

**Submission
No 6**

VOLUNTEERING AND UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

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**SUBMISSION to the Parliament of New South Wales –
Committee on Children and Young People**

**Inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work
placements among children and young people in
NSW**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network of NSW

MYAN NSW is the state-wide network representing the issues effecting young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds and the services that support them. MYAN NSW is committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for young people aged 12 to 25 from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NSW. Our aim is to strengthen the ability of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to settle well through stronger participation in work, school, family and community. MYAN NSW is committed to empowering young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate in discussions and decision-making that shapes their local communities, NSW and Australia. We aim to develop strategies, policies and resources that address the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at the local, regional and state levels.

MYAN NSW is part of the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network of Australia - the nationally recognised policy and advocacy body representing multicultural youth issues.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding (Francis and Cornfoot: 2007: 7). However, this group of young people face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities. These barriers include language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism, and discrimination. These factors can place these young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation and impact on things such as employability.

MYAN NSW believes that a targeted approach to policy and service delivery is essential to addressing these barriers, and supporting the social, cultural and economic participation of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. MYAN NSW works across the settlement and youth sectors to achieve this goal, supporting links between these sectors and supporting the development of appropriate responses to the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

1.2 About this submission

MYAN NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee on Children and Young People's inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work placements for children and young people in NSW. This submission provides a focus on the needs of multicultural young people, drawing on MYAN NSW's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities, and the youth and settlement support services across NSW.

Taking part in volunteering and unpaid work placements provides vital opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Such opportunities help them to develop greater understanding of workplaces and workplace culture in Australia, build social and professional networks, and develop a broader understanding of the career opportunities available to them. Volunteering also helps young people to develop skills, and a sense of commitment and belonging to their communities and to society as a whole.

MYAN NSW sees first hand the significant challenges facing young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in many areas, such as navigating the employment system and securing either part-time or full-time employment. Volunteering and unpaid work placements help to overcome some of these barriers.

This submission will focus on addressing those questions in the Terms of Reference of the inquiry that are relevant to improving outcomes specifically for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

1.3 Young People from Multicultural Backgrounds and Volunteering

Supporting and creating opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to meaningfully participate through volunteering can build a strong sense of agency and belonging. Not only this, but the broader community benefits from the rich diversity of experience and skills such young people can offer. On a broader level, the involvement of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is not only beneficial for the individuals concerned - it is also a crucial measurement of the depth and vigor of multiculturalism within NSW.

In the recent research report *Migrant Youth in Australia: Social Networks, Belonging and Active Citizenship* (Mansouri and Skrbis: 2013), the authors found that there were many issues and practices that got in the way of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds taking part in volunteering and other forms of active citizenship. One such issue is that we often fail to recognise the achievements of young people involved in volunteering and other forms of community participation. The study found that “some groups are markedly under-represented in data on volunteering because they contribute to their communities in ways that they do not see as volunteering.

Similarly, in 2011 the National Volunteering Strategy found that “culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Indigenous communities, in particular, often give large amounts of time to supporting others but report lower rates of formal volunteering’ (National Volunteering Strategy, 2011: 28). The Strategy (2011: 12) suggests that flexible, project-based roles, meaningful work with room for autonomy, innovative use of technology and rewarding social connections are vital in attracting today’s young volunteers. Participants in this study volunteered in a number of ways, including through participation in school-based groups, ethnic community groups, recreation groups and religious groups” (Mansouri and Skrbis, 2013:18).

This research also found that “young people volunteer because they want to get involved in the community and they have a desire to belong. Participants in this study viewed involvement in ‘volunteer groups’ as a way of addressing broader, systemic social justice issues. By being involved in volunteer groups they got actively engaged in the debates about larger systemic inequalities. There were two main motivations for the increased tendency towards ‘social-cause services’: desire and/ or expectation of a broader social change, and positive self- affirmation. Determination, agency and action had, in general, positive effects on self-affirmation, because being involved in and contributing to social change (often by being involved on more local levels) made people ‘feel good’; they also got to meet new people or developed their social networks, which contributed to their increased employment options”.

“There were differences in volunteering between young people born outside of Australia as opposed to Australian-born. As most young people involved in volunteering groups thought that their volunteering contributed to social change... higher volunteering rates among overseas-born young people may reflect their challenges of belonging, which contribute to a strengthening of their beliefs that social change is needed. Seeking engagement with broader, systemic social justice issues comes also from the desire to be accepted in the context of the national space and relates to the need to be active outside of one’s ethnic group” (Mansouri and Skrbis: 2013: 18).

However, it is important to note that the experiences of refugee and migrant young people are not always the same. Although young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may share common experiences as a result of the migration process – such as leaving behind friends and family, and having to adapt to a new culture and systems - important differences exist between the two groups. Migrants have generally made the decision to move to Australia, often for employment or educational opportunities, although it is important to consider that a young people migrating as part of a family unit may not necessarily have had a say in the matter.

In contrast, refugees have been forced to flee their countries of origin due to fear of persecution. They may have often spent years in transit countries or refugee camps, may have experienced disrupted education, torture and/or trauma, lost family members, and may know little about Australia prior to arrival. They also often lack financial resources due to the refugee experience, and/or having to provide finances to family members overseas. This can also be the case for some migrants who support family members outside of Australia, which can cause financial strain.

There are also important differences in experience according to how long a young person has lived in Australia. Newly arrived young people (defined by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection as five years or less in Australia) face very different issues to those who have lived in Australia for more substantial periods of time, or those whose parents may have migrated to Australia (referred to as ‘second generation’ migrants). These unique stages of settlement and length of time living in Australia impact on how young people experience and interact with ideas of citizenship and participation, including volunteering.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds not only face the same challenges as other young people in the areas of active citizenship and volunteering, they also often experience additional barriers. For refugee young people, these challenges may include:

- English language acquisition
- disrupted education
- competing settlement priorities such as housing, education or employment
- limited financial resources to take up opportunities
- the ongoing effects of torture and trauma.

Both migrant and refugee young people may experience:

- unfamiliarity with Australian systems
- unfamiliarity with the opportunities that exist
- limited social networks
- limited support and understanding amongst family and/or community as to the value of participating or volunteering in various activities.

But in spite of the numerous settlement challenges they face, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds tend to be particularly independent, resilient, opinionated and more than capable of making their own decisions. This is hardly surprising given the strong determination and survival skills young people have had to draw upon throughout the refugee or migration experience.

2. Response to the Inquiry

This submission focuses on the following issues outlined in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry:

- Measures to encourage volunteering and foster opportunities for volunteering among children and young people in NSW, including possible incentives to volunteer;
- Best practice in supporting and promoting safe opportunities for volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in other jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas;
- Providing the NSW Government with advice on how it can better engage with and support children and young people in volunteering and unpaid work placements; and
- Any other related matter.

In order to consider the measures that would encourage volunteering and foster volunteering opportunities for young people in NSW, it is useful to look at other large-scale reviews of youth volunteering. The most comprehensive review of youth volunteering in recent years was conducted in England in 2004/5. The Russell Commission was charged

with developing a national framework for youth volunteering, which would bring about “a step change in young people’s civic engagement, overseeing the expansion of all types of youth volunteering activities to the point that volunteering becomes a common feature in their lives” (Russell: 2005: 7). Many of the measures recommended in this report would provide a useful basis for improving and increasing volunteering and unpaid work placements for young people in NSW. These include:

- “The importance of involving young people themselves in the design and implementation of volunteering activity - Half of all young volunteers become involved in activities on the advice or recommendation of friends, some of the most successful and inspirational volunteering experiences are those that are led by young people, and young people are uniquely placed to support and mentor their peers on a number of important social issues”
- A series of campaigns to promote awareness of volunteering, in order to establish volunteering as a powerful force for change and an activity that all young people should aim to pursue
- A national (or state-wide) volunteering portal to ensure that young people have ready access to information on volunteering opportunities. This would include a website, an “online community”, volunteering hotline, a youth-focused database of volunteering opportunities
- Ensuring that young people receive high quality advice and guidance on volunteering through a network of Youth Volunteer Advisers
- Celebrating the achievements of young volunteers through an annual youth volunteering award ceremony, to recognise and reward young people for their contributions to society. The award ceremony should be designed, organised and judged by young people; recognise volunteering in all its diversity, and reward both distance-travelled and achievements; have a strong regional component, enabling local and regional recognition of young volunteers; regional events should also provide opportunities for young people to nominate their peers for state-wide awards; attract corporate sponsorship, celebrity support and high profile media coverage; utilise internet, mobile and digital platforms to facilitate interactive voting
- Young people should have access to a ‘menu of opportunity’, with details of the full range of volunteering activities, including the range of choice available matching young people’s desire to make a contribution with community needs; peer ratings of opportunities and organisations that provide them; pathways between different volunteering experiences – from one type of opportunity to another by activity, organisation or time committed; links between volunteering opportunities and different qualifications and recognition schemes; peer e-mentors providing advice and information to young people around developing their own ideas for action and taking them forward within their communities.
- Volunteering organisations should be encouraged to meet minimum standards governing the access, involvement, development and reward of young volunteers

- It is important to mark the contribution made by young volunteers, and to recognise the skills they learn in the course of their activity. This could be met through a progression of awards and accreditation that recognises the commitment they show and the skills they gain in the course of their volunteering. One such example is the Youth Achievement Awards scheme, which measures and accredits young peoples' learning in informal and non-formal educational settings
- Young people and their families should not suffer a financial barrier when they volunteer
- The establishment of a dedicated implementation body specifically responsible for promoting and supporting youth volunteering (Russell: 2005: 7-18).

With regards to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, each of these recommendations would need to be carried out in such a way as to be sensitive to and supportive of their specific needs and interests, and the issues facing them. This would include:

- **Involving young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds directly in designing and promoting volunteering opportunities, and consulting with them on their needs and interests**
- **Promoting volunteering opportunities through various mediums and in a range of languages, in order to reach young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families / communities**
- **Providing culturally sensitive and appropriate support, advice and guidance on volunteering and unpaid work placements**
- **Celebrating and promoting the achievements of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds through awards ceremonies, publicity etc**
- **Ensuring that the “menu” of volunteering opportunities available to young people take into account the types of volunteering that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are likely to take part in. This should keep in mind research that shows that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds often volunteer “through participation in school-based groups, ethnic community groups, recreation groups and religious groups” (Mansouri and Skrbis: 2013: 18).**
- **Financial barriers to participation in volunteering should be removed, as these are particularly likely to be problematic for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families.**

The recommendations made in the report from the Russell Commission into youth volunteering in England recommended the establishment of a dedicated implementation body. The report concluded that this body should be youth-led and independent of

government. The body would be responsible for raising awareness among young people of the value of volunteering, improving the quality and usefulness of their volunteering experiences, and for building volunteering capacity. It would provide an accessible 'portal', or point of contact – via web, phone, and face-to-face local interfaces – for individuals seeking information and advice on volunteering. This portal would also maintain a nationwide database of opportunities, and work closely with local volunteering bodies to deliver opportunities, advice, and guidance (Russell: 2005: 8).

These recommendations were met in the establishment of a new organisation known as V. V was established by the UK government in direct response to the recommendations of the Russell Commission. Even the name of the organisation was chosen in response to feedback from young people, which found that young people were not comfortable with the term "volunteering", which they associated with older people and with a limited range of activities. They found that even young people involved in volunteering activities were often uncomfortable with using that word.

This attitude amongst young people in England to the word "volunteering" is also true of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia. In 2011, the National Volunteering Strategy found that "some groups are markedly under-represented in data on volunteering because they contribute to their communities in ways that they do not see as volunteering. 'Culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Indigenous communities, in particular, often give large amounts of time to supporting others but report lower rates of formal volunteering' (National Volunteering Strategy: 2011: 28).

With this in mind, any attempts to promote volunteering and unpaid work placements to young people - especially those from refugee and migrant backgrounds - should be mindful that the word "volunteering" is often not a familiar or comfortable one for this audience, and other terminology should be explored.

Recent consultations with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds were conducted in Victoria by the Centre for Multicultural Youth. These consultations produced a number of interesting findings with regard to volunteering and participation. This included:

- Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are highly active in the community. However their rates of participation in volunteering are slightly lower than those for the general youth population
- The level and type of participation amongst young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds changes according to the length of time in Australia
- Participation is effected by gender, with young women more likely to volunteer than young men
- The main barriers to young people participating in volunteering and similar activities include lack of knowledge about the opportunities available, and lack of knowledge about what is involved in these volunteering activities

- Lack of finances, language barriers and lack of transport pose as barriers, particularly for young people who are newly arrived in Australia
- Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are keen to get involved in volunteering for a range of reasons, including meeting new friends, developing new skills, and the chance to participate in decision making

Any efforts to increase the rate of volunteering amongst young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NSW must take these issues into account.

The Victorian consultations also found that strong social networks appeared to be the key to young people finding out about the opportunities available to them. Social networks are often fragmented for young people through the migration and refugee experience, and thus developing friendships and social connections can be even more critical for this particular group.

A small but significant number of young people held the concerning view that 'getting involved' in volunteering is mostly for well educated, confident young people, perhaps due in part to the type of opportunities they see around them. This perception could prevent some young people from participating in opportunities due to self-exclusion, particularly for young people who have experienced interrupted education or are struggling to learn English.

As mentioned earlier, many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are highly involved in their local communities or religious groups, but do not necessarily perceive or identify this activity as 'volunteering'. **Young people who were consulted in Victoria suggested educating both parents and young people about what they can gain from volunteering experiences, including how to translate the skills learnt onto a resume.**

3. Recommendations

MYAN NSW makes the following recommendations in order to increase and improve volunteering and unpaid work placements for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NSW:

1. That the NSW Government involves young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds directly in designing and promoting volunteering opportunities and unpaid work placements, and consult with them on their needs and interests.
2. That the NSW Government promotes volunteering opportunities and unpaid work placements through various mediums and in a range of languages, in order to reach and attract young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families / communities.
3. That the NSW Government provides adequate funding to ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds receive culturally sensitive and appropriate support,

advice and guidance on volunteering and unpaid work placements, from services with high levels of cultural competence and experience in working with young people.

4. That the NSW Government ensures that there is a broad “menu” of volunteering opportunities available to young people that takes into account the types of volunteering that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are likely to take part in.
5. That the NSW Government consults with a wide range of young people, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, on the use of the term “volunteering”, in order to determine whether this term is useful and appropriate for young people.
6. That the NSW Government thoroughly investigate and eliminate any financial barriers to young people volunteering and undertaking unpaid work placements.

4. References

Francis, S. and Cornfoot, S. (2007) *Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and Transition*, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

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