

### The Importance of Language

English proficiency plays a central role in determining the successful integration of migrants into Australian society and is a key factor associated with education and employment outcomes (Olliff and Couch, 2005). It is essential to note that language is identified as one of the most common resettlement stressors facing refugees (Beiser and Hou 2001) and has a profound effect on their ability to navigate and participate in education and employment, particularly in unfamiliar systems (Atwell et al., 2009). In recent years, up to 70% of refugees in the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP) have had limited or no English language skills on arrival in Australia (AMEP data as cited in Murray and Skull, 2005). Although humanitarian entrants to Australia are provided

with some English language tuition on arrival, those with limited previous English often find it inadequate (Atwell et al., 2009, Olliff and Couch, 2005). Additionally, many refugees will have minimal prior schooling and subsequent limited literacy in their first language. This means that many refugee young people understandably make slower progress in English language schools than other newly arrived young learners (Olliff, 2010a, Moore et al., 2008). Moore et al.'s (2008) research with refugee and humanitarian young people (aged 16-25) who attended English language programs found that 58% remained at the level at which they entered the program.

However, while it is well-recognised that refugees will often need additional support, this is not reflected in allocated funding which currently takes a 'one size fits all' approach (Olliff, 2010a). Research into ESL provision in Melbourne highlighted the need to extend English language instruction in and out of schools and make access to programs more flexible (Olliff and Couch, 2005). Olliff (2010a) outlines a recommendation to develop programs to bridge the gap between English programs and mainstream education.

### Going to School

While this report focuses largely on the transition to employment, it is important to briefly outline the situation for school education as this has ramifications for further study and employment options. Schools are an important jumping point for young people in Australia to access further education and viable employment options.

However, the evidence suggests that recently arrived students from refugee backgrounds have specific and complex learning needs that are not being adequately catered for in the mainstream school system (Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007, Olliff, 2010a). The following key themes can be drawn out from the literature.

**Limited language support:** Many refugee young people spend their first year in Australia in an English Language School or Centre (ELS/C), designed to help prepare students for mainstream schools. The rationale behind these schools is to provide necessary English skills to be able to make a successful transition into mainstream education and employment. However, it is consistently documented that this current provision of support is inadequate to prepare many young people for mainstream work and school (Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007, Gifford et al., 2009). In particular, concerns have been

raised that ESL provisions are not adequately catering to the needs of recent cohorts from the Horn of Africa and Middle East, young people who are likely to have histories of severely disrupted schooling (Olliff and Couch, 2005, Olliff, 2004, Chegwiddden and Thompson, 2008).

**Transitioning from English language to mainstream schools:** A number of studies have documented considerable difficulties experienced by young people transitioning from specialised English language schools into mainstream schools (Gifford et al., 2009, Chegwiddden and Thompson, 2008, Olliff, 2004). Gifford et al.'s Good Starts study found that while many recently-arrived refugee young people reported on their first experience in an English Language School positively, they faced a number of challenges on their transition to mainstream school. Gifford et al.'s research shows a significant change in experience between ESL and mainstream schools. Some of the results are summarised below:

- Many felt that their level of English was not yet sufficient for them to cope with educational requirements;
- There was a statistically significant decrease in enjoyment in coming to school;
- They reported that they were less supported by their teachers;
- Sense of belonging and safety decreased;
- Levels of engagement and perceived achievement decreased;
- Reported experiences of racism and discrimination significantly increased.

By the end of the fourth year of the study, 25% of participants had left without completing secondary school to seek further technical training or employment (Gifford et al., 2009). While it is noted that Victorian schools are provided with resources to provide additional language support to refugee students, there is evidence that schools are not always applying these resources and require additional support, advice and professional development in order to adequately support their refugee students (See Teacher's experiences below) (Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007).

**Inflexible school education system:** Young refugees arriving in Australia will have a range of educational backgrounds. Some may have experienced no formal schooling, others have had disrupted education due to long stays in refugee camps or from being in flight, and



therefore have limited numeracy and literacy skills in their first language; others have had some schooling but not in their first language (Olliff, 2010a). However, the school system in Australia is constructed on a linear model, which is based on the presumption of uninterrupted progression through primary, and secondary schools leading to tertiary education or integration into the workforce (Taylor and Sidhu, 2007). This system is particularly challenging for older adolescent and young adult refugees who have experienced interrupted schooling and need to acquire English language proficiency along with relevant skills and knowledge to tackle unfamiliar education, training and employment pathways (Taylor and Sidhu, 2007, Cassity and Gow, 2006). They will be placed in a class-level reflecting their chronological age, rather than their ability or educational needs (Cassity and Gow, 2006). Some participants in the Good Starts study said that while they had wanted to attend high school, they were directed to TAFE because they were too old for school (Gifford et al., 2009). This again highlights an inflexible system that narrows pathway options for some young people.

*... Many are not ready for a job but there is no suitable education or training option*

Teacher's experiences: Research suggests that many teachers struggle to cope with increasing numbers and needs of refugee students (Matthews, 2008). Research in the UK found that many refugee students were seen by their teachers as 'problems' rather than having potential to contribute positively to their schools and classrooms (Jones and Rutter, 1998). Matthews highlights the critical lack of professional development.

For Sidhu and Taylor (2007), the current education system is working against positive outcomes for refugee young people, largely leaving outcomes 'to chance'. While many young people and their families come to Australia with high aspirations and expectations for education, the reality is often very different (Gifford et al., 2009). If not given adequate support, students will often disengage and leave school without pursuing alternative education options.

### Post-compulsory education

Many of the issues identified above pose similar challenges to refugee young people in accessing and participating in post-compulsory education. However, a number of other themes emerge in the literature exploring post-compulsory education and training

pathways. Firstly, mainstream post-compulsory education pathways have been criticised for being inflexible and not tailored to meet the diverse and complex needs of Australia's young people (Taylor and Sidhu, 2007). There is a critical lack of targeted education and training pathways that work for post-compulsory school age young people and young people with severely disrupted education. Ollif's (2010a) recent review of education and training pathways highlighted a lack of training programs relevant to young people who are disengaged from school or English Language Schools and who are not ready for TAFE. Many are not ready for a job but there is no suitable education or training option.

Secondly, the complexity of pathways and services that young people must navigate is highlighted as a challenge for many young people (Olliff, 2010a). Education systems and labour markets vary enormously across countries and likely differ from the Australian system. A key theme emerging from the young people in the Good Starts study was the difficulties they had in 'finding themselves an educational pathway'. Many of the young people recounted stories of being confused about their options and being uncertain about how they could achieve a degree that would get them the job or career that they wanted (Gifford et al., 2009). As Ollif (2010a) points out, in a complex and confusing system it is perhaps unsurprising that many young people and their families have a strong preference for young people to go into mainstream secondary schools or universities – as these are pathways that are understood (Olliff, 2010a). Additionally, when it comes to finding employment, many young people do not know 'what pathway to choose' (Multicultural Development Association, 2010). The Australian labour market is new and different and there is no simple road map to guide them and provide support/assistance in relation to jobs and careers (Multicultural Development Association, 2010).

### Technical and vocational options

The literature points to the difficulty that educators have had portraying non-university post-compulsory study pathways in a positive light (e.g. AMEP Youth Program, AMES, Vic - Olliff, 2010a). Many young people and their families see TAFE as a 'second best' option. Young people and their families often have high expectations and it can be difficult to face the reality that some of these expectations may not be realistically achieved given their language and literacy abilities (Francis and Cornfoot,

2007, Krenn and Limaye, 2009, Atwell et al., 2009, Banks and MacDonald, 2003). In some countries certain jobs are considered undesirable or only for people of a 'lower class/ caste'. This means that young people and their families see some jobs as 'non-options' and may not consider gaining a trade qualification. In consultations by the Multicultural Development Association (2010), one young person said: "It is better to not work than do a job that my family and community will not accept" (p. 8).

In Atwell et al.'s (2009) research with parents of refugee young people, many had high expectations for their children's careers. Half of the participants wanted their children to become nurses or doctors, with others naming engineering, mechanics and law. This reflects the preferred careers available in their country of origin but they are also highly skilled professions which many people with disrupted schooling may find challenging to achieve.

One of the key challenges identified by Transition Officers (employed by DEECD to support students with backgrounds of disrupted schooling to access mainstream schools and further education), was getting students to accept that TAFE and other alternatives to university were more appropriate options for them (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008 see Case Study 4, pp. 4).

This research shows the importance of understanding people's hopes and expectations and the way these are constructed when it comes to facilitating pathways that are desirable and that work. Non-university education options may be more appropriate for many young people but there is a need to present these options in a positive light.

## University

Previous studies suggest that, given the challenges students from refugee backgrounds face at high school, university studies might be unrealistic for many of these students (Cassidy & Gow, 2005; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Other studies have suggested that students with a refugee background often need a specifically tailored initiation into universities so that they are better equipped to meet these challenges. In research with university students in Western Australia, students highlighted the following (Earnest et al., 2010a, Earnest et al., 2010b):

- The need for guidance and encouragement to attend university: High school students should be made more

aware of the possible avenues for higher education to be encouraged to have dreams and goals.

- Extra attention and help (esp. in the first year): Additional help from university staff, including one-on-one support, as students learn to navigate university. This included support with English but also general academic support. Counsellors should also be available to help with the social and emotional needs.
- Bridging or preparatory courses: This includes orientation on what to expect at university.
- Increased financial support: This was necessary to reduce financial pressure on students and reduce the temptation to discontinue education in favour of work.

These recommendations are further supported by recent studies which proposed a need for understanding refugee student issues, increasing academic awareness of refugee backgrounds and educational shortcomings (for example, poor English language skills, lack of continuous schooling and differences in learning styles), and implementing strategies to improve educational outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds. Strategies include mentoring, cultural sensitivity training for academics, participation in tutorials and involving students from refugee backgrounds in student guild activities (Earnest et al., 2010b). Such strategies are few and far between in the current system.

## Transitioning to Employment

Research highlights a number of challenges experienced by refugee young people when it comes to accessing and maintaining employment. In previous research, the Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008) pointed out four key barriers hindering successful transition from education to employment for refugee and other newly arrived young people:

- Lack of critical networks such as family and friends in employment
- Limited vocational skills relevant to the Australian labour market
- Limited work experience prior to arrival
- Lack of familiarity

Other commonly reported barriers to employment include: limited English proficiency; lack of Australian work experience; limited access to transport and affordable housing close to employment; lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture and systems; pressures of

4. The JSA contracts that were awarded in 2009 were due to expire on 30 June 2012 but have since been extended for a further three years (Refugee Council of Australia 2012)

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juggling employment and domestic responsibilities with caring responsibilities (especially for women and girls); limited social and professional networks in Australia; the stressors of resettlement; racism and discrimination; difficulties with recognition of skills, qualifications and experience; lack of qualifications; and visa restrictions for some asylum seekers. These challenges are well-documented in the literature. Some of them are explored in detail below.

## UCan2 Case Study

UCAN2 is a multi-agency project involving collaboration between the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House), Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). The Ucan2 program provides individual case management, employment-focussed curriculum, psycho-social support, social connections and part-time employment opportunities to participants who are concurrently undertaking the standard twelve-month English language program offered to newly-arrived migrants.

Ucan2 is designed to provide appropriate levels of support during early resettlement to enable young people from refugee backgrounds to negotiate challenging education, training and employment pathways successfully. The aim of UCAN2 is to support the transition of students into other education settings, to provide work preparation skills, to provide work experience and employment opportunities and to give them life skills and to build confidence and capacity to build their own future in Australia.

### ***The Specific Objectives of Ucan2 are:***

- To increase the level of co-operation between providers of education, social support, training and employment services working with young people from refugee backgrounds in the 16 – 24 year age group.
- To increase education, training and employment opportunities for young refugees in the first 15 months of the resettlement, recovery and integration process.
- To increase psycho-social support provided to newly arrived young people through developing relationships with volunteers and class curriculum.

### ***Outcomes and Learnings:***

The positive outcomes of UCAN2 have included increased capacity in English Language skills, knowledge about education and employment pathways, workplace communication skills and employment seeking skills. A significant number of students have undertaken part-time work experience in a local retail store. This experience provides valuable skills for those young people who are newly arrived and have not had the opportunity of working in Australia. With each Ucan2 program delivered, a number of students are successful

in gaining employment directly through their work experience placement. A majority of students have successfully transitioned to further education, training and employment opportunities after completing the Ucan2 program.

### ***The learnings and experience of Ucan2 include the following;***

- The Importance of an interrelated support network, for example, English language schools, specialised mental health providers - Foundation House and specialised youth support workers - CMY, in supporting the successful transition for young people from refugee backgrounds in education, training and employment.
- The importance of relationships between the multicultural community sector and corporate industries such as Australia Post, Coles and K-mart in providing employment opportunities for young people.
- The need for specialised targeted support for young people from refugee backgrounds in gaining successful education, training and employment opportunities.

**Length of Project:** Commenced in 2008 – Funded until June 2014

**Funding Source:** Philanthropic

**Location:** Each semester there are 5 sites delivering the Ucan2 program. Sites have included the following;

- AMES - Dandenong , Noble Park, Box Hill and Footscray
- NMIT - Epping, Preston, Collingwood
- Swinburne Croydon
- Victoria University - Footscray
- Western English language School
- Noble Park English language School – Noble Park and Casey

*Case Study supplied by CMY*

## Lack of Specialised Services

Specialist employment services for refugees are limited and this is seen as a barrier for refugee young people accessing appropriate and effective employment support (Mestan, 2008, Refugee Council of Australia, 2012). Job Services Australia (JSA) is the main Australian Government-funded network of organisations providing employment services to eligible jobseekers across Australia<sup>4</sup>. Currently, there are a limited number of specialist JSA services targeting people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. However, this provision is generally seen to be inadequate. The Refugee Council of Australia highlight the absence of any strategic framework for funding specialist services in areas where there is significant settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants and point out that clients are not being appropriately referred to existing specialised CALD services (Abdelkerim and Grace, 2012). Moreover, it has been argued that even where there are specialised services available, often the target population – job seekers from refugee or other CALD backgrounds – do not know that they exist. It is also clear that many young people do not know what they are entitled to (Refugee Council of Australia, 2012).

Both refugee communities and community or non-government organisations providing services to refugees have expressed frustration at the lack of targeted support offered by JSA services and the poor outcomes experienced by refugee and humanitarian entrants. The Refugee Council of Australia document consistent negative feedback about how JSA services are meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants (Kyle et al., 2004).

## Experiences in Mainstream Services

In the absence of a national employment strategy focusing on refugee and humanitarian entrants, the main provisions for this group of job seekers are through generalist or 'mainstream' service providers (Refugee Council of Australia, 2012). While undoubtedly many young people make it through the system and are able to find employment, research suggests that many mainstream services are not adequately responsive to the specific needs of refugee communities. They have

been criticised for being unable to provide the necessary level of assistance required and a lack of cultural sensitivity (Barraket, Refugee Council of Australia, 2012). They have further been questioned for avoiding 'difficult cases' and valuing short-term over long-term gains (Refugee Council of Australia, 2012, Refugee Council of Australia, 2007, Multicultural Development Association, 2010).

The reality is that refugee young people need access to services that are not only sensitive to the needs of CALD communities but that are also sensitive to the additional challenges faced by the young which require a different level of support than for adults (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007, Refugee Council of Australia, 2007).

While JSA claim to provide tailored services and early intervention to support vulnerable job seekers, anecdotal evidence based on community consultation suggests that the way in which early intervention and tailored responses are defined does not encompass the level and type of employment support that refugee and humanitarian entrants are requesting and need in order to overcome barriers (Multicultural Development Association, 2010). Many people consulted felt that JSA providers had not helped them find jobs and most of those who had found employment had done so through their own networks or with the help of settlement and other community services.

## Limited Social and Professional Capital

A significant factor that contributes to disadvantage of young people from refugee backgrounds when it comes to finding employment is the lack of social and professional networks that they have outside of their community (Refugee Council of Australia, 2012). In research with Melbourne's Sudanese community participants recognised this disadvantage with participants observing that other Australians are able to gain employment through networks that are 'underground' and 'invisible', but that they do not have access to such opportunities (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006, Dhanji, 2009). Lack of social and professional capital can also make finding work experience a real challenge (Dhanji, 2009).

Several studies suggest that young refugees try to cope with their loss of human capital and challenges accessing mainstream services by seeking help within their own communities. This can contribute to a cycle

4. The JSA contracts that were awarded in 2009 were due to expire on 30 June 2012 but have since been extended for a further three years (Refugee Council of Australia 2012)

of undesirable employment within 'secondary labour-market niches' for people from various communities (Olliff, 2010a). Research has found that in some refugee communities, employment seems to be significantly concentrated in certain low-skilled service niches, including cleaning, aged care, transport (i.e. taxi driving) and meat processing (Tomlinson and Egan, 2002, Colic-Peisker, 2003). Many of these jobs are characterised by unhealthy work environments, including long hours, relatively high occupational health and safety risks, and limited job security (Alcorso, 2003; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). While seeking employment through one's own family or ethnic community may have positive employment outcomes in the short-term, in the long-term they can lead to inadequate employment and downward occupational mobility (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006, Colic-Peisker, 2003, Tomlinson and Egan, 2002).

## ReSource Case Study

ReSource is a multi-faceted pre-employment program that targets marginalised young people living in public housing including refugee young people. Run by the Ecumenical Migration Centre the program addresses a range of barriers such as unfamiliarity with the education system through the use of peer education, career counselling and connections to volunteer opportunities. There are four elements to the program and they include:

### 1. Employment Pathways for Refugee Youth:

An experiential learning program designed to empower refugee young people to make informed choices about education and employment options. The program was developed in consultation with refugee young people living in the City of Yarra who felt they needed more support for looking for work and is now open to young refugee background people from across Melbourne. The program combines practical learning (e.g. preparing resumes, cover letters and practice interviews) with work place visits and career advice to empower and improve the knowledge of these young people about Australian workplace and education and training pathways.

### 2. PHUCHA (Future) Club:

A weekly informal job club for refugee young people supported by paid staff and volunteers. Job seekers are encouraged to explore diverse career options and learning pathways and are linked into other support services. Feedback from participants highlights the benefits of individual and intensive job search assistance that allows young people to articulate their skills and strengths. The Future Club currently runs from the African Australian Community Centre in Footscray and will re-commence at the EMC's Fitzroy offices in term 1, 2014.

### 3. Community Service Volunteering Program:

In partnership with NMIT's Young Adult Migrants Education Centre (YAMEC) and Victoria University's ESL department, this program introduces migrant and refugee young people to volunteering. Guest speakers talk about the benefits of volunteering followed by on-site visits to community led activities. Connections to organisations and volunteer opportunities are supported to develop ongoing volunteering opportunities.

### 4. Youth Voices:

In partnership with the Fitzroy Learning Network Youth Voices creates a space for young people to share and develop project ideas that respond to common issues through the use of multimedia. As part of this program young people regularly participate in the Gertrude Street Projection Festival, the Young Refugee Film Festival and other local arts based initiatives.

### ***Outcomes and Learnings***

ReSource has demonstrated successful outcomes, engaging over 200 young people each year in clarifying their personal goals and options in work, vocational study or training. They have worked with young people to undertake a range of traineeships, in volunteering roles and into employment opportunities. Participants have also indicated that they feel more equipped to look for work in the new cultural context.

### ***The learning and experience of ReSource indicates that:***

- Having a local focus helps develop links with local employers and training providers that will help young people make sustainable employment choices.
- Targeted approaches are required to specifically address young people's job readiness in a new cultural context.
- Refugee young people require ongoing support at different stages of their chosen employment pathway.
- It is essential to actively build the networks of young refugee people, as close social ties are those which lead to employment opportunities.

**Length of Project:** Current funding from 2012 - December 2014

**Funding Source:** Office for Youth and Philanthropic

**Location:** Fitzroy and Footscray.

*Case Study supplied by CMY.*

## Racism and Discrimination in the Job Application Process

Recent research paints a concerning picture. Unfortunately, despite the diversity of Australia's population, racism and discrimination are still well documented as experienced by many groups. This includes systematic discrimination in the job application process. For example, a recent study found that a foreign or indigenous-sounding name on a CV meant significantly less likely to be interviewed for a position (Booth et al., 2010, Booth et al., 2012). With some exceptions (e.g. an Italian sounding name in Melbourne, which served as an advantage) and variation across ethnic groups, the study showed a clear pattern of discrimination on the basis of the racial origin of applicants' names (Booth et al., 2010, Booth et al., 2012). The study found that people with Chinese and Middle Eastern names would have to submit at least 50% more applications in order to receive the same number of callbacks as people with traditional Anglo-Saxon sounding names. Indigenous applicants also suffered a statistically significant level of discrimination, though the effects were smaller (Booth et al., 2012).

The technique used in this study – sending out over 4000 fictional CVs to advertised positions, with all variables held constant except the applicant's name as an indicator of ethnicity, and comparing callback rates – is argued to provide an accurate measure of racism than with more traditional approaches, which tend to allow the knowing research participant to respond in a 'socially correct' manner, making true attitudes towards ethnic groups and resulting in biased estimates (Booth et al., 2010, Booth et al., 2012).

## Workplace Vulnerabilities

Lack of local knowledge and workplace experience leave many young people ill-informed about employment conditions in Australia and their right to a safe, fair and discrimination-free workplace (Booth et al., 2012). A lack of knowledge means that many young people are vulnerable to being exploited by employers and may be reluctant to report illegal or unfair working conditions for fear of jeopardising their source of income or their ability to remain in the country (Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, 2008, Multicultural Development Association, 2010).

There is no research available specifically documenting the experiences of refugee young people in the workplace. However, it is well documented that young people, particularly in casual employment, have low

bargaining power. They tend to be uninformed about their rights at work and lack the skills to exercise these rights, so can be vulnerable to workplace exploitation or be unaware of safety issues in the workplace (ILO, 2005, Stokes and Cuervo, 2008). Therefore, it is reasonable to postulate that refugee young people in the workplace are vulnerable to potential exploitation.

## Racism and Discrimination in the Workplace

As noted above, racism and discrimination are highly reported among Australia's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community (Coventry et al., 2002a, Booth et al., 2010, Booth et al., 2012, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2013). While racism and discrimination are reported in many parts of life, a recent study by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2013) found that work was the most commonly reported setting, with one in three survey respondents reporting either witnessing or experiencing racism at work. They described a range of experiences, including unfair treatment when applying for work, being denied work opportunities, being subjected to inappropriate questions and comments and hearing racist jokes or derogatory comments in the workplace (2013). These findings are backed by a series of reports highlighting racism and discrimination at work for some minority groups in Australia.

Many people are reluctant to report experiences of racism with a prevailing view that nothing would be done about it. This literature suggests that this view is somewhat founded showing that in many workplaces, there is a failure to respond to low-level racist incidents, creating an environment in which this kind of behaviour is replicated and tolerated (e.g. Kabir and Evans, 2002, Poynting and Noble, 2004, Forrest and Dunn, 2007, Berman and Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, 2008).

## Gender-Based Patterns

Although age-disaggregated data is not available, research has demonstrated that in many refugee communities, experiences in education and employment are profoundly gendered. Women, particularly from some cultural backgrounds, tend to have lower levels of labour market participation than men (Lamba 2003; Yost & Lucas 2002). For the 1999-2000 cohort of the LSIA, labour market participation 18 months post-arrival was less than half for female refugees (17%) than male refugees (48%)



(Richardson et al., 2001). Such patterns undoubtedly at least partly reflect traditional gender roles in country of origin, where options for women may be limited by cultural and religious values (Mestan, 2008). Childcare and housework responsibilities can also limit women's options for education or employment. Therefore, special efforts may be needed to provide opportunities for women. At the same time, men may experience personal and community pressure to work to provide for their families. This may lead them to accept poor working conditions or underemployment (Multicultural Development Association, 2010).

There is a need for further research into the way that gender influences the experiences of refugees in younger cohorts.

## Women in Work Community Enterprise Case Study

Women in work community enterprise is run by Whittlesea Community Connections and offers local training and employment opportunities to refugee and migrant women who face systemic barriers to workforce participation. Women are supported to access the certificate 3 and diploma in Children's Services and employed as childcare workers in a mobile childcare service. The program maximises the strengths of refugee and migrant women who speak multiple languages and have extensive formal and informal childcare experiences. Some women have had no prior formal education before coming to Australia, while others have overseas qualifications but have experienced difficulties gaining local recognition.

The women are provided with additional support in communication, orientation to Australian workplace culture and job search skills. The women must also

complete a work placement and offered an opportunity for casual employment when qualified as part of a multi ethnic mobile childcare service.

The 'Women in work' childcare community enterprise is illustrative of a successful innovative approach that combines training, support and employment whilst simultaneously building participant's confidence, self-esteem and employability.

**Length of Project:** Started 2010 - ongoing

**Funding Source:** Funding Donor - Australian Communities Foundation

**Location:** Metropolitan Melbourne

*Case Study supplied by CMY.*

## Vulnerability & Disengagement:

Despite the inadequacies in the system noted above, many refugee young people will and do undoubtedly find a way through the system and transition into ongoing employment. However, it is important to note that in the context of vulnerabilities stemming from pre-migration experiences, post-migration settlement challenges and a system that is not adequately meeting their complex needs, young people from refugee backgrounds are vulnerable to disengagement. In Ollif's research, staff from a specialised learning centre supporting disengaged young people from refugee backgrounds, highlighted a lack of referral pathways to catch students as they are disengaging from education and employment pathways (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Vulnerability to disengagement has also been highlighted in recent research investigating the problems being faced in the Sudanese community in Melbourne. Currently, a range of services are seeking to engage a number

of young men who have faced a range of settlement challenges and have not been able to engage with mainstream services or education and employment. Many are experiencing significant mental health problems, substance abuse and are frequently engaged in the justice system (Brown et al., 2013, Turnbull and Stokes, 2012). Research with community members and workers highlights that many of these young men have had negative or unsuccessful experiences in the service system, tried and failed to engage with education, and have become disengaged from their own communities. While many are tempted to look for blame at the individual level – it is essential to recognise that in many ways, the system has failed them.

With a lack of specialised services to meet their needs, many of these young men have essentially fallen through the gaps in the system. There is a critical need to respond to their needs and to ensure that the appropriate services are in place to prevent this happening in the future.

## Section 2: Processes That Support Youth Transitions

While refugee young people are by no means a homogenous group, there are a number of common barriers that many face in terms of participating in education and transitioning from education into sustainable and meaningful employment. In this context, there is a need to take a serious look at what is being provided and where reforms are needed. While it has been noted that evidence-based practices for this population are lacking and there is a critical need for research, the available literature can start to highlight key features of effective programmes.

Indeed, there are number of initiatives that are attempting to facilitate young people from refugee backgrounds to transition into employment. Many of these initiatives are small-scale but highlight key elements of what works (and, perhaps just as importantly, what does not work). As a recent report pointed out, while there is no definitive recipe (Olliff, 2010a), we are starting to get a clearer idea of what can facilitate (and indeed, what can impede) positive youth transitions. There are several pockets of good practice, largely emerging from the community sector. This forms the start of an evidence base to guide future investments that have the maximum potential to make a difference in these young people's lives.

This section presents key principles of what works. It draws together a number of sources including previous literature reviews (e.g. Refugee Council of Australia's recent review of what works in facilitating post-compulsory education and training pathways), reports on consultations (with young people and service providers) and an evaluation of specific initiatives.

### Key Principles of Good Practice

#### **1. Recognise that refugee young people have distinct needs**

When it comes to support for education – employment transitions, refugees face different challenges from other migrant groups and thus require a specific and tailored response. Taylor and Sidhu (2007) highlight that until recently, academic and public policy research have not distinguished between the needs of migrants in education from the particular needs of refugees. This means that there is a lack of targeted policies and organisational frameworks to address the significant educational disadvantage confronting refugee youth. For example,

putting refugees in the same category as other migrants for whom English is their second language can mean that while their language skills are recognised, their more complex needs (for example related to potential limited literacy skills in their own language) are not. In the context of education, Taylor and Sidhu argue that failing to see migrants and refugees as separate groups is failing to acknowledge a serious difference in pre-migration and post-migration factors. In a recent study of provision for refugee students in Australia, it was reported that refugee students were mostly either conflated with other categories or students such as ESL or not mentioned at all (Taylor and Sidhu 2007).

This means that there is a need for a range of targeted education and employment initiatives for young people. Research highlights that programs specifically designed for refugee youth are able to be flexible to individual learning needs (2007). However, currently these programs are usually small scale (and sometimes short-term) community-based initiatives which often have sustainability issues in the face of funding restrictions and/or lack of staff capacity (e.g. River Nile Learning Centre Victoria - Olliff, 2010a).

*Key Message: Tailor specific education and employment policies, programs and services targeting young refugee and humanitarian entrants because their needs differ from other Australian migrants*

#### **2. Refugee Young People are not a Homogenous Group**

While it is important to recognise that the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds are different from those of other migrant or culturally and linguistically diverse young people, it is also important to recognise the diversity within the refugee community. Refugee and other newly arrived young people come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Treating them as a homogenous group leads to generalisations and limits effective work. Existing initiatives have been criticised for failing to take into account people's different countries of origin, and the way their experiences have impacted on their education and employment history.

*Key message: Programs must recognise the unique needs within and between refugee communities.*

### 3. Holistic Approach

There is a need for holistic initiatives that address education and employment pathways while being sensitive to health, wellbeing and settlement needs of refugee young people (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Many young people from refugee backgrounds will be dealing with pre-migration as well as complex settlement issues. As Atwell et al. (2009) point out, to move forward with their lives they need to come to terms with their past and gain a sense of control over their future. Several programs have been praised for incorporating wellbeing support and therapeutic elements such as drumming or music/art therapy alongside language or employment training (e.g. Bankstown Intensive Learning Centre; Milpera State High School) (Atwell et al., 2009). However, it is essential that this is an explicit focus of programs so that staff time is appropriately allocated to these activities rather than it being an add-on that staff do in their own time, as has been identified as a problem in the past (Olliff, 2010a).

At the same time, it should be noted that some have warned that disproportionate attention to the trauma experiences of refugee children and youth can draw the attention away from a focus on other needs such as education. For example, Rutter has warned that a focus on pre-migration experiences of trauma masks the significance of post-migration experiences such as poverty, isolation or racism (Block et al., 2011, Block et al., 2010). There is further concern that a focus on trauma leads to a preoccupation with individual level interventions which overlook broader dimensions of inequality and disadvantage (Rutter, 2006).

*Key message: Provide wellbeing support alongside education and employment services without focusing solely on one or the other.*

### 4. Flexible Options Multiple Pathways

In the context of criticisms that currently available education pathways are inflexible and not meeting diverse and complex needs of Australia's diverse young people, there is a need to consider mapping appropriate pathways. This means considering some realistic and achievable pathways for young people who might need language support, have a background of disrupted schooling, and have other settlement issues that they are dealing with at the same time. It also means that initiatives should be able to develop and change to meet needs that emerge (Matthews, 2008).

It is well known that there is a need for a more 'flexible' system. But what does flexibility look like in practice? Olliff highlights that young people need to be provided with 'supported choices' (Olliff, 2010a). This means that young people have a number of realistic options to choose from. Programs should provide choices based on student's realistic abilities, which include both academic and vocational pathways.

Secondly, young people and their families need information about the Australian education system, and the potential pathways for young people to make informed, realistic decisions (Olliff, 2010a). In their research with refugee families in Melbourne, Atwell et al. (Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007) have highlighted the importance of understanding and having confidence in the stability and predictability of one's environment. Resettlement programs that provide an understanding of unfamiliar social and bureaucratic systems and services that respond in a consistent and comprehensive way were key to this effort (2009). Finally, different pathways need to be portrayed in a positive light (Olliff, 2010a), rather than comparing options as undesirable or less superior than others.

*Key message: Provide flexible education support options to meet the varying needs of those with disrupted schooling.*

### 5. Involve the Broader Community

Providing specialist services are important but they are only the first step. To facilitate refugee young people to find meaningful employment, there is a need to work with employers so that they can see the value of workforce diversity (Olliff 2010). In light of evidence of structural racism in the employment application process discussed above, there is much work to be done here. Working with local business and other employers in community-based programs has been shown to be a strategic first step.

Programs that include the community (e.g. through the mentoring and work placement components) can foster better community relationships and understanding (Atwell et al. 2009, Olliff, 2010). Programs that have made a concerted effort to include the wider community (e.g. local businesses and volunteers) have reported benefits not just for the young participants but to the community as well (Carr, 2004). For example, evaluation of the UCan2 initiative showed that involvement of the community through volunteer mentors and work experience provided young people with connections, language support and increased understanding

of Australian culture. At the same time, community members reported an enhanced understanding of refugee issues (Block et al., 2011, Block et al., 2010) and young people were able to build networks and some were able to get a job through their community contacts.

*Key message: Engaging employers and local business in programs establishes networks for young people and helps to build understanding, cultural awareness and recognition of what refugee young people have to offer.*

## 6. Better Coordination

It is essential to recognise the range and interconnectedness of the health, social, education and employment issues that many refugee young people and their families face, and subsequent need for agencies and institutions to work together (Block et al., 2011, Block et al., 2010, Bloch, 2004, Coventry et al., 2002b). This may mean linking participants in education and training programs with support services in the community (Olliff, 2010a). However, the literature suggests that there is often little coordination between government departments and community groups working with refugee young people (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008). There has also been some criticism of poor communication between State and Federal services leading to overlap in programming (Olliff and Couch, 2005).

*Key message: The needs of young people are cross-cutting and many young people will need access to a number of services, it is essential that services work together to provide an integrated response.*

## 7. Regular Consultation

The literature suggests that currently, young people from refugee backgrounds are inadequately consulted in policy formulation and program development. There is a need to develop a systematic process of consultation. Ongoing consultation with service providers can also inform development of appropriate policies and programs.

*Key message: Ensure ongoing consultation with young refugees and the service providers working with them about the issues and support services that affect young refugees.*

## 8. Gender Sensitivity

A gender-sensitive approach to programming is always important. This means that different approaches may be needed to target and work with young men and women

from various cultural backgrounds with awareness of culturally prescribed gender norms and the impact that this may have on employment opportunities and outcomes.

*Key message: Sensitivity to gender in programming which may include specific outreach to young women.*

## 9. Being Inclusive and Involving Individuals, Families and Communities.

Given that young people highlight family as a key source of social support, strengthening families so that they can better provide support to their young people should be a priority (Gifford et al. 2009). As such, it is important to consider how initiatives can involve families as part of the process of finding a positive outcome for young people. This is additionally important given the evidence that young people's education and employment outcomes or choices can lead to conflict in families, especially when they clash with misguided or unrealistic expectations.

*Key message: Involving families in some levels of programming is important, particularly for younger cohorts.*

## 10. Addressing Racism and Discrimination

It is well noted that specific policies and programs for refugee young people will ultimately be effective if embedded within a broader socially inclusive society. Therefore, in the context of continued reports of racism and discrimination in the community and in institutions, facilitating social attitudes towards new arrivals that encourage a sense of belonging, and value positive messages of integration are important. Coventry et al. (2002b) argue that there needs to be continuing community education to encourage the community to respond positively and generously to disadvantaged groups including refugees and asylum seekers.

A report from the Victorian Multicultural Commission and Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (Harnessing diversity) outlines a series of recommendations for addressing racial and religious discrimination in employment. This includes broad recommendations to campaign employers to encourage culturally inclusive workplace policies, to promote cases of promising practice, and to establish benchmarks for workplaces to measure against their diversity practices (see Berman and VEOHRC, 2008).

*What works? Work with employers to encourage culturally inclusive workplaces and the economic benefits in managing diversity.*

## The Social Studio Case Study

The Social Studio is a non-profit social enterprise with the sole purpose of creating meaningful and long-term social change for young people who face barriers to employment and education. Clothing is created from recycled and excess manufacturing materials. The Social Studio empowers young people from refugee communities in Melbourne to achieve their dreams through work experience and training in clothing design, production, retail and hospitality. The main social barriers addressed are unemployment, isolation and difficulties accessing education and training. The Social Studio addresses these problems in 4 ways:

- Creating jobs;
- Providing training;
- Encouraging community engagement and
- Social inclusion.

In addition, social support is provided via legal advice, counselling, tutoring, driving and referral for housing and medical assistance. The Studio also enables community engagement through its program or workshops and public events. It is an environmentally sustainable and ethical enterprise.

There are three core aspects to the 'business' of the Social Studio:

1. The design and making of clothing
2. Sales of fashion merchandise made on premise
3. Preparation and sale of coffee and café food.

### **Sale of goods:**

All goods are sold on consignment with designers receiving commissions on the sale of goods. Any profits are invested in developing more employment and training opportunities for refugee youth.

### **Café':**

The café' services Fair Trade coffee and food with an east African and middle eastern theme. It is open 6 – days a week and provides training and employment for staff.

### **Environmental and Social Sustainability:**

All goods are created from reclaimed materials and

produced on site, sustaining the local manufacturing industry. Produced within ethical working conditions with production methods and employment model obtaining Ethical Clothing Australia accreditation.

### **Students can undertake the following training:**

- Certificate II and III in Clothing Production
- RMIT School of Fashion
- Certificate II in Hospitality, AMES
- Certificate III in Retail, AMES
- ESL and numeracy coaching
- Business management and event management work experience.

### **Pathways include:**

- **Training**
  - » Cert IV in Clothing production / Cert IV in Applied Fashion
  - » Pathways into Diploma and Bachelor courses at RMIT
  - » Cert IV in Frontline Management / Cert III in Business
- **Employment**
  - » Small business development and mentoring
  - » Mariana Hardwick
  - » Social roasting company
- **Social Supports**
  - » Weekly driving tuition
  - » Financial literacy and financial counselling
  - » Tutoring and ESL support
  - » Referral for housing, legal and medical advice

**Length of Project:** Started in 2009 and ongoing

**Funding Source:** Previous Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – Round 1 Jobs fund – Seed funding to June 2011, local government, Philanthropic, corporate funding (i.e. Vodafone) and VMC

**Location:** Collingwood.

*Case Study supplied by CMY.*

## Elements of services delivery: What works?

### **1. Individualised Support/Case Management**

Individualised case management has been a central feature in programs that have been evaluated positively (Olliff, 2010b, Carr, 2004). The case-management model is based on the rationale that refugees often require ongoing assessment and intensive support by professional staff because they often have multiple support needs. Olliff's case study of the Place Based Service Initiative for Young Refugees (Centrelink, Fairfield) highlights the value of one-to-one tailored supported services (Olliff, 2010b). This allows time to build a relationship of trust, explore individual goals and options and support navigating services. Individualised career guidance and planning allows for young people to develop a pathway that reflects their skills and desires.

Case-management is resource intensive and funders will inevitably be skeptical of the costs associated with individualised case management. However research comparing one program employing individualised case management with Job Network's (now called Job Services Australia) intensive assistance program shows positive education and employment outcomes can be achieved without significantly increasing costs (Kyle et al., 2004).

In examples of successful initiatives, individualised case management has worked well because case workers are trained to be sensitive to the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds (Olliff, 2010b, Carr, 2004).

*What works? Individualised case-management from people with adequate training in cultural awareness and the specific education, employment and other wellbeing needs of young people from refugee backgrounds.*

### **2. Provide Support in the Workplace**

Research suggests that providing employment support to young people should not stop once they find a job. Providing ongoing support in the workplace may be necessary to achieve sustainable outcomes. Some services have found that their young clients have lasted only a short time in a job, simply as a result of simple workplace misunderstandings not being appropriately addressed (Olliff 2010b).

Once a young person has found employment, ongoing support might include the option for young people to return to the employment service for advice and support or having employment services carry out follow-up visits to workplaces to check with clients and employers/supervisors while they are settling in. Consultation with employers found that they valued having a service which they could contact to ask questions or raise concerns. In some situations they also found language support workers very helpful (Olliff 2010b).

*What works? Continue to offer support to young people and their employers once they have found employment to address any issues in the workplace. Involve employers in this.*

### **3. Support Work Experience**

Bloch (2004) shows that training programs lead to higher employment rates for refugees when combined with work experience. Work placements offer refugees the opportunity to get acquainted with the work culture in the resettlement country, improve vocational language skills and build references for their resumes (Olliff, 2010a). For participants in the UCan2 program, work experience provided program participants with practical skills and helped some to gain part time work while finishing their training (Block et al., 2011).

*What works? Training programs lead to higher employment rates for refugees when combined with work experience.*

### **4. Mentoring Programs with an Employment Focus**

The potential for mentoring to be used as a tool for facilitating successful employment outcomes for young people from refugee backgrounds is well documented (Olliff, 2010b, Refugee Council of Australia, 2005). Consultation with a range of stakeholders involved in mentoring programs with refugees found that benefits include expanding social and professional networks, helping refugees build an understanding of the Australian workforce culture and system, and providing valuable support in the form of a trusted person (Olliff, 2010b). Carr (2004) has noted that mentoring programs not only have benefits in terms of facilitating young people to navigate the labour market, they can also foster understanding and tolerance by creating bridges between mainstream society and refugee communities.



In two recent programs employing a mentoring strategy in Melbourne, an outcome reported was the increased awareness of mentors about the refugee experience and the associated challenges. However, across both programs, while most of the mentoring partnerships worked well, there were a number of problems related to conflicting expectations. It was noted that mentors and mentees should be given comprehensive information to guide expectations and that mentors should be provided with adequate training.

de Vries (2011) discusses different models of mentoring relationships and comments on the value of seeing both mentee and mentor as gaining from the process. As well as providing support and advice, mentors can develop greater insight into the circumstances of disadvantage and become advocates for (organisational and structural) change. Therefore, mentoring programs should not be about getting a job, rather they should be about facilitating mentees to extend their networks and learn from each other. However, goals must be explicit to both the mentor and mentee at the outset of the partnership (deVries, 2011)<sup>5</sup>.

*What works? Well-supported mentoring programs provide positive outcomes to young people and their mentors alike. Mentoring programs require significant organisation and support to be successful.*

### **5. Providing Cultural Awareness Training to Service Providers**

A central element that successful programs have in common is that staff have received training in cultural sensitivity and have an understanding of the refugee experience. The research suggests that training service providers on cultural differences and pre-migration experiences will make them sensitive to refugee needs (Mestan, 2008).

*What works? Ensuring workers are given appropriate training so that they can provide a culturally sensitive service and have an understanding of the context of the experiences of young refugees in Australia.*

### **6. Transition between English Learning Schools and mainstream schools**

While there is a need for specialised programs for refugee young people, there are also benefits in making

mainstream schools and services more responsive to the needs of refugees. Olliff (2010) recommends teacher training supporting teachers and other school staff to understand and engage more effectively with young people from refugee backgrounds. This includes wellbeing as well as educational needs.

The Refugee Education Partnerships Project (2007) acknowledge that some resources exist to support schools to support their refugee students but call for teacher professional development to build teacher skills in literacy language and support and to help them to understand the refugee experience and subsequent support needs. They also highlight the need for training of pre-service teachers to work with young people from refugee backgrounds.

*What works? Professional development for teachers on the learning needs of newly arrived young refugees.*

5. See also Block et al. (2011) for use of de Vries' conceptualisation of mentoring in the context of the UCan2 Program.

## A Final Word

In an international context where people continue to be displaced – fleeing from persecution, conflict and serious human rights abuses – Australia’s humanitarian intake is likely to increase in the coming years. The research highlights that the current systems in place are not working for everyone, including the facilitation of employment transitions. It is essential that the appropriate systems are put in place to capture positive experiences. The available literature documents pockets of promising practice and the key principles that lead to working systems. However, when it comes to investing in the most effective policy and practice for young refugees, the evidence base is lacking. There is still much to be learnt and a need for investment in further research.

Several key commentators in the literature call for an investment into longitudinal research that captures young people’s education and employment outcomes over time. While studies and evaluations can capture the short-term employment and education outcomes of young people (e.g. Block et al., 2011), it is important to have more long-term information. Research that focuses on single transitions or a point in time can be useful

but does not capture long-term outcomes and ignores valuable information that comes before and after a change (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007, Fry and Boulton, 2013). The need for follow-up research has also been highlighted in the context of program evaluation. For example, evaluators of the Ucan2 program highlighted the need for medium to long-term follow-up to assess longer-term benefits of employment programs (Mestan, 2008).

Policy and practice have relied heavily on qualitative information (Cameron et al., 2011). It will be important to invest in longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research but also research on program development and effectiveness. As pointed out by Cameron et al. research should be two-tiered, investigating the needs of young refugees as well as what works for them.

*Key message: Invest in longitudinal research capturing the education and employment experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds over time to gather a deeper understanding of what leads to successful and unsuccessful outcomes and subsequently guide policy and programming.*

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