

Better Futures Review
Youth Policy and Programs
Office of Communities
GPO Box 7060
SYDNEY NSW 2001

8 August 2011

Dear Better Futures Review team,

Re MYAN NSW Submission Better Futures Review

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to Better Futures Review. The MYAN NSW believe that the Better Futures program has a lot of potential to support children and young people in NSW, particularly those from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those who are newly arrived.

About this submission

This submission addresses the four questions posed by the Better Futures Review *Discussion Paper on the future direction of the Better Futures Program*. It does so in reference to the needs of multicultural young people in NSW and the focus of the MYAN NSW.

About the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW is a network of services committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for multicultural young people in NSW. The MYAN NSW works to develop appropriate policies, strategies and resources that address multicultural youth issues at the local, regional and state-wide levels. It does this through consultation with youth and family services, the multicultural sector, state and local government, and multicultural young people.

Multicultural young people in NSW

The MYAN NSW use the term multicultural young people to refer to those aged 12-25 who are newly arrived, those from refugee backgrounds and Australian born young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

In Australia

- 2.7 million young people in Australia are aged 15-24¹.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 200 languages are spoken at home.
- Between 2005-2010, 31% (24,679) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24².

In NSW

- 871,712 young people in NSW are aged 15-24, 13.3% of population³.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 80 languages are spoken at home⁴.
- Between 2005-2010, 30% (7,310) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24⁵.

In 2009-10, 23,993 people aged 12-24 migrated to Australia of these there 6,608 or 28% arrived to NSW. Of these young people 1,071 arrived as part of the Humanitarian Program, 4,143 came as part of family migration and 1,390 came as part of skilled migration⁶.

According to the Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) NSW *Youth Worker Survey 2011*, first generation CALD clients make up 55% of CALD clients in 109 services. Among 49 the six most common issues for which youth services could not provide assistance to first and second generation CALD clients were homelessness, brokerage and relief funds, mental health, domestic and family violence, personal relationships, education and training and sexual health respectively.

The role and function of the Better Futures program

When discussing the purpose, function, form and structure of a new Better Futures program the MYAN NSW believes that a number of key considerations need to be made regarding how it meets a need which is not the focus of other funding programs in NSW such as Community Builders, and Early Intervention and Placement Prevention Program administered by Community Services. Clearly identifying the purpose and function of the Better Futures program is particularly important in this context.

The MYAN NSW believes that the Better Futures program purpose and function should:

1. Take into account the need to provide opportunities to support the social inclusion and build capacity of young people aged 9-18, particularly those from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived.
2. Include a focus on supporting the personal development of children and young people aged 9-18. The program should focus on fostering participation and leadership in young people including those facing disadvantage and building their capacity to feel empowered and reflect on their lives and their future.
3. Not only focus on funding local interventions and projects, but also ensure the capacity to include projects with a state-wide focus that can provide a 'bigger picture' approach to service provision. For example, Community Builders only funds projects with a local focus, which means that state-wide projects and best practice is not utilised. If Better Futures shifted to only include a focus on local projects then this would duplicate Community Builders and mean projects could not operate across NSW in multiple locations.
4. Seek to reflect on and create best practice examples at the local and state-wide levels. NSW often lacks opportunities to create and showcase best practice and Better Futures could easily serve this purpose, by providing an evidence base for best practice. This would lessen duplication across services and enhance service provision and efficiency.

Question 1 – Determining Better Futures priorities

The MYAN NSW believes that Better Futures should continue to focus on the broad policy area of vulnerable young people, but when doing so ensure that it is not duplicating the role of other funding programs. The MYAN NSW considers focusing on a specific issue would unnecessarily limit the scope of the program to the detriment of children and young people. Choosing one issue to focus on would mean that a lot of other issues would be neglected for the funding period and that this would not enable the children, youth and family services to meet the needs of children and young people. Moreover, the issues for each area of NSW vary. Standardising which issues are focused on means that some areas of NSW may not be eligible for funding because the issue only

affects a small number of children and young people, whereas a focus on another issue could have had a larger impact.

The example cited in the *Discussion Paper* of a possible focus on young drivers for a 2-3 year period, would be a misuse of the Better Futures program. While the MYAN NSW does not deny the need for support for young drivers who cannot access driving lessons, this is a particular issue for young people from refugee backgrounds and newly arrived young people, it should not necessarily mean that the Better Futures program provide this function.

The MYAN NSW proposes that there are other ways to give priority to particular issues than to focus on one for a specific period of time. For example, funding applications can give priority to particular issues but still consider and fund others by outlining specific themes and priorities as part of the application process. It could include a focus on a few areas but also have a component that is more general and allows for projects with diverse aims would also be considered.

The MYAN NSW do not believe the current model is a “deficit model” and that it is essential that vulnerable young people in NSW are supported in the best way possible as well as providing opportunities for them to build their capacity and improve their opportunities.

Particularly for young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived, there are few opportunities provided to them to build their capacity for participation and leadership and for creating positive role models in their communities. There is a strong evidence base that supports the provision of leadership training, peer support, personal development and social development. A program such as Better Futures should be supporting children and young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived to fully participate and be active members of their communities.

Question 2 – Guaranteeing the participation of young people

As stated by the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Victoria, *“Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds experience a number of barriers to participation that result in them being even less likely to be included in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Some refugee young people have a fear of voicing their opinions due to past experiences in their country of origin. Newly arrived young people are extremely busy, often struggling with language acquisition, school and study, juggling part-time work and family commitments.”*

Young people from newly arrived and refugee backgrounds do not have the same familiarity with systems and structures that other Australians do. Some groups of CALD young people may fear the prospect of participation because the processes seem complicated and they are unsure of the intent and outcome. Young people can find the process intimidating and are suspicious of initiatives that attempt to involve them or try to find out what they think about particular issues.”⁷

In order to involve young people in planning and delivery of Better Futures projects they need the skills to do so. The best way of ensuring the ongoing involvement of young people in projects funded through the program is to build their capacity to do so.

In *Involving Young People: Documenting Youth Participation Strategies for Newly Arrived Communities*⁸, a number of key ways in engaging young people from refugee backgrounds and who are newly arrived are identified. These include training in:

- Leadership

- Communication Skills
- Decision making
- Public speaking and debating
- Problem solving
- Developing confidence and self-esteem
- Stress management⁹.

This resource highlights that young people need to be provided with the appropriate skills to engage, that it is not adequate to just invite them to be part of the process through consultation and as part of a steering group for example.

In addition, there are number of well-established youth participation guidelines produced by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People which provides a guide to ensuring young people are consulted and engaged in activities that affect them. The MYAN NSW supports the use of these guidelines in engaging young people in Better Futures projects.

Question 3 – Targeting specific age groups

The MYAN NSW believes that it is important that Better Futures funds projects that equally cater to all children and young people aged 9-18. Not any one age group should be privileged, however, measures should be taken to ensure all ages are included. Dividing the groups up into 9-12, 13-15 and 16-18 as suggested by the *Discussion Paper*, however, is again unnecessarily limiting. For example, it would not allow programs to cater to 9-18 and would mean that projects would only focus on specific age groups over others.

The MYAN NSW recommends that there is equal weighting given to all ages between 9-18, but that it is not necessarily best done through dividing projects into specific age groups.

Question 4 – Administration of Better Futures

The MYAN NSW supports the government's policy priority that focus's on local solutions to local problems. However, in regards to the Better Futures program the MYAN NSW would consider that Better Futures would benefit from being centrally administrated. The main justification for this is that it would enable a more holistic and 'bigger picture' approach to the selection of projects and would also better enable the application of best practice.

The MYAN NSW recommends that the Better Futures budget is managed in way that enables a broad cross section of projects to be funded that involves a diversity of children and young people from a good cross-section of ages.

Conclusion

The MYAN NSW thanks the Office for Communities for the opportunity to make a submission to the Better Futures Review. The MYAN NSW believes that Better Futures plays an important role in supporting young people in NSW and hopes it will continue to do so in a targeted and informed way now and into the future.

For further information please contact:

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¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

² Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

⁵ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 20/1/2011

⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010

⁷ <http://www.cmy.net.au/InvolvingYoungPeople>, accessed 20/7/2011

⁸ *Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) Involving Young People: Documenting Youth Participation Strategies for Newly Arrived Communities, CMYI Best Practice Model 1 October 2001*

⁹ *Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) Involving Young People: Documenting Youth Participation Strategies for Newly Arrived Communities, CMYI Best Practice Model 1 October 2001*