



MYAN NSW
Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

COVID-19: How are young people from multicultural backgrounds faring?

Notes from youth consultation
April 2020

Background

MYAN NSW held a consultation for young people from multicultural backgrounds on Thursday 9 April from 5pm to 6:30pm to see how COVID-19 was impacting them, their families and communities. The online discussion was facilitated by Domina Augustine, NSW youth representative to MYAN Australia, along with two MYAN NSW staff members, Hannah Lai and Henrietta Amevor. The purpose of the meeting was to actively listen to young people's experiences, validate and capture the challenges they're facing and record stories of support the young people have witnessed. The consultation was promoted through our email networks, as well as social media — in particular Instagram.

Who came?

24 young people attended, all aged between 12 and 25. They came from Sydney, South-West Sydney, Wagga Wagga and Newcastle.

Young people reported their cultural background as: Indian, Ghanaian-Australian, Hazara, Indonesian-Chinese, Egyptian, Chinese, Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Vietnamese and Yazidi.

Key issues discussed:

1. Access to technology
2. Impacts on study and work
3. Messaging and information
4. Challenges
5. Encouragement, support and positive stories

1. Poll: Access to technology

The young people who attended the online consultation were those who had access to internet within their homes. MYAN NSW was unable to reach young people who rely on public WiFi or those without access to a device such as a smartphone, computer or tablet.

Up to 23 young people participated in the multiple choice Zoom poll which focused on two questions.

What is your access to technology like?

- a. I have a laptop – 21/23
- b. I have a smartphone – 20/23
- c. I have unlimited WiFi and data at home – 14/23
- d. I use my own limited WiFi and data – 6/23
- e. I have a tablet (iPad or similar) – 6/23

Some people responded that they didn't know if their WiFi was limited or not.

Where are you getting your information about COVID-19 from?

Young people are getting their information about COVID-19 mainly by watching the news, Facebook and through their family or friends.

- a. Watching the news – 16/21
- b. Facebook – 11/21
- c. Family, friends and people I know – 11/21
- d. NSW Health website – 7/21
- e. Instagram – 6/21
- f. WhatsApp – 6/21
- g. Twitter – 2/21
- h. Radio 1/21

“From Google and watching news.”

“I get regular updates from Channel 9 and I use online streaming.”

“Through university emails.”

2. How has COVID-19 impacted your studies or work?

a. General

COVID-19 has had a major impact on young people’s experience of education and work. The rapid move to an online environment has exacerbated already existing inequities, particularly in terms of access to technology. Some major challenges young people reported were:

- The difference in how schools and universities are adapting to the online environment. Although many young people have had their exams and assessments postponed, overall they reported feeling more pressured than ever before about exams.
- Stress of changes to the way assessments and exams contribute to final marks.
- Slow internet connections mean young people can’t easily download their lessons or see them clearly.
- Increased costs of accessing technology e.g. purchasing additional devices and internet data.
- Financial stress in the family due to job losses.

“I’m a drama student and they had to cancel a very important module, so now we have two modules and it’s 50/50. They are re-weighting everything.”

“I’m in my first year of uni and I was just getting into it. Out of nowhere it’s all online now.”

“I used to have two jobs, but I lost a job because they shut down – just like that. We had to get ready really fast without time to adapt I guess.”

“Tutors and lecturers are sending things through multiple channels, so it’s been difficult to keep up.”

b. Learning difficulties

All the young people in the consultation reported that they are no longer attending school in person and are instead studying online. They felt the move to online learning was impacting the quality of their learning. In particular, the decrease in interaction with teachers means it is harder to get the help they need and they noted sometimes long delays between asking questions and getting answers.

- Time lag in being able to receive feedback and have questions answered from teachers and tutors.
- Many video conferencing technologies not permitted e.g. Zoom.
- Difficulty asking questions in real time.
- Need for additional time if students are doing exams online or on computers, but this has not yet happened.
- Difficulty in collaborating for group assignments.

“Group assignments are not the same. The teacher’s answers are very delayed — about 5 days later which is due to poor internet connection. Without the video, you can’t see the facial expression.”

“It’s hard when I don’t get immediate responses. I understand it but when you are there, you can get immediate responses.”

“When we have exams on computers, it is difficult...they have not increased the time limit that you get in your exams. Many universities have not changed the framework to reflect the times.”

“I’m in a public school and we are not allowed to use Zoom with teachers. I don’t know why. The department just said so...we can’t listen to anyone explain we just have to rely on notes.”

c. Motivation

Young people reported a lack of motivation, boredom and pressure to excel. In particular, the home environment was mentioned as not conducive to study as there is often not a quiet, dedicated place to do work and there are a lot of distractions.

- Online learning is not as engaging.
- Difficulty in developing and maintaining good study habits.
- Time management.
- Slow internet makes it difficult to engage in the work they are set.
- Impact of stress, reactivated trauma and grief on motivation levels.
- Not knowing what their future of learning looks like is stressful.

“Routine and finding quiet places with a big family is really hard.”

“We use Microsoft Teams in our school to be able to talk to our teachers which is very boring.”

“It’s hard to think far forward when you see the death toll go up and you are thinking about how these are people and families.”

“Internet is very bad, there is noise around. Not a good location for study. I feel sleepy when I am with the teachers online. I feel so bad I don’t have the motivation to do any work. HSC is close and soon!”

“My school cancelled the half-yearly exams which was a good chance to review all the subjects. We don’t know what we are going to do with the trial exams. A few classes online and other classes via papers on emails, worksheets on emails and photos.”

“I feel like there is a gap in my studies, like my education is going down.”

“I’m a student in year 10, it’s very boring...you can’t do everything. It’s just on Google or something. I was volunteering with some markets and because of COVID-19 we always stay at home. We either sleep or doing something else.”

“I’m in high school...it’s kind of boring. We cannot do homework because internet and email is very slow because every Australian is now using it.”

3. Getting accurate information about COVID-19

Young people reported a sense of confusion when it came to COVID-19 messaging, with constant changes in restrictions and uncertainty about how long restrictions will last. They also reported not being able to get up-to-date information about restrictions in their first language.

- Conflicting information about restrictions, or information that is difficult to understand.
- Hard to understand what is the most up-to-date information.
- Avoiding the news because of its depressing natures means missing out on updates.
- Lack of understanding about fines.

“I find it very confusing, there’s restrictions and it’s overwhelming.”

“When you google something, one page says something, another one says something different. Some websites have different information.”

“With COVID-19 there is so much changing so quickly, it’s really hard to discern which bits of information is up to date.”

“The news can be extremely depressing so I’m not trying to always watch the news. You can’t do much about it. Mainly, there’s WhatsApp messages that get a bit twisted. Trying to keep track of what Scomo is saying... all of that together and understanding what’s going on... It’s in every direction and there is no united voice that is sharing this information.”

“I also heard that someone got fined \$1600 for driving on their Ls, you know what I mean? So I’m not even going to chance it. Try to keep up the best I can. And not to push my boundaries. Because I don’t want to pay that fine. Just trying to make sure I follow the guidelines.”

4. What other challenges have you been facing?

Young people reported their biggest challenges included:

- Mental health services changing.
- Physical health affected, lack of exercise impacts routine.
- Absence of routine impacts motivation.
- Feelings of expectation to be productive.
- Sense of disappointment due to cancelled plans.
- Concerns about family and those without permanent visas.

a. Pressure to be productive

Young people talked about social media being saturated with productivity content, but also gave each other encouragement to stay rested.

“There’s a lot of productivity content on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn... but I wanted to say that it’s okay if you are not feeling productive or not feeling well. These are unprecedented times. We are not used to spending 15 hours indoors.”

“You can’t do anything when you don’t have any motivation, so take your time and be patient.”

b. Mental health concerns

Young people discussed changes in services, environments and not being able to see people.

“It’s hard to have psychologist [support], appointments had to be delayed or they hard to book due to long waiting lists.”

“The service I was going to now does telehealth services, which is a bit hit and miss. The platform itself is a bit slow, and it’s just not great. It’s better than nothing.”

“Some of us are fortunate to be here with friends and family but some of us don’t have friends and family around and don’t get to see them.”

“I miss my grandma. I went to hug her but she took this very seriously from the start. Yesterday someone said they had to attend a virtual funeral. It’s just so tough...how are you meant to care?”

“There’s drug and alcohol abuse during this time with the lack of mental health supports. Financial stress also increases family and domestic violence. People are on the brink of experiencing homelessness.”

“It’s harder to be organised and have routines, trying to maintain a schedule and keeping it normal. Sometimes having breakfast at dinner time, etc...especially with the holidays, it still feels like we are in a holiday mode because we are at home all the time. We are in our bedrooms all day.”

c. Sense of disappointment

“At my school I was preparing for Harmony Day. It’s all cancelled after we did a lot of work. It was a waste of time. Assemblies, excursions and all the good things. It’s all disappointment.”

“Working hard towards something and not having a substitute is very disheartening.”

“It’s really hard to plan and think ahead...things just get cancelled. Some industries are so competitive, like the legal industry and you need to get your foot in the door and network in person.”

d. Physical health concerns

“This year was the first year to join a team sport — that was so scary. It took so long to convince my parents. You go through the whole process and then it gets cancelled”

“Gyms closing has affected my routine. I am wondering how long will things last.”

“I used to go to the gym, walk around, and now I can’t do anything. I’m just in the bed. I feel pain in all my body, it sounds silly. I feel so bad, so bored. Everything goes down and no motivation to do anything.”

e. Sense of uncertainty

“I just moved to Australia a year ago. A lot of my family right now are temporary visa holders. We are all quite confused about what would happen. The situation is far worse in Indonesia. For my Uncle and Auntie’s safety it’s much better for us to stay in Australia. But at the same time the government hasn’t put together a statement whether or not we are allowed to extend our visa. But we are going to try anyway, we are doing our best.”

5. Encouragement, support and positive stories

Young people discussed ways to stay connected and shared encouraging messages to remain hopeful.

- ‘One Another’ is an organisation that connects volunteers in crisis. Contact them to connect with people who are feeling isolated in the community: www.oneanother.community/
- Stay connected and join the MYAN Youth Ambassador Network or other youth services online.
- Keep a reflection journal so we look back in a year’s time. Create a ‘report’ or Google doc to capture how young people are feeling.

“Reaching out and reconnecting with people we hadn’t talk to for a long time, such as childhood friends, primary school friends. It’s been really helpful. I’d encourage people to do it if they’d like to.”

“We shouldn’t impose our burnout culture onto other people, where we feel like we should be in a constant state of productivity.”

“We need to be patient with ourselves and give ourselves time to slowly fall into that pattern. I know for me, it’s been a struggle. I’m slowly finding that pace.”

“Sometimes there’s a pressure to upskill ourselves to do everything digitally. It feels like everything is on our shoulders, but it’s not. The world will not fall apart if we are not productive for a day.”

“We have virtual pubs, tea and talks, sharing and having people to actively listen to you. Having that space to share whatever is on your mind.”