December 2017

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support:

A Discussion Paper on enhancements to the Settlement Grants program

Response from Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW

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About Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW

Our vision is that all young people from multicultural backgrounds in NSW can access the support and opportunities they need to be active citizens in Australian society.

MYAN NSW is the first state-wide multicultural youth specialist organisation. We engage, connect and build the capacity of the youth, settlement and multicultural sectors to meet the needs of young people from refugee, asylum seeking and migrant backgrounds. We support the development of young people's skills and networks to engage in advocacy and influence the regional, state and national agenda.

MYAN NSW is a hub of networking, information and capacity building. We support and strengthen the work of our large and diverse network. Our members, partners, services and young people benefit from a range of initiatives and services, including:

- Network meetings and events;
- Sector development forums;
- Skills and capacity building workshops and training;
- Policy advice to government;
- Fact sheets, reports and resources;
- Contributions to research on key issues;
- Regular eNews and information.

Background

MYAN NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the review of the Settlement Grants program (SGP). SGP is one of a range of programs which support young people along their settlement journey and plays an important role in supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to settle well in Australia and achieve Active Citizenship. Active citizenship assumes the acquisition of social capital and agency, where young people are supported to become active agents of change in shaping their own futures. Developing a sense of agency is particularly important for refugee and migrant young people as this group of young people have had their capacity for agency diminished by the refugee and migrant experience[1].

MYAN NSW believes the most effective responses to supporting young people to settle well in Australia are those that full invest in and support services and systems to remain flexible and responsive to the changing needs and challenges facing newly arrived young people. While Australia's settlement services system is globally recognised, we would like to see a stronger focus on more targeted, coordinated and consistent approach to supporting young people across settlement services. Strengthening the Settlement Grants program to better focus on building autonomy, skills, connectedness, participation and wellbeing will ensure that young people making a new life in

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[1] 1 MYAN (Australia). 2016. National Youth Settlement Framework. Melbourne: Centre for Multicultural Youth.

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Australia will develop a strong sense of belonging and be able to actively participate in all aspects of society.

1. Program Design

Question 1: What types of activities will best support client outcomes under each of the two component types and what are their desired outcomes?

MYAN NSW cautions against the removal of youth settlement services as a distinct stream within the Settlement Grant program. While we acknowledge that the Department of Social Services (DSS) has stated in the discussion paper that a focus on services for young people (aged 15 to 25 years) will remain a policy priority, we believe the removal of a distinct 'youth stream' poses a risk that the tailored support required for young people may be diminished in future grant rounds.

Acknowledging the intention of DSS to maintain the eligibility for support to a period of up to five years after arrival, activities in the two streams of client services and capacity building need to focus on building autonomy – skills and knowledge – which will prepare young people, families and communities to engage effectively with mainstream services in both the government and community sectors. Activities which address challenges and barriers while simultaneously building people's problem-solving skills and capacity to apply knowledge will best support client outcomes.

We note that the SGP Evaluation Report highlighted that mainstream services often do not have the capacity or skills to respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of refugee and migrant young people. This has also been the general feedback of the settlement sector, as well as many mainstream services who acknowledge that this is not their area of strength. While building the capacity of mainstream services to engage better with migrant and refugee communities may be outside the scope of the SGP, we feel it is important that there is action taken on this. This could be through the Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG) and the implementation of the National Settlement Framework, which seeks to engage with local, state and federal governments and their respective responsibilities in achieving strong settlement outcomes for their communities. Action could also be taken by further resourcing and support of the National Youth Settlement Framework and the work happening in each state and territory to progress its implementation. In addition, this feedback should be made available to state and territory settlement planning committees who are also in a position to address local barriers to effective settlement support initiatives.

Data gathered and analysed in the *Building a New Life in Australia* (BNLA)[2] longitudinal study of humanitarian migrants suggests that, over time, progress is being achieved in this cohort in relation to engagement in education and entrance into employment. Of note is the critical role of English language proficiency in facilitating engagement in these key settlement outcomes. Support initiatives within SGP need to focus increasingly on analysing current skill sets and devising programs which support ongoing knowledge and skill development.

BNLA data also suggests that education and employment backgrounds significantly influence outcomes and the rate at which people achieve these. Given that there will always be new arrivals in the eligible visa streams with low-level English proficiency, little or no educational achievements and little or no employment experience, building the capacity of ethno-specific agencies to support their community members over time should be a priority area of funding.

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[2] Department of Social Services. (2017). Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants – Findings from the first three waves. Canberra: Department of Social Services.

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However, DSS should be aware that this poses a potential conflict of interest for generalist settlement agencies. Should they be very successful in building the capacity of ethno-specific agencies and specific ethnic communities in their geographic location, new agencies may well be competing with generalist agencies for future grant funding. This is a potential disincentive to perform well in this component of settlement support.

Question 2: What is the best way to ensure ethno-specific organisations benefit from this approach with a view to sustainable capacity building.

Existing ethno-specific organisations with capacity to support their communities ought to be competitive in the grants process. However, this could be difficult to achieve when competing against community sector agencies which have demonstrated skills in application writing and grant management. We recommend that DSS consider nominally allocating a portion of overall funding for these organisations.

It must be acknowledged that smaller ethno-specific organisations are often competing with larger organisations who may receive multiple streams of funding and can make cost savings or achieve economies of scale due to their size. MYAN NSW received feedback from many ethno-specific organisations around inadequate levels of funding for smaller organisations to cover both staffing and project-related costs. While it is true that many ethno-specific organisations benefit for an active and large volunteer base – often more so than generalist settlement services – it does not negate the need for skilled paid staff with adequate project resourcing. We believe a strong settlement sector is a diverse one, and this means resourcing a range of organisations of varying sizes, and which may focus on specific client groups and ethnic communities.

For those ethno-specific organisations not yet possessing the capacity to adequately support their community, generalist agencies should be funded to support their growth in this area. It is imperative that these generalist agencies need better guidance on identifying, measuring and reporting on outcomes so that there is evidence of increased skills and knowledge within those communities. Furthermore, it important that there is ample focus on ethno-specific youth organisations to support the young people in their communities. Multicultural youth specialist organisations are well-placed to support capacity building in these agencies in a range of areas, particularly governance, grant writing and management, and youth development approaches.

2. Service provision and innovation

Question 3: What are some of the characteristics of a needs-based approach, including provision of tailored medium-level intensity support, that the Department should address in guidance documentation?

It is too early to determine if the new requirements within the Humanitarian Settlement program (HSP), including an increased focus on the *Three E's*, may diminish the demand for medium-level support within the SGP. MYAN NSW has heard concerns from our network that a needs-based approach appears to further narrow the scope of the SGP overall and many were disappointed that an opportunity has been missed to expand the program and the services we are able to provide to support good settlement outcomes for more young people.

DSS and the broader sector must be aware that unless overall funding for the program increases, the number of people assisted will be diminished in order to provide medium-level assistance to a proportion of clients. This increased assistance creates an opportunity to provide more tailored support to young people who are particularly vulnerable or who present with a complex set of needs. However, DSS should acknowledge that this is a more resource-intensive service and young people

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who need less intensive services must not miss out. It is important to remember the long-term cost-benefit of providing low-level support to those whose needs are less intense.

A needs-based approach acknowledges that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they require to navigate the demands of settling in a new country. Young people's settlement needs are distinct from adults and families, and their settlement journey is often rendered more complex by the developmental tasks of adolescence. A needs-based approach acknowledges that young people's priorities change over time and promotes flexibility and innovation in addressing them. MYAN NSW stresses the importance of resourcing multicultural youth-specific services who are often best placed to provide tailored, relevant and responsive services to young people and deliver on the National Youth Settlement Framework.

Other characteristics of a needs-based approach include:
- promoting flexibility for young people moving out of, or into, a location within the five-year period;
- amending intake protocols to assess vulnerabilities and develop a profile of client's needs, as well as acknowledging that these vulnerabilities and needs change over time;
- providing different types of services, supporting young people to engage in the four domains of active citizenship: economic, civic and social participation, and personal wellbeing. More information on the domains of active citizenship can be found in the MYAN National Youth Settlement Framework.

In program documentation, DSS might consider providing advice and clarification on:
- how to manage demand which exceeds resources;
- how to prioritise clients approaching their service for support;
- how to identify vulnerabilities;
- priority targets groups (such as refugee and migrant young people); and
- whether there are any expected outcomes for 'average' clients and medium-intensity clients.

Question 4: What mechanisms would encourage innovation in the program?

When advocating for more innovation within service delivery, it is important that we clearly define what innovation is – and what it is not. Innovation cannot be defined as doing more with less, nor is always about providing an evidence base for your methods of addressing challenges. Innovation requires deep insight and creativity into how to meet our clients' needs and often forces us to confront basic assumptions about what we think clients want and expect of us. Furthermore, we cannot expect innovation to occur simply because we want it to – space needs to be created for it to flourish. There needs to be strong leadership, flexible systems and workplaces, dispensing of risk-averse attitudes, collaboration, ready access to technology – and most importantly, innovation needs to be adequately resourced.

Our first recommendation to encourage innovation relates to other later questions in this discussion paper regarding communities of practice and collaboration, so this will be addressed below. The second recommendation is to establish an innovation fund within the Settlement Grants program. Allocation of monies from this fund would be on an application/DSS approval basis. However, it should not be an annual scrummage for additional funds where agencies are required to come up with a good idea simply because there is a call for applications. It should be in place to assist agencies address unexpected challenges with innovative responses based on actual rather than potential needs of clients. Adequate resourcing to evaluate innovative models should be a priority if such innovation is to be successfully mainstreamed into broader service delivery in the future.

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3. Key priorities

Question 5: Without duplicating existing English, employment or education services, what Settlement Grants activities drive Three E's outcomes for clients. In the context of Settlement Grants, how would you define an English, education and/or employment outcomes. How can Settlement Grants add value in achieving expected outcomes under the Three E's?

It could be argued that most or all settlement grants activities, where they genuinely build knowledge, skills and autonomy, are contributing to positive outcomes in relation to the Three E's. Since "without duplicating" is a key phrase, Settlement Grants activities which assess need and provide information and assistance to access funded English, education and employment services will make such a contribution.

In the context of Settlement Grants, an English, education or employment outcome would be defined as an activity which fills a gap in these existing services. For example, if an SGP-funded agency had clients who had completed AMEP study but who were not yet proficient enough to be job-ready, then linking them to further English language study opportunities would be filling this gap.

MYAN Australia's National Youth Settlement Framework and accompanying Active Citizenship Indicators provides greater clarity around what good settlement outcomes look like for a young person and the types of activities services providers can deliver to support the achievement of these outcomes. For example, in an employment context, an SGP-funded agency might:

- provide flexible employment support options to meet the varying needs of those with disrupted schooling and experiences of trauma;
- support refugee and migrant young people to access mainstream employment services;
- provide access to professional networks and mentoring to build social capital;
- provide opportunities or support young people to access volunteering opportunities to improve their employability;
- engage employers and local businesses in programs to establish networks for young people and to help build understanding, cultural awareness and recognition of the skills and qualities that refugee and migrant young people have to offer;
- advocate with services and organisations about the specific education, training and employment needs of young people.

Question 6: How can Settlement Grants service delivery be enhanced to meet the often complex needs of eligible youth?

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a diverse group who face a unique and often complex set of challenges in settling in Australia - due to their age, developmental stage, position within the family and migration experience. Although they often face additional and more complex transitions than their Australia-born counterparts and their settlement experiences are different from those of adults, they are often considered and treated as a sub-set of the broader youth or multicultural/migrant populations.

While there have been some important youth initiatives in settlement services in recent years, such as the Youth Transition Support program and the Refugee Youth Peer Mentoring program, settlement services are often designed around the needs of adults and family groups on the assumption that

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adult-focused programs can be readily applied to young people. Similarly, in the mainstream youth sector, services are designed around the needs of Australian-born young people, neglecting the cultural and migration/settlement experiences of newer arrivals and how these impact on their needs.

The National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) is an evidence-based resource to guide and measure good practice in youth-specific settlement services. It focuses on building social capital, agency and autonomy – all of which are key features of the SGP. The NYSF enables services to respond more effectively to the specific needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and ensure that this group of young people receive the support they need to become actively engaged in all aspects of Australian society. In addition, it strengthens engagement which mainstream agencies which has previously been identified as a major barrier in clients receiving appropriate support from mainstream services.

MYAN NSW advocates for the further implementation of the NYSF to guide policy and service delivery within the SGP, as well as incorporating the Framework's Active Citizenship Indicators in outcomes reporting for young people. While there has been strong uptake of the NYSF, demand outstrips capacity in NSW to support organisations in its implementation. Additional resourcing to support organisations adopt a targeted and tailored approach to providing settlement services to young people should be a priority and would greatly enhance outcomes for this cohort.

The NYSF also provides an opportunity for services to identify and build the skills they need to best support young people. The NYSF Good Practice Capabilities reflect best practice in responding to the particular circumstances of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the settlement context. When applied, they address the range of barriers young people face in accessing the support and opportunities they need to become active citizens in Australian society.

The good practice capabilities are:
1. Cultural competency
2. Youth-centred and strengths-based
3. Youth development and participation
4. Trauma informed
5. Family-aware
6. Flexibility and responsiveness
7. Collaboration
8. Advocacy

Other characteristics of a Settlement Grants program enhanced to meet the needs of young people include:
- ensuring youth-focused SGP activities include a mix of individual casework and case management, as well as group work and outreach services;
- planning for the types of services in geographical areas so that there is a mix of programs/services that deliver on the Active Citizenship domains and indicators. This would support a more planned approach to SGP service delivery;
- acknowledging the importance of funding multicultural youth-specialist agencies to deliver SGP to young people and their ability to deliver on the NYSF;
- ensuring continuity of support between HSP and SGP by allowing for new individual case management plans to identify young people who would benefit from referral into SGP and make active supported referrals;
- acknowledging the need for capacity building within SGP service providers and ensure young people access the support they need and that is available to them;

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- extending the lower age bracket for youth support to 12 years, bringing SGP in line with the majority of state-funded youth services.

4. Communities of Practice (COP) and Collaboration

Question 7. In what ways could the Department address barriers and provide incentives for organisations to participate in the COP? What model could these forums take?

MYAN NSW strongly endorses a Community of Practice model as a way of facilitating cross-sector collaboration, strengthening referral pathways and improving practice, and acknowledges that there are potential barriers to its implementation and functioning. A COP can be empowering, opening workers up to new knowledge and skills, and enabling them to manage change and share ideas, collectively solve problems and create a greater sense of connection and trust between organisations. However, any grants program is an inherently competitive environment whose context is exacerbated around the time of grant rounds. Sector competitiveness may mitigate against genuine engagement in collaboration or a COP. This is the greatest barrier the department needs to overcome, as knowledge and expertise is a competitive advantage that agencies may not willingly share.

Stakeholder engagement and collaboration could be integrated into SGP funding agreements as an activity supported by DSS. If it is included in an Activity Work Plan then agencies will need to identify and report on networking and collaborative initiatives. Participation in a COP could also be made a grant requirement. This would require oversight and management by DSS.

Our experience tells us that one of the most effective strategies to reduce barriers between agencies is to convene face-to-face meetings or conferences at which staff are able to network and develop relationships with like-minded agencies. In a youth-specific SGP context, MYAN-affiliated organisations are ideally placed to 'convene' a COP given the existing networks in most states and territories. These networks are experienced and skilled, have existing infrastructure, links to mainstream agencies, policy and practice knowledge, and sector development skills, including providing training. In NSW, MYAN NSW has convened network meetings for a considerable amount of time and the focus of these meetings has included strengthening relationships between service providers, building capacity to deliver targeted and tailored services to migrant and refugee young people and sharing best practice in service delivery.

Other potential strategies to address barriers to genuine collaboration or participation in a COP would be for DSS to convene an annual conference, followed up by state and territory-based bi-monthly or quarterly meetings. In addition to or in lieu of face-to-face engagement, DSS could establish a web-based platform for grant funded agency staff to raise challenges, share resources and communicate on a regular basis.

We would like to highlight that MYAN Australia has been facilitating a COP with the Youth Transition Support Pilot, which has been an excellent mechanism for sharing practice and strengthening collaboration.

Question 8. What strategies could providers implement to enhance collaboration within and across the sector?

MYAN NSW is aware that most funded agencies participate in local refugee, youth and multicultural interagency meetings and some participate in broader, state-based networks. While this ensures agency staff are well informed about programs and services in their area, it does not automatically result in collaborative efforts to support clients in need.

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Providers could be more pro-active in seeking to co-sponsor events and information sessions and in joining consortium or partnership arrangements for a range of allied grant programs which support client outcomes and aims of settlement grants programs.

5. Administrative Improvements

Question 9. What type of guidance would organisations like the Department to provide to assist with greater program clarity?

More clarity should be provided by DSS about:
- sector development opportunities within SGP guidelines and the role of peak bodies currently funded currently under SGP;
- whether workplans incorporate specific outcomes, for example Three E's, and how each outcome is to be measured;
- guidance about the relationship between HSP and SGP, and how SGP will follow and build on the work of HSP;
- what can actually be included as an eligible SGP activity, so that providers can know what activities are possible and where this is scope to do more or link to existing programs or services.

Question 10. What do you consider to be the main barriers to service providers increasing their reporting through the DEX Partnership Approach?

As MYAN NSW is not currently a recipient of Settlement Grants funding, there is no comment to make in regard to this question of barriers. However, it is notable in the full evaluation report (at 3.1.2c) that while "the majority of organisations funded under SG were in the Partnership Approach in May 2017, only 9 – 15% of clients had completed assessments on any outcome measure in the reporting period under consideration." Furthermore, in the following paragraph, researchers noted that 91% of service providers reported using DEX to record client outcomes. It is not clear in the report if there is an unwillingness to report outcomes or if the disincentive to report outcomes relates to the DEX assessment and recording protocols. While MYAN NSW would never wish to see service delivery and program administration dominated by outcomes reporting protocols, it is of concern that there is little evidence available to the researchers or DSS on the positive program outcomes reported by service providers.

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