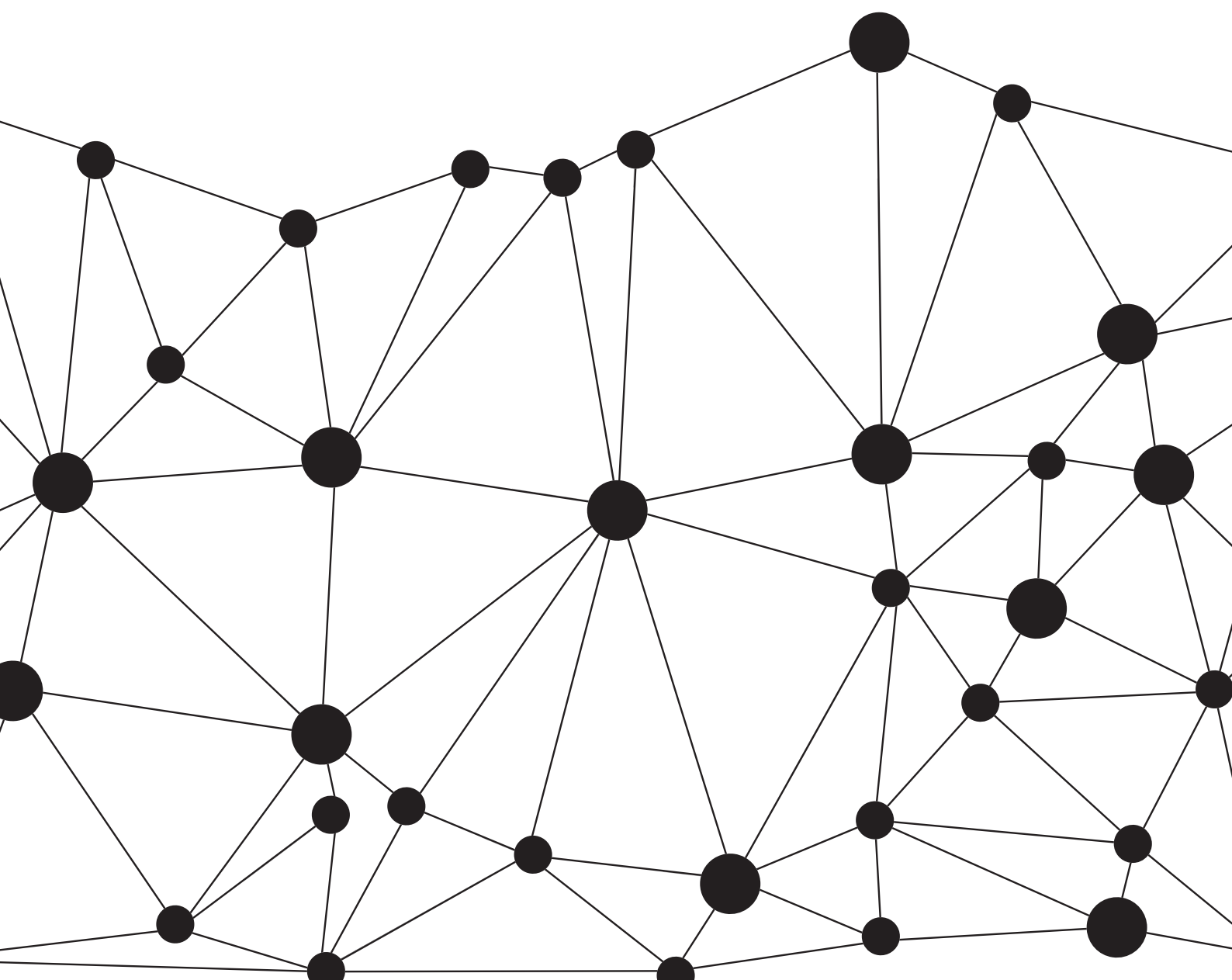




NSW
Settlement
Partnership

Youth Speaks

Consultation Report
August 2023



Acknowledgement of Country

SSI acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise their continuous connection to Country.



Acknowledgement and Thanks

Youth Speaks would not have been possible without the collaboration of the youth workers in the NSW Settlement Partnership, SSI settlement teams and our other partners, who gave their time and energy to connecting with young people for this project. Our Student Placement, Kritika Whitaker, has played a critical role in supporting the implementation, coordination and delivery of the project. It was a massive undertaking, and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

It would be remiss not to thank the young people themselves who participated in this project, who were generous enough to be vulnerable and to share with us their stories and experiences. We recognise them, we acknowledge and commend their courage and resilience, and we value their contributions to this project.

A photograph of two young women hugging outdoors. The woman in the foreground is wearing a yellow t-shirt and a green bag, smiling broadly. The woman behind her is wearing a light blue shirt and a black cap, also smiling. They are standing in front of a tree with purple flowers and a residential street in the background.

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Executive Summary

Young people from multicultural, migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia are an asset to our society, and bring with them immense talent, skills and knowledge.

SSI is a national not-for-profit organisation that offers a diverse range of human services and promotes equal opportunities for all. At the heart of our organisation is a drive for equality, empathy, and celebration of every individual. SSI has been supporting young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities through a variety of programs since our inception. In 2015, SSI established the Youth Collective program to provide a focused way to support and connect with youth from diverse backgrounds. In 2022, the NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) finished the Exploring Settlement: Life in Australia project. Exploring Settlement shone a spotlight on the settlement journeys of nearly 300 people who settled in NSW. Their challenges, hopes, dreams and experiences formed the core of this project. Although young people were among the participants, we felt that their voices deserved to be more strongly highlighted.

The Youth Speaks project, a collaboration between the NSP and SSI's Youth Collective program, builds on the foundations laid by Exploring Settlement. It aims to give a voice to the young migrant and refugee population in Australia, to learn from their lived experience of settlement and to understand their settlement needs. The project involved conducting a number of consultations with over 100 young people, the findings of which inform this report.

Young people told us about their challenges, fears, hopes and settlement experiences. While some of what they shared had resonance with what we heard from older cohorts, young people had added burdens of having to navigate a new education system, a new language and a new culture, all while dealing with the complexities that are already a part of adolescence and the transition to becoming a young adult. Some of the key themes that emerged were:

- **Hopes for the future.** Young people are resilient and hopeful. They look forward to finding a job, completing their education and achieving their dreams in the Australian landscape with the opportunities the education system provides.
- **Challenges of being in a country where they do not speak the language well** and supporting their families with limited or no English skills to navigate the Australian system.
- **Adapting to a new country**, sometimes with little to no support from friends, family or the general community and having to adapt to a new way of thinking and being, in a landscape vastly different to what they are used to.
- **Gratitude to be in a country that is safe**, stable and that has given them opportunities.

As our research shows, with guidance and space to speak for themselves, young people have a lot to contribute. Our hope, and our call to action for those who work with and support young people from CALD backgrounds – be they in education, the community sector, government, academia or the private sector – is to listen to what young people are saying. We hope that the Youth Speaks project will create a space for them to be heard and for their lived experiences to be acknowledged and valued.

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Policy recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the Youth Speaks research, which also has resonance with our client-facing work with young people from multicultural backgrounds in both NSW and Queensland — particularly in the SETS program.

Foster regular cultural exchange and dialogue amongst newly arrived young people with their Australian born counterparts to promote social harmony and cohesion and provide opportunities for strengthening English language skills.

- Facilitate and fund youth-led cultural exchange programs among high schools and IECs, for students and educators, to mitigate culture shock for younger migrants and refugees and promote Australian values of inclusivity and diversity. These can also be an opportunity to practise and strengthen English language skills and can be done with increased funding for settlement services.

Support capacity building and leadership development programs for CALD youth in targeted industries and create internship programs for diverse young people in the community sector.

- Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds aspire to become leaders in their field, to gain meaningful employment and to give back to the community where they have been given a fresh start at life. Working with employers to make the job market more accessible through the creation of specific CALD leadership and internship programs, can lead to better settlement and employment outcomes for this younger cohort as they transition into adulthood and enter the Australian workforce.
- Programs that deliver these types of services for eligible humanitarian entrants, such as Youth Transition Support (YTS), should continue to be funded and receive more resourcing.

Develop digital solutions or other appropriate technology to help younger newcomers to navigate social services and public transport and receive important settlement information in a timely manner.

- Digital service delivery is becoming more and more the norm and remains as vital as ever to allow people to access information and resources safely and at their own convenience and comfort. A digital one-stop-shop where settlement resources can be centralised and clients can engage with case managers could help young people become more independent as they adjust to their new environment and come into contact with essential social and settlement services.

Strengthen and increase funding for settlement services and youth case management so that the settlement needs of children and young people within and outside the family unit can be properly addressed.

- Youth settlement workers provide a crucial link and support for young people in helping them to adapt and adjust to school, work, and other aspects of life in Australia. However, settlement programs tend to consider the needs of families as a whole, with children and young people's needs folded in with their parents' and older relatives. An approach that puts young people first, considering their needs separately, would enable more comprehensive, individualised support. It is also important that young people do not 'age out' of eligibility for settlement support.

Establish and fund a mentorship or buddy system and peer networks in schools and universities across the country.

- To promote acceptance, inclusion, diversity and anti-racism and to prevent bullying and discrimination, establish and fund formal buddy systems and peer networks in schools and universities. These networks can be included within settlement support, or supported by settlement services when they are in a mainstream setting.

Mandate domestic and family violence information sessions for young people aged 15+ and work with healthcare providers and medical professionals to understand migrant and refugee issues and provide culturally sensitive and responsive care to newly arrived young people.

- New migrants and young people from CALD backgrounds may find themselves in a position where they need complex support from domestic and family violence workers or healthcare providers but might struggle to communicate due to language barriers or a fear of stigma from their communities. To make these services accessible and approachable for people from diverse backgrounds and to provide more comprehensive and responsive care, mainstream providers should be able to understand young people's migration and settlement experiences. Government programs that support culturally responsive health care specifically for young people and their particular needs should be expanded, e.g. mental health and healthy relationship supports.

Where appropriate, consider expanding opportunities for multicultural youth to be included in mainstream youth services, e.g. housing and homelessness support.

- Visa eligibility criteria make it difficult for some young people to receive both domestic and family violence and housing and homelessness support (e.g. unaccompanied minors). Removing these criteria and making the services visa-neutral could allow all young people to get the help they need, regardless of culture, ethnicity, or visa status.

1. Introduction

Australia's youth are a vital component of our economic and social fabric. Not only are they our future leaders and entrepreneurs, but they are already forging their own path. They deserve to be supported and empowered to be their fullest selves, to realise their potential and to nurture their diverse skills and talents.

Young people, while having much to offer, face a number of challenges. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is one example, but for young people from CALD backgrounds, there are often several periods of transition to navigate. Many young migrants and refugees, when they first arrive, need to adjust to a new environment both at home and outside the home, including at school, all while learning a new language. While every case is different, the particular needs of this cohort require a greater level of understanding, informed by young peoples' actual lived experiences, and a holistic approach to service delivery. The youth settlement sector strives to do just that, in addition to amplifying the voices of young people from diverse backgrounds.

In NSW, prior to 2015, there was no unifying structure or organisation that existed in the service delivery space to bring together a range of interested stakeholders to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. To address this gap, the newly formed NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP), a consortium of 20 settlement and community organisations operating across the state, came together to

form the Youth Collective. Managed by SSI, the Youth Collective focuses on young people from multicultural, migrant and refugee backgrounds. Through the delivery of activities that build their confidence, resilience and leadership skills, and the collaboration of youth workers and others across the youth, education and settlement sectors, it offers a platform for knowledge sharing and harnessing collective expertise, as well as provides opportunities for young people to have a say in settlement service delivery planning and implementation. One of the key successes of the Youth Collective initiative has been the NSP Youth Workers Network, which connects with and informs the work of local councils and youth sector peak bodies apart from its core business of harnessing youth service delivery across the NSP.

SSI also supports newly arrived young people (primarily aged 15–25) through its delivery of the Australian Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program, Youth Transition Support Program (YTS), Youth in Power Program (YPP), Youth Employment Passport Program (YEPP), and other youth related projects in NSW and in Queensland. In Queensland, SSI is the key delivery partner for the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN).

HSP

Supports humanitarian entrants and other eligible visa holders to integrate into Australian life by building the skills and knowledge they need to become self-reliant, active members of the community.

Clients receive support on arrival that includes airport pickup, short-term accommodation, community orientation and health assessments. They are also assisted with making links to their community, a basic household goods package and finding affordable long-term accommodation.

For six to 18 months, individuals receive tailored support from a case manager, who enhances self-reliance with a focus on English language skills, education and employment. This assistance improves refugees' social and economic participation and, ultimately, sets them up to live independent lives in Australia.

Individuals or families who have complex settlement needs may be eligible to receive assistance under the HSP's Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS).

SSI adds value through a client-centred approach, collaboration with complementary services within the organisation and working closely with business, community and other stakeholders to connect refugees with employment and educational opportunities.

SETS

Clients are eligible for SETS services (Client Services and Community Capacity Building) within their first five years of arrival. SSI delivers the SETS program through a consortium of multicultural settlement and community organisations known collectively as the NSW Settlement Partnership, which has a footprint across major metropolitan areas of Sydney and regional NSW.

SETS Client Services provides clients with settlement-related information, advice, advocacy and assistance to access mainstream and other relevant services in accordance with a needs-based approach. This includes support with:

- facilitating acquisition of English language skills
- supporting engagement with education and training, and
- building employment readiness with services complementing other settlement and mainstream services

SETS Community Capacity Building assists new and emerging community groups and organisations to support their specific communities' needs by increasing the social participation, economic and personal wellbeing of community members. This includes working with diaspora networks and individual community members and leaders on:

- the development of leadership and governance skills
- access to resources and facilities, e.g. providing a space for ethno-specific community associations to meet
- linkages to the broader community
- interaction with government and local stakeholders

YTS

Newly arrived young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds often need extra help and support to become and stay connected in their new community. YTS services help young humanitarian entrants and vulnerable migrants aged 15 to 25 to participate in work and education.

YTS services improve workplace readiness, provide access to vocational opportunities, and create strong social connections through education and sports activities. Service providers deliver a range of projects and activities for participants, including connections with local employment services and jobs. YTS is delivered by SSI in Logan, Queensland.

YTS services are funded to 30 June 2024.



YiPP

The Youth in Power Program (YiPP) is a new initiative in QLD, funded by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, to help young people recognise and unleash their potential, ultimately empowering them to shape their own future and narratives.

YiPP embraces Adventure-Based Learning (ABL) as its core framework and methodology, ensuring that participants take ownership of their actions and acquire knowledge through experiential learning. To date, SSI have supported 20 young men aged 14–18, to participate in YiPP activities. They have undertaken various challenging activities such as tunnel rats, mud rescues, rock climbing and trust falls. These experiences have fostered trust, resilience and self-confidence among the participants.

YiPP participants also have the opportunity to connect with our caseworkers and receive personalised support to build and maintain connections with school, employment and other services. The outcomes so far have been remarkable:

- Deputy principals have been moved to tears witnessing their transformation and teachers and staff have been amazed by the high level of engagement exhibited by the students
- Young people who were previously unaware of their own potential have found a platform to expand their horizons and developed confidence and leadership skills

YEPP

The Youth Employment Passport Program (YEPP) was a pilot program focused on supporting CALD youth in their final years of schooling and helping them with their education, training, and employment decisions.

Targeted to young people from Year 10 to age 23, the program offered participants a personalised Career Passport, with opportunities tailored to each participant. We also worked with local stakeholders, community, and employers to provide high quality career counselling and opportunities for work experience.

Schools were proactive and supportive throughout the program, with SSI being the only provider allowed to take an external trainer to a local school in order to provide barista training to the students. Additional interventions, such as promoting the program to parents and siblings, were also undertaken to bolster acceptance and support from the participants' families.

The YEPP model proved to be very successful because participants had both agency and choice. At the end of the program, 11 young people accepted full-time roles, while five received job offers, four took traineeships and four chose to continue their education.



The **Youth Speaks** advocacy project is an initiative of the Youth Collective, made possible through the collaboration of the HSP/NSP network, and SSI's Settlement and Youth teams in Queensland. The project seeks to advocate for and alongside young people to ensure their voices play a role in shaping the policies that will impact their lives and to improve the delivery of youth services. Specifically, it aims to:

- Amplify the voice of migrant, refugee and CALD youth clients beyond the settlement sector
- Highlight young people's resilience and positive contributions to their community
- Create a safe space for young people to share their challenges, hopes and dreams
- Understand newly arrived young people's specific settlement needs

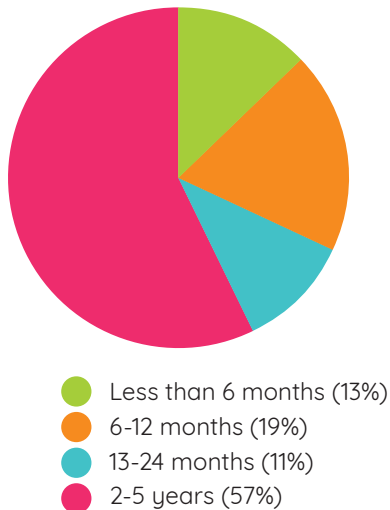
Youth Speaks builds on the foundations of Exploring Settlement, a collective advocacy project undertaken by the NSP over the course of two years, which engaged 288 community members in 56 'listening exercises', and the collaborative efforts of the NSP Youth Workers Network in relation to youth mental and physical wellbeing. This project engaged 119 young people through 45 group and individual sessions. To assist youth workers to facilitate the sessions, we designed new resources and adapted some from the larger parent project, including our Youth Speaks Conversation Guide.

The Guide contains nine questions adapted from the Exploring Settlement toolkit. While the intent behind the questions was more or less the same, some of the wording was simplified and adjusted, keeping in mind the specific context of our youth clients, which differs from that of their parents and grandparents. Exploring Settlement revealed that the youth voice required further understanding, listening and promoting, and so Youth Speaks was born.

This report synthesises and analyses the data and emerging themes from our guided consultations with young people.

2. Participant demographics

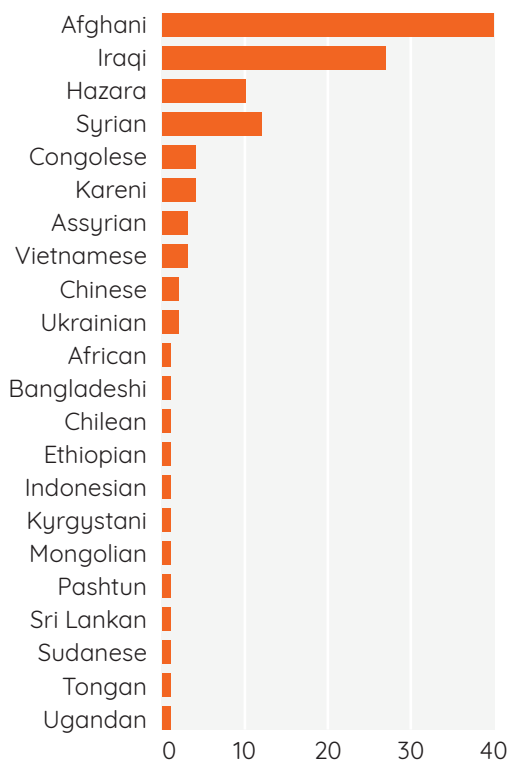
Time in Australia



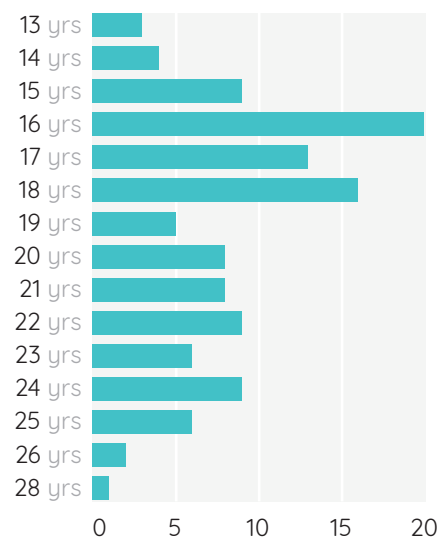
Gender
(self-described)



Participant Ethnicity



Age of Participants



3. Thematic analysis

Across the 45 conversations that took place with young people in Queensland and NSW, there were a number of common and recurring themes. In analysing their responses, as well as listening to feedback from youth workers about the benefits and challenges of asking young people to share their sometimes-traumatic experiences, it is clear that our young people have a wealth of valuable knowledge and experience that needs to be heard and incorporated into both policymaking and program design.

The analysis of young people's responses to the questions asked offer deep insights for service providers, policymakers, academics and educators wanting to understand how to support young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to participate fully in Australian life and society.

Care has been taken to avoid any bias in the analysis of themes. It should also be reiterated that this research is an offshoot of the Exploring Settlement parent project, which was undertaken by community-based organisations with their own respective histories of supporting migrants and refugees. Those same organisations have also participated in Youth Speaks, along with two local high schools.

The themes emerging from our research can be grouped into the following categories:

Education and employment

Hopes of further education, a stable financial future and job, and learning the language of their adopted country were things young people frequently told us they aspire to. Not knowing English makes navigating the system here in Australia challenging for most and can prevent young people from socialising and making important connections both at school and at work. Almost every young person we spoke to talked about the positive impact of education in helping them to learn English and develop their confidence, particularly the Intensive English Centres (IECs). In fact, when asked what three things were most helpful to them since arriving in Australia, the most common answers were: teachers, IECs and youth case workers. The number of times IECs were mentioned in our conversations shows how important they are in the process of settlement. By providing a safe environment to practice and develop their English language skills, IECs help young migrants and refugees transition into mainstream education.

"My school, Central Intensive English High School, [...] ha[s] been helpful to improve my language [...] I met with so many people from similar background. The school had introduced us to so many things, whether it was new Australian sports, or other cultures."

"The IEC helped me the most learning English. The teachers were very supportive and taught me how to adapt to the environment."

"IEC was an easy transition that helped very much."

"I believe once I go to high school and start study there, I will find my goal. Now I feel like maybe I would like to go to university and study maths; or maybe I would like to be a nurse or a teacher."

When young people have a good settlement experience and can smoothly transition into life in a new country, it allows them to dream bigger and reach for their goals. In our conversations, we met young people who want to be artists, doctors, designers, engineers, entrepreneurs and more. Time and time again, they told us they want to complete their education, go on to university and find employment in their chosen field.

Social inclusion and establishing your identity

Friends, family and community make up a significant part of any young person's life. In order to achieve better settlement outcomes for younger newcomers, it is vital to facilitate community connections and to establish links where none exist. Young people especially may lack confidence and fear isolation from peers and not being able to make friends. For some, not having extended family members like older or younger cousins around can be quite lonely as well.

"It's very different here, no one says hello. If they're outside they don't talk, they don't even smile. In Iraq and Lebanon when you see someone you say hi, and you talk to them even if you don't know them."

"I'm trying to adapt to my new life actively, but just found that a bit lonely when I can't find someone to talk to."

In this context, having support from diaspora networks can help ease the transition for newly arrived families and individuals as they get settled and attempt to establish their new lives. However, when asked about support received from neighbours or one's own cultural community, only a few young people responded positively. There were instances of support received from the Ukrainian, Mongolian and

Vietnamese diasporas, but young people recently arrived from Afghanistan in the last year, for example, were not even aware of any Afghan community associations or pre-existing networks.

One young person from Ukraine did tell us they were reunited with their father and about the support they received from neighbours and the Ukrainian community.

“Yes, [I had support] both from Ukrainian community through the Association in Lidcombe as well as Australian local community. People were willingly providing food, clothes, and essential items.”

“When I lived in Smithfield, some nice neighbours let us borrow their tools and helped fix our backyard.”

On the other hand, several young people expressed a lack of support from neighbours and the general community.

“Not really, I did most of the things by myself. We had a caseworker, and her assistance was helpful while we were settling Australia.”

“No support from neighbours, but support from family friends who gave us stuff and supported us. But mostly the government.”

“We didn’t have supportive neighbours. When we struggled, my dad called the Syrian community for emotional help. It was hard when he couldn’t find work.”

Adding to many newly arrived young peoples’ hesitations and uncertainty about making friends is the fear of being bullied or discriminated against. Many of the conversations we had with young people revolved around how to ‘fit in’ at school or university while holding onto their identities, values and the beliefs they were raised with at home.

“At school, when you’re reading, some people laugh at you when you don’t know how to pronounce words.”

“I think the biggest thing is maintaining our own cultural and religious beliefs as well. We’re surrounded by so many types of people and so much more temptation with 100% more freedom so it’s definitely hard not to fall for those temptations.”

“I hope to find myself, to work out who I am and my identity. I’m trying to be better. I want to try new things so that when I have children, I can teach them about life’s challenges.”

Health and wellbeing

As part of the process of self-exploration and establishing one's identity, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds often have to learn and develop new life skills to get by in Australia. Supporting them to acquire these skills and helping them transition into adulthood with confidence may lead to better overall health and wellbeing outcomes.

"I have had to learn to advocate for myself, learn different independent skills than what was required of me in Afghanistan."

Similarly, being actively involved in different sports and recreational activities also promotes better mental and physical health for young people and intersects with social inclusion and building connections with others at work and school.

"My dance crew (monochrome) has been very helpful in so many ways."

"My first school had introduced me to new sports that I now play daily."

"I had to keep my physical activity going. Work helped me a lot."

Resilience and adaptability

Many young people are resilient, adaptable and enterprising, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. They aspire to a better life not only for themselves but for their families, and often have extremely powerful reflections to share on what they have been through and how their migration and settlement experiences have shaped them and their goals for the future. In our conversations, young people also told us how they have had to adapt to life in Australia.

"I've become more open-minded. You have to adapt your ideas to suit the environment [...] I have had to learn to control my anger and not have fights at school."

"I have had to adapt to the language and ways of communication. I have had to be more open-minded."

"I have changed the way that I speak now, there is a difference in which language is acceptable or normal. Also, people smile here more and show more emotion, even strangers on the street. This is very different to Ukraine where people don't show so much emotion."

“When I went to school, I learnt the new rules of Australia and this country adopted me. The behaviour and attitude of teachers here is so different than my home. Here teachers are like friends but in my home country they are strict and we have to learn our place.”

To strengthen their resilience and help young people to achieve their full potential, settlement programs must acknowledge and address long-term, systemic issues that impact all people, regardless of their country of origin. Systemic barriers such as lack of affordable housing and high inflation affect the most vulnerable members of society even more and only serve to make them more insecure.

Safety, stability and belonging

New migrants must wait four years to become eligible for most welfare payments and income support, meaning that individuals and their families, depending on their economic status pre-arrival, are often financially insecure. This lack of a social safety net for newly arrived families and young people is a real burden highlighted by young people we spoke to and presents a significant challenge not only for young people but many for many other cohorts trying to settle in Australia and establish their lives. Similarly, newcomers who cannot afford to buy a home in Australia are often waiting for years to be moved up on the list for social housing. Young people spoke about how important it was for them and their families to have a house, and as settlement providers we know that insecure housing can prevent clients from achieving good settlement outcomes. Employment in such conditions becomes untenable, and as young people still in school or university told us, learning can be impacted as well. A lack of safety and stability due to economic pressures, the high cost of rent and a prohibitively priced housing market only hampers young people's growth, aspirations and expression of skills and talent with which they make valuable contributions to society. It leaves very little room for upward social mobility for people from CALD backgrounds, which in itself perpetuates a cycle where young people do not take advantage of opportunities because they are not

represented at those levels, e.g. in academia, executive leadership positions and so on. This could limit their perception of what is possible and what they can achieve.

"When it comes to dreams, I cannot help but think of getting a place to call home. We have never had a place we called home. So for us to have that, it would definitely be a dream come true."

"I dream of getting an excellent job, getting my citizenship, and looking forward to travelling the world."

"The important things to me are to find a stable job, build myself a business, and get a car."

Society, culture and navigating social services

When asked what surprised them most when they first arrived in Australia, most of the young people we spoke to expressed amazement at how multicultural Australia is. They were not accustomed to the range of different cultures, languages and even foods as they had not experienced this level of diversity in their countries of origin. Although there was a sense of appreciation and acknowledgement of the value of multiculturalism, the young people's responses indicate that government programs to support new migrants and refugees can do more to mitigate the initial culture shock, which can be a jarring experience for those who have not lived in pluralistic societies.

"When you go to different areas it feels like you're in a different country. Fairfield is like Iraq, Strathfield is like Korea, and Cabramatta is like Vietnam."

Another theme that consistently came up when young people were asked what surprised them most upon arriving in Australia was difficulty with navigating services, infrastructure and the public transport system. For example, one young person shared a story about getting on the wrong train and needing to call their parents to pick them up.

“The traffic in Australia is tricky. I went to the station to take the train to the city but I got lost. I got on the wrong train and ended up at a station I didn’t know. I felt scared and called my parents and they helped me.”

Similarly, a newly arrived high school student we spoke to told us how challenging it can be just to get around and felt that, even when approached for help, strangers did not provide much help.

“I just think it is hard to navigate things around here and people are not much helpful.”

In addition to difficulty navigating public transport, several young people shared with us the challenges they faced in dealing with services. For example, one young man from Afghanistan had to overcome major obstacles in securing his place at university because he did not have the required identity documents.

“I had one of the most challenging incidents recently. A few months ago, I got accepted by Western Sydney University for a civil engineering degree, but I needed to get my TFN number for the HECS. But the most challenging part was I could not get my TFN due to the fact that I could not verify my identity at the post office. Because I don’t have a foreign passport neither the primary documents such as Australian birth certificate nor the Australian passport. I came to a point that I might not be able to continue my university education.”

Thankfully, with support from the young man’s settlement case worker and advocacy from the provider to both the ATO and local MP, he was able to get a conditional enrolment and have his case fast-tracked so that he could get a TFN and enrol in university. This is just one example of how necessary and vital multicultural and settlement services are for newcomers and people from CALD backgrounds. They serve as the bridge between multicultural communities and mainstream social services and provide a safety net for people during the early phases of settlement.

Civic participation and giving back

Although they reflected on the difficulties of the settlement process and recounted some of their most personally challenging moments, the young people we spoke to showed immense appreciation and gratitude for being in Australia and for having a chance to start a new life. Regardless of their career aspirations, many of them expressed a desire to give back to the community and to help others.

"I don't know what I want yet but I was thinking something to do with community services or nursing. I want to be able to help the community as well as reach for something I could have never dreamed of back in my country."

"I wish to become a doctor and serve the people to help people and repay the kindness I have been shown."

In their own words:

"Adpting to a new environment when you do not know the language is very hard. There is a lot to learn [and] it may seem simple for those raised here but for us, for example, learning what all the lines on the road mean, or street signs, takes time."

"There's a sense of peace and tranquillity here. There is a different type of freedom, especially for females. We have rights and [are] not oppressed."

"I felt that my career as an artist will stop here because of the language barrier."

"To master the English language, I had to adapt to a new set of learning: attend English classes regularly, had to make some changes in my appearances at job interviews."

"Not much of consistency in services, Different systems everywhere it creates confusion. some service providers say 'we cannot help you' but then some others help you right away. Because of this I learned how to do my research or get things done. And make sure about the procedures."

"I dream of getting an excellent job, getting my citizenship, and looking forward to travelling the world."

"I don't know what I want to be yet in the future, I think I'm too worried about the now to think of that."

4. Conclusion and way forward

The findings from the Youth Speaks project highlight the importance and value of including the voices and perspective of young people from CALD backgrounds in designing policies and programs that impact them.

The analysis of the conversations we had with young people across NSW and Queensland reveals several common threads that have important implications for supporting them to settle successfully in Australia.

Education and employment emerged as key themes, with young people expressing their aspirations to improve their English language skills, complete their education, and find meaningful employment. Access to Intensive English Centres (IECs) and supportive teachers were identified as significant factors in supporting their settlement journey, underscoring the importance of addressing language barriers and providing adequate support for educational and career development.

For many newly arrived young people, the biggest challenge they faced was juggling between the cultural beliefs and identity they



were raised with at home, and the need to ‘fit in’ at school or university. This highlights the importance of social cohesion and inclusion to enable young people to understand and respect each other’s differences. One of the ways in which youth settlement services can help to build newly arrived young people’s social connections is through sports and recreational programs that encourage teamwork and build confidence and self-esteem. Such programs could also mitigate the initial culture shock that newly arrived young people feel.

Despite the significant challenges they faced, resilience and adaptability were also evident in the stories shared by young people, highlighting their ability to adapt to a new culture, learn new ways of communication, and overcome obstacles like navigating social services and infrastructure. For example, a lot of the young people we spoke to experienced difficulties with public transport and engaging with some mainstream service providers. However, when asked what three things helped them most when they first arrived, the majority of them said their settlement case workers provided them with the most support, which demonstrates that multicultural and settlement service providers are essential in bridging the gap between CALD communities and mainstream services, especially early on in the settlement process.

Young people also expressed gratitude that they, along with their families, had the opportunity to rebuild their lives in Australia. They told us how they wanted to give back to the community in some way and help

others. Their many positive strengths, skills and talents, if properly supported, can lead to great civic contributions to our society and give a voice to our many communities. This potential can be harnessed both by government and non-government organisations through the creation and expansion of CALD youth leadership programs and volunteering opportunities that lead to employment. Creating avenues for young people to contribute to policymaking, advocacy and program design can also help to ensure their unique needs are met and that they are active participants in the broader Australian community.

The Youth Speaks project serves as a call to action for stakeholders involved in youth services, settlement programs, and policymaking to prioritise the needs of young people from diverse backgrounds. This means strengthening educational and language support, creating employment opportunities, promoting social inclusion, ensuring access to health and wellbeing services — especially mental health, addressing systemic barriers like the high cost of rent and living, and fostering opportunities for civic participation. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers all young people to realise their full potential and thrive as active and engaged citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

Appendix 1

Youth Speaks – conversation guide

Tips for facilitating a welcoming conversation and environment

- Create an informal but safe setting
- Icebreakers and physical activities, games, etc. can foster interaction and help young people feel comfortable
- Be aware of the age difference and try to give the young person confidence to share
- Listen actively and be respectful of different opinions
- Acknowledge what young people have shared
- Remember that young people have lots of talent, skills and wisdom to share

Client Question Set on next page

Client Question Set

Question	Purpose
1. When you first arrived in Australia, what is something that surprised you?	Open the conversation with a light question that encourages the client to reflect on how they felt when they first arrived, what was similar and what was different from their country of origin. The responses could be simple or entertaining. The client should feel comfortable and not intimidated.
2. What are three things that have helped you most since you arrived in Australia?	It is useful to know what works well and what areas of support might need strengthening.
3. Have you received any support from neighbours? OR Have you received any support from your own cultural community?	To understand the role that informal support plays in peoples' settlement journey and how it might be having different outcomes from settlement providers and mainstream services.
4. In what ways have you had to adapt to your new environment?	The responses to this question could be different depending on the age cohort, e.g. clients aged 18-25 may talk about work/employment, while those aged 15-18 may focus on school.
5. Now that you have been in Australia for a while, what are the most important things to you and your family? OR What do you want for yourself in life here in Australia? OR What are your hopes and dreams for yourself and your family?	Acknowledge and appreciate young peoples' dreams and aspirations.
6. Could you share with me some of the challenges you have had to overcome? Is there one story you can tell us? What helped you get through?	Acknowledge the unique and specific challenges faced by young people, as well as their resilience in overcoming those challenges.
7. What has made it difficult for you and your family to get help?	To hear from the client about what are the barriers to accessing support/services.
8a. What support would you and your family have liked? 8b. What difference would it have made if you received that support?	Identify what they would like more of and understand the impact it could potentially have.
9. Based on all you have learned about life in Australia, what advice would you give to others just arriving?	Give the client the platform to share a bit of advice or wisdom, talk about their achievements, etc. if they wish.





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The NSW Settlement Partnership (NSP) is a consortium of community organisations, led by SSI, and funded by the Department of Home Affairs.



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