

NOT JUST “TICKING A BOX”

Youth participation with young people
from refugee and migrant backgrounds



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ABOUT MYAN

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is Australia's national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and those who work with them. We work in partnership with young people, government and civil society to promote the interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and to support a targeted approach to addressing these in policy and service delivery. MYAN facilitates national connections between young people, academics, policy makers and practitioners, providing an important policy perspective, capacity building resources and youth leadership opportunities.

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1. Introduction

WHY HAS THIS RESOURCE BEEN DEVELOPED?

This resource aims to help organisations consider ways they can support and enable young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate in decisions that affect them. While there is a range of material on youth participation, there are few resources that focus on youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In the sections that follow we will:

- Highlight some of the barriers and issues that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may face to participation and how to address these;
- Showcase some examples of good practice, highlighting some of the practical ways that projects and organisations have addressed these barriers; and
- Finish with some “top tips” and a checklist of things to keep in mind when planning and facilitating youth participation opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The resource has been designed in such a way that it can be read all together, or each section can be used on its own - in workshops, team meetings, supervision sessions and so on.

WHAT INFORMS THIS WORK?

This resource has been informed by consultations with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those with experience in good practice in youth participation with this group of young people.

Some of the frameworks that inform good practice in youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are:

- MYAN’s National Youth Settlement Framework
- Youth work policies and practice
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Resolution on Youth and Human Right, UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security.
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This resource is for anyone who is keen to enable young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate in decisions that affect them, with a particular focus on:

- Organisations that are interested in young people’s participation but have not done this before
- Organisations who have some experience of involving young people in decision making but are keen to build on this experience
- Organisations that are experienced in involving Australia -born young people but have little experience in doing so with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.



2. About Young People's Participation

WHAT IS "YOUTH PARTICIPATION"?

"Youth participation is about developing partnerships with young people so that they may take a valued position and role within our community and are able to be actively involved in the decision making processes that affect them" (1). MYAN's *National Youth Settlement Framework* (NYSF) recognises Youth Development and Participation as one of the eight Good Practice Capabilities that support and enable the effective settlement and integration of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

According to the NYSF "youth participation approaches recognise the right of young people to participate in decision making that affects and shapes their lives, and that they are often best placed to identify their needs and should be supported to identify and advocate for solutions. Meaningful youth participation is not just about opportunity; it is about seeing young people as partners and equipping them with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively participate" (2).

Youth participation recognises the knowledge, strengths, skills and assets that young people bring to organisations, their communities and broader society when they get involved.

True participation is about genuinely involving young people in all aspects of decisions that affect them, as early as possible. It is not about token gestures, such as asking young people their opinions when there is no real intention to take their ideas into consideration. Meaningful youth participation:

- Recognises the capabilities of young people, with important perspectives and expertise that are often overlooked.
- Takes young people's perspectives seriously as valuable actors, with particular needs and rights distinct from children and adults.
- Builds young people's agency and social capital to identify and implement solutions in policy and programming.

It requires investment in building the skills and knowledge of organisations and staff, building the capacity of young people, and providing platforms and opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and influence decision-making.



// Meaningful youth participation is not just about opportunity; it is about seeing young people as partners and equipping them with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively participate."

WHY IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

Youth participation has significant benefits, both for the young people who are engaged in decision making processes, as well as for the organisations and communities that engage and support young people to participate. Young people have valuable opinions and insights, which they are most capable of sharing, provided they are given the space and support to do so. Some of the reasons we should support young people's participation include:

- Young people have a right to express their views when decisions are being made that affect their lives. This right is captured in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is endorsed by most countries in the world. Articles 12 and 13 talk about the right of children and young people to share their views freely - "the right to freedom of expression; (including) the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers... through any ...media of the child's choice" (3)
- The UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Youth and Human Rights refers to youth participation in decision making as well as "the need to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere real opportunities to enable their full, effective and meaningful participation in society" (4).
- Young people's participation encourages them to take an active role in shaping communities and societies, and equips them with the skills and confidence to do so.
- Young people are experts in their own lives and have knowledge and experiences that are unique to them. The world is a changing place, with new inventions and technologies emerging all the time. No-one else has been a young person at this particular time in history. Because of this, young people today can tell adults things about their lives and the world around them that we don't already know and have never experienced.
- Young people look at and experience the world differently to adults. They are often more creative and flexible in their thinking, and because of this they can help (older) adults to see things differently.
- Programs and initiatives that are designed for young people are much more likely to succeed if young people have been involved in designing, developing and implementing them. We can save valuable resources including time, energy and money by involving young people in the design and delivery of services, programs and supports (5).

// In order for young people to make change we need support from organisations, and also from individuals with power and authority that can help us - tapping into their knowledge and having access and opportunities to lead."



HOW DOES YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION BENEFIT YOUNG PEOPLE?

The benefits for young people include:

- Being empowered to make a difference by shaping policies, programs, organisations and communities
- Developing abilities and skills including problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills needed to influence decisions that affect them
- Developing an awareness of their knowledge, understanding, insights, values, aspirations and needs
- Developing advocacy skills
- Facilitating active citizenship - building agency and social capital to be active participants in and contributors to communities and broader society
- Being able to make genuine contributions, which helps develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and belonging in communities
- Exposing young people to different points of view and teaching them about the need for learning skills in negotiation and compromise
- Improving their relationships with adults and with other young people (6).

WHO ELSE BENEFITS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION?

As well as the benefits for young people themselves, their participation has wider benefits for the organisations they engage with, their communities, and broader society. These include:

- Gaining better knowledge and understanding of young people's views and ideas to guide the development of policies, programs and services
- Developing policies, programs and services that are better at engaging young people, more relevant and better at meeting their needs
- Developing more effective policies, services and resources because they are based on needs and assets

that young people identify

- Improving social cohesion and the settlement or integration of young people within their communities and broader society
- Building stronger relationships between young people and the adults that support them.

WHAT DOES YOUTH PARTICIPATION LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

There are a variety of ways that young people can participate in decision making. These include:

- One-off surveys, questionnaires and consultations, in order to help shape programs, services etc
- Providing input and ideas at meetings and events
- Sitting on boards, committees, youth councils and advisory groups
- Designing, leading or helping to lead projects
- Helping to recruit new staff
- Making presentations at conferences, training sessions or workshops
- Planning and running conferences and workshops
- Taking part in or undertaking research
- Meeting and raising issues with MPs and other decision-makers

// The end result was different to what we would have come up with if it had just been designed by adults. The program is more flexible, more holistic. It is all in all a better program because of the involvement of young people in every aspect of its design."

The types of activities that you might involve young people in will depend on a range of factors, including the resources you have available, the way young people's input will be used, the timeframe available and so on.

It's important to remember that youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds will require a range of resources - an investment of money, time, building staff and organisational capability and a willingness to develop a culture that supports youth participation within your organisation. It's ok to start small and gradually build on the ways your organisation involves young people in decision making.

WHY IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION DIFFERENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM REFUGEE AND MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS?

One of the criticisms of youth participation is that often only certain groups of young people are offered, or take up, opportunities to participate. These tend to be young people who are already doing well, who have easy access to information and supports, and who have the skills, knowledge, confidence, resources and social networks to get involved.

This can mean that young people who are harder to reach, those more marginalised, or who may not have easy access to the 'social capital' described above, do not get the chance to participate and have their voices heard (6). This is often the case for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This group of young people (particularly those who have arrived more recently in Australia) often have limited social capital in the Australian context and commonly face unique or additional barriers to participation.

These barriers include:

- Organisational structures and policies
- Cultural norms and expectations
- Community values and views about the role young people should have in decision-making
- Limited English language skills
- Lack of knowledge about youth participation opportunities
- Gender-based expectations

- Racism and discrimination.
- Having their agency diminished through the refugee or migration experience

These barriers, both conceptual and practical, place them at greater social and economic disadvantage than their Australian-born non-immigrant counterparts. This can impact on their capacity to advocate for their needs, access opportunities, influence decision makers or be supported as leaders in their communities. It can also mean that their voices are marginalised in advocacy, service delivery and broader policy making processes. This group of young people also have particular strengths and capabilities that often go unrecognised, including broad cross-cultural and multi-lingual skills, and a lens on Australian society, structures and systems shaped by their migration experiences. They will often be working to influence and shape the settlement or integration experience for their families, peers and communities and working to address negative stereotypes, racism and discrimination (7).

In order to address these issues and build on capacities, we need to properly plan and develop youth participation opportunities for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and support their engagement. If their experience is negative or tokenistic, this can have a detrimental effect on young people, reinforcing their lack of agency, disempowering them further, reducing their confidence and their willingness to engage in future opportunities (8).

// Youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds will require a range of resources - an investment of money, time, building staff and organisational capability and a willingness to develop a culture that supports youth participation within your organisation."

Case Study

Project: MYAN Youth Ambassadors Network (YAN)

Organisation: MYAN Australia

The Youth Ambassadors Network (YAN) of MYAN Australia was established in 2015 as a key way for young people from across Australia to engage with and inform the work of the MYAN, as well as develop leadership and advocacy skills. The YAN are a group of passionate young advocates who have come together in their voluntary roles to support positive change in the lives of refugee and migrant young people across Australia. The group meets face-face annually and regularly communicates virtually. The YAN are a key element of MYAN's work, as they bring the voices of young people directly to the work that MYAN does. YAN members are supported to build leadership and advocacy skills by participating in national projects, including consultations, campaigns and events.

Youth Ambassadors are involved in all areas of MYAN's work. This has included:

- Being consulted during the development phase of publications, policy papers, reports and submissions
- Helping MYAN to develop a video series which provides service providers with a glimpse of young people's experiences.
- Taking part in a youth panel at the 2017 MYAN National Conference. YAN alumni and other young people were invited to have a discussion with the sector about their experiences and advocacy
- Helping to plan and run MYAN's FUSE summits



3. Pathways to Young People's Participation

In this section we explore some of the barriers and issues that can prevent young people from participating in decision making in the programs, services and organisations they use. We will also explore ways to overcome these. We have used Harry Shier's Pathways to Participation (9) and applied this to youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Shier's model is based on five levels of participation, and recognises that young people's participation is a process rather than a particular activity or event. While there are several well-known models of youth participation, we have chosen Shier's model because it focuses on principles and process, rather than specific activities. We felt this made it particularly relevant for the purposes of this resource.

Shier's model offers a series of questions to help organisations work out where they currently stand with regard to youth participation and with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and what they need to do to improve their participation practices.

When considering (barriers), we are talking about the factors that inhibit young people's participation. When considering (issues), we are referring to other factors that need to be considered when planning activities to enable young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate.

Note that the columns are not meant to be read in a linear way, but are tips and suggestions to prompt reflection on policies and practices. Also note that this model, and our suggestions, are not designed to provide an exhaustive list of barriers and solutions to addressing these. Instead, we hope it will generate reflection on policies and practices and offer some suggestions for improving youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The suggestions on ways to address these barriers are underpinned by the NYSF Good Practice Capabilities: Cultural Competency, Youth-centred and Strengths-based, Trauma-informed, Youth development and Participation, Family-Aware, Flexibility and Responsiveness, Collaboration and Advocacy (10).



“ Another important thing to do when you are supporting young people to participate is not making assumptions about what young people are capable of. Take time to ask questions, listen to the answers, and make sure the lines of communication go both ways.”

Case Study

Project: Shout Out

Organisation: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)

Shout Out is an innovative public speakers program that trains and nurtures young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to share their experiences and views with a wider audience. Shout Out offers organisations the chance to book a young person to speak at events such as conferences, workshops and meetings, and provides an appropriate young person for each event. The program started because CMY was constantly being asked to provide young people to speak at a variety of events. Shout Out was developed to provide structure and support for young people, such as looking after the practical issues, ensuring the safety of the young people, and providing them with ongoing training and support.

Shout Out provides young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with an opportunity to have their say about issues that affect them. Their voices are often stereotyped, marginalised or invisible in mainstream culture, and this can damage their ability to feel like they belong. Shout Out ensures that they have opportunities to speak about issues that are broader than their refugee or migrant experiences, instead covering the whole range of issues that young people are passionate about. The program has also highlighted the power of story telling in bringing about change, both for the young person sharing their story and for the audience hearing it.



Image courtesy of CMY

Level 1. Young people are listened to

Are you ready to listen to young people?
Do you work in ways that enable you to listen to young people?

Barriers to young people being listened to	Additional barriers specific to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds being listened to	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Being reluctant or inexperienced at talking and listening to young people</p> <p>Using jargon, technical terms and unfamiliar language, or not taking the time to explain these clearly and simply</p> <p>Failing to ensure that young people are really listened to, rather than being "on display"</p> <p>Not offering young people genuine opportunities to have a say</p>	<p>Unfamiliarity with youth participation - both conceptually and practically. This may be due to cultural values or expectations about young people speaking up or being involved in decision-making.</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may feel uncomfortable or even unsafe participating alongside Australian born non-immigrant young people, or feel they cannot participate equally</p> <p>There may be fear or uncertainty amongst parents/family and community members about youth participation. This might be due to past experiences of persecution (prior to arrival in Australia), unfamiliarity with structures, processes, youth programs or opportunities in Australia and what young people are getting involved in</p> <p>Recently arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may have additional financial barriers due to building a new life in Australia - looking for work and balancing learning English, sending money to relatives overseas, being reliant on welfare/income support (relatively small weekly income) or being ineligible for welfare/support services. Seemingly small costs for participation - which may not be an issue for most families - may be unaffordable (11)</p>	<p>Recognise the skills and expertise needed by staff and provide training and support to staff who are involved in supporting young people's participation</p> <p>Use clear, simple language and take time to explain any technical terms or jargon</p> <p>Explain to young people how their opinions and ideas will be used - be realistic about this and don't promise what you may not be able to deliver</p> <p>Reimburse any costs that young people may have had in order to participate</p>

Level 1. Young people are listened to

Are you ready to listen to young people?
Do you work in ways that enable you to listen to young people?

Barriers to young people being listened to	Additional barriers to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in being listened to	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Not explaining to young people how their ideas or opinions will be used</p> <p>Not considering costs of participating, including travel (petrol or public transport fares), meals, lost income etc</p> <p>Failing to recognise that inequality exists between different groups of young people - because of socio economic factors, differences between schools, locations, gender, age, language, cultural background etc</p>	<p>Young people may lack the English language skills, or the confidence to speak in English in group settings - particularly if they are in a group with young people who speak English as their first language</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may have less digital literacy, have more limited awareness about the expectation to engage digitally, or have less access to technology such as computers, internet and smart phones, all of which are commonly used to advertise or promote youth participation events and activities (although this may be the exact opposite for others).</p> <p>Not addressing young people's practical and physical needs, such as food and drink, or failing to provide these in culturally and religiously appropriate ways</p>	<p>Take time to explain what you are doing and why with the young people you are working with, as well as with their parents, families and communities</p> <p>Consider whether you need to use interpreters or translated material, as well as finding ways for young people to communicate and participate that are not so reliant on their English language skills</p> <p>Use a variety of ways to promote your participation activity - including, directly with young people, through the groups and organisations young people may already be involved in. You may need to build new relationships with young people and/or organisations in order to do this</p> <p>Think about young people's practical needs, such as food and drink. This should include making sure there are suitable options for various diets including vegetarian, Halal, kosher etc. If your event is during Ramadan, you will need to plan for young people breaking their fast at sunset</p>

Case Study

Youth Participation - A Young Person's Perspective

Apajok Biar

Apajok Biar is a 23 young woman of South Sudanese heritage who lives in Sydney. Apajok was born in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and arrived in Australia with her family when she was aged 2 1/2. Apajok's youth participation "journey" started when her high school principal recognised her potential and recommended that she attend a youth leadership forum being planned for young people from multicultural backgrounds. Apajok was reluctant at first, but agreed to attend. It was there that she heard other young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds talking about their experiences advocating for change. And she realised this was something she wanted to do too.

After this she began volunteering for a homework club to help other young people from multicultural backgrounds. She went on to develop anti-racism workshops to take into local schools, and worked with the local council to produce an anti-racism resource for schools in the area. Apajok found out about MYAN NSW, and applied to become part of their Youth Ambassadors program, attending training and other events for young people.

Through MYAN, Apajok was chosen to help facilitate consultations with young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia, as part of the UN's Global Refugee Youth Consultations GRYC). Apajok also applied and was chosen to represent Australia at the GRYC in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2017.

Since then, Apajok has completed a Bachelor of Social Work, and began working as a Youth Participation Officer supporting other young people to participate in the decisions that affect them.

In reflecting on her experience, Apajok says there are a few things that have been critical in helping to achieve all of these things. "It's really important to train and support young people to participate. Having someone that checks in with you regularly is important too. They need to care about you as a person ... care about your feelings, and not just about the event you are speaking at. When we were in Geneva, Carmel (MYAN's Chairperson) would take me to lunch and spend time explaining what was going to happen, give me a chance to ask questions, and make sure I was clear and comfortable about my role. That really helped."

"When working with refugee young people, you also need to involve the parents and families. The staff at MYAN always offer to call my parents to explain the things I'm doing and what they will involve. Now my parents have gotten to know the MYAN staff and they trust them."

"It's also important not to make assumptions about what young people are capable of. Take time to ask questions, listen to the answers, and make sure the lines of communication go both ways."



Level 2. Young people are supported in expressing their views

Are you ready to support young people in expressing their views?
Do you have a range of ideas and activities that enable young people to express their views?

Barriers to young people expressing their views	Additional barriers to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds expressing their views	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Limiting the ways that young people can be involved</p> <p>Only offering one-off opportunities with no follow through</p> <p>Not providing training and support to young people in order to enable them to fully participate</p> <p>Young people being nervous about what they are getting involved in or what they will need to do or say</p>	<p>Information not being available in young people's first language or in simple English</p> <p>Not providing accessible information for parents, family members, community leaders etc</p> <p>Concepts, structures and organisations might all be unfamiliar to young people who did not grow up in Australia</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may have less availability, or be available at different times than Australian born non-immigrant young people. This is due to things such as family responsibilities, the need to help parents with translating and interpreting, cultural and community responsibilities, religious observance etc</p> <p>All young people have fast changing lives, but this is even more the case for refugee and migrant young people. Newly arrived young people are also more likely to move house more frequently, change schools more often etc</p>	<p>Ask young people - let young people guide you on how to address barriers</p> <p>Provide young people with information about what they are participating in. This might include information in languages other than English</p> <p>As well as thinking about information that young people may need, think about the information you can provide to parents, families and communities</p> <p>Plan your participation activities at times and in places that will be friendly and accessible to young people</p> <p>Young people may need emotional support and de-briefing, especially if they are sharing experiences from their own lives, including the refugee/migration experience. Young people should always decide what they share about their personal experiences.</p> <p>You may need to plan participation activities and events specifically for young women</p>

// In my community, young people aren't given positions within the community to have a voice and engage in the decision making process, which creates a barrier to young people engaging in other platforms."

Level 2. Young people are supported in expressing their views

Are you ready to support young people in expressing their views?
Do you have a range of ideas and activities that enable young people to express their views?

Barriers to young people expressing their views	Additional barriers to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds expressing their views	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Organisations not having a plan for dealing with any ethical or safety issues that arise - clear processes about who to speak to, what needs to be taken further etc</p> <p>Holding your meeting or event in venues/spaces that are not comfortable or familiar to young people, and at times that make sense for young people to participate</p> <p>Young people's lives change rapidly, as do their other commitments to things like study, sports, hobbies, friends etc. All of these things may limit their participation</p> <p>Competing priorities such as exams, part time jobs, friends, hobbies etc might also get in the way</p>	<p>Parents and community members may have taboos or stigmas around particular issues that young people wish to be involved in – such as sexual health, LGBTI, mental health etc</p> <p>Some cultures and religions have very different attitudes to gender. It's important to recognise that young women's roles are influenced by culture. For example, mixed gender activities may be viewed as culturally inappropriate.</p> <p>Many young people from refugee backgrounds have lost their sense of belonging to a community. Different methods and approaches may be needed to engage and support these young people</p> <p>Using words and phrases that young people are not comfortable with to describe them. For example, some young people don't like being referred to as a refugee, but others are proud to use this term. This will differ from person to person, group to group</p> <p>Young people may fear reprisals as a result of speaking out about government policies and programs, based on their experiences in their countries of origin, or due to having a temporary or uncertain visa status (12)</p>	<p>If you are addressing issues which may be taboo or unfamiliar in some cultures, think about how you can address these issues in sensitive and respectful ways and seek specialist support and advice (including asking young people what the best approach may be)</p> <p>Have a plan for addressing any safety or ethical issues which may arise</p> <p>Think about ways to recognise and reward young people's participation and ask young people about this. It might include paying them a fee, giving gift vouchers, certificates of recognition, invitations to celebrations or other opportunities/activities and so on.</p> <p>Ask the young people you are working with what words and phrases they prefer to use to describe themselves</p>

Level 3. Young people's views are taken into account

Are you ready to take young people's views into account?
Does your decision making process enable you to take young people's views into account?

Barriers to young people's views being taken into account	Additional barriers to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds having their views taken into account	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Adults often ask young people their opinions or seek to involve them in tokenistic ways, meaning that young people's views are not genuinely used to bring about change</p> <p>Adults and the organisations they represent may be unclear about the boundaries and limitations of young people's involvement in decision making</p> <p>Limited recognition of the skills and expertise which, through experience, young people can bring to decision-making processes. These include global connections, multiple languages etc.</p> <p>Adults may assume that all young people are the same - that they want the same things, have the same views, want to participate in the same ways</p> <p>Organisations fail to provide feedback and updates to young people about what has happened as a result of their involvement, or how their input has been used</p>	<p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are often asked to tell the stories of their refugee or migrant experiences but that's as far as it goes – there's no chance to influence change or be involved in ongoing processes to have their voices heard and build their skills as advocates</p> <p>Some organisations have a "multicultural rent-a crowd" approach - using diverse faces to "tick a box" or look inclusive without genuinely taking young people's views into account</p> <p>Limited recognition of the skills/expertise through experience that young people can bring to decision-making processes, e.g. global connections, multiple languages</p>	<p>Before asking young people their opinions or involving them in decisions, think about how this information will be used</p> <p>Be clear about the limits and boundaries to young people's involvement, and be honest about this with young people</p> <p>Let young people know how their input has been used and what difference it has made to your organisation</p> <p>Recognise that young people are not all the same. Their views, opinions, experiences, likes and dislikes vary, just like adults do</p> <p>When seeking the input or involvement of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, make sure their involvement is not tokenistic or limited only to their refugee or migration experiences.</p>

Case Study

Project: Catalyst Youth Summit

Organisation: MYAN WA

Catalyst Youth Summit is organised by young people for young people, and is open to all young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds aged 18 to 25 living in Western Australia. The aim of the summit is to bring multicultural young people together to discuss issues important to them, create solutions, and directly express their opinions to politicians and other decision makers. The three-day summit includes leadership and advocacy trainings; opportunities to hear from inspirational speakers; networking with politicians and decision makers; and forming friendships with other likeminded young people.

For both the 2016 and 2017 summits, the organising committee of 12 young people chose five topics of particular interest to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The 50 summit delegates were then divided into five teams to work on one of these issues and prepare a presentation on their findings. These presentations were made to an audience which included four politicians and 25 key stakeholders. The event reports include a call to action focused on practical actions that each of us can take to help address the issues raised by the young people.



Photo courtesy of YACWA

Level 4. Young people are involved in the decision making process

Are you ready to allow young people to join in your decision making processes?
Is there a procedure that enables young people to join in decision making processes?

Barriers to young people joining in decision making processes	Additional barriers to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds joining in decision making processes	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Young people not being able to choose what they are involved in, how and why</p> <p>Only offering young people opportunities to have a say in things that are seen as "youth" issues, like school uniforms or skate parks</p> <p>Only involving young people at the end of the decision making process, rather than involving them all the way through</p>	<p>Only offering opportunities for young people to be involved in issues that are specific to their refugee or migration experience</p> <p>Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may have had negative experiences of adults such as torture, trauma, abuse etc</p> <p>Due to previous experiences or limited social capital in the Australian context, parents and families may be unfamiliar with programs and services designed for young people (both conceptually and practically), and those which engage directly with young people - i.e. they may be unfamiliar with the concept of youth-specific services/programs, why they exist and how they work, and may have limited trust in these services</p> <p>Parents or family members may fear losing control of their children. This is often exacerbated by the already changed power dynamics in their relationships with their children, as young people often settle into their new life faster, learning English quicker etc - which makes parents reliant on their children to navigate services that assist with settlement of the whole family</p> <p>Parents - especially those who have experienced trauma - often fear for the safety of their children. Consent for young women to participate, in particular, may be hard to get or may be limited to activities that take place during daylight hours</p> <p>Some refugee and migrant young people may not be used to adults asking their opinion on issues</p>	<p>Ask young people what they want to be involved in, and how to best engage them in decision making process. Don't limit this by your own assumptions or beliefs about what they might be interested in or how they might add value to your organisation</p> <p>Take time to build trust with the young people you are working with. This may take longer with young people who have had negative or traumatic experiences in the past, including negative experiences with other organisations in Australia</p> <p>Take time to engage and involve parents, families and communities when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This might mean inviting families along to meet you, or calling parents/carers to explain what you are doing and how their child/family member will be involved. You should always discuss this with young person first and seek their permission, make sure they are comfortable with who you are speaking to, what information you are sharing and so on</p>

Case Study

Project: Refugee Youth Peer Mentoring Project

Organisation: Multicultural Youth Affairs Network of NSW

The idea for a mentoring program designed specifically for young people from refugee backgrounds arose during consultations held in 2016 across Australia, as part of the UN's Global Refugee Youth Consultations. During the consultations, young people said that mentoring would be a useful way to support their settlement journey and help them achieve their goals. In 2017 the NSW Government provided funding for a Refugee Youth Peer Mentoring (RYPM) scheme, to support refugee young people to settle well in NSW.

Young people from refugee backgrounds were involved in all aspects of the project. They were part of the co-design team; they helped facilitate the workshops; they took part in a workshop specifically for young people, as well as participating in workshops for service providers and for government; and they were involved in testing some of the ideas and assumptions about how the program might work. The project has helped to create an appetite for a youth participation approach within the NSW Government, and amongst the network of services who took part in the workshops and the broader co-design process.



"Don't assume, ask!!
Young people can be an
incredible resource."

Photo courtesy of CMRC

Level 5. Young people share power and responsibility in decision making equally with adults

Are you ready to share some of your adult power with young people?
Is there a procedure that enables young people and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?

Barriers to adults sharing power with young people	Additional barriers to adults sharing power with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds	Ways to address these barriers
<p>Adults not being open to truly sharing the power and decisions</p> <p>Adults making assumptions and having preconceived ideas about what young people are capable of</p> <p>An organisational culture where people aren't allowed to make mistakes - as sharing power with adults is new for most young people and they are bound to make mistakes along the way</p> <p>Failing to support or encourage leaders or champions of youth participation who drive this at the organisational level</p> <p>Turnover in staff and/or leadership may mean changing priorities, lack of familiarity or skills in involving young people within the organisation</p>	<p>Some communities/cultures may be unfamiliar with or resistant to young people having an equal say with adults. This may be particularly challenging for adults in some communities as it can be seen as undermining cultural values</p> <p>Youth participation leaders or champions in your organisation may fail to understand or address additional barriers and issues faced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds</p> <p>Young people may have experiences or hold values that are different from those of most Australian born non-immigrant young people about concepts such as democracy, adolescence, (youth) leadership and participation (13)</p>	<p>To achieve Level 5, youth participation and a commitment to access and inclusion will need to be embedded in all aspects of your organisation</p> <p>Consider any cultural issues affecting young people sharing power with adults, and ways to address these</p> <p>Ensure there are champions of participation for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at senior levels of your organisation</p> <p>New staff and board members should be fully trained and informed about your organisation's commitment to participation</p> <p>It's important to create an organisational culture where it is ok to ask questions, make mistakes, try new things etc</p>

// My mum always thought young people should be either in school, at church or at home. She was wary at first. But slowly she saw that I was having an influence on things that she had experienced when she first came here, but didn't have the power to change. That has made her really proud of me."

4. Top Tips

These are our “Top Tips” for engaging and supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate in decision making:



Work with young people as partners – build trust and allow them to guide the ‘participation’ process as much as possible. They are best placed to know what works and how.



Wherever possible, offer young people a “menu of opportunities” so that they can choose when, where and how they participate



Reflect on your cultural assumptions and biases - what are you assuming about participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and how is your cultural context shaping these?



Remember that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are often managing a range of competing priorities, in addition to those of other young people (managing work, study, family responsibilities, volunteer work and settlement related issues). Factor this in to your time frames, expectations etc



Always be mindful of all aspects of young people’s physical and emotional safety, and treat them with respect



Consider ways to reward young people for their participation and explore this with young people. This could be some form of payment, or by recognising and celebrating their contribution in other ways



Engage family and community members as directed by young people - always ask permission from a young person and take their advice on what this engagement looks like



Be prepared to offer additional supports and address additional barriers to enable participation for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, considering their age, gender and diversity



Take time to explain what the project is, why it is being delivered, the expected outcomes, follow-up etc.



Make sure someone in your organisation has clear responsibility for supporting young people’s participation, and that they have the time, skills, support and resources to do this well



Think about your use of language and use plain English wherever possible. Consider whether you need to use interpreters, or have written information translated into other languages



Recognise and invest in building staff expertise in youth participation



Build strong links with organisations that already have established relationships with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their families and communities



If possible, go to where young people are and/or where they feel comfortable, instead of expecting them to come to you



Make sure your participation activities are culturally sensitive and appropriate



Make sure your participation activities and events are inclusive and appropriate to the age, gender and cultural background of the young people who will take part



Think about practical and logistical factors that will enable participation - reimbursing travel costs, suitable venues (location, set up, 'feel'), food, structure, etc



Let young people know how their input has been or will be used and what difference it has made



Use methods of participation that don't rely too strongly on English language skills – include visual prompts, interactive methods, games etc



Take time to find out what words and phrases young people prefer to use when describing themselves. For example, some young people are uncomfortable being labelled as refugees, whilst others are proud to be referred to in this way. This will differ from young person to young person, group to group. Similarly, using words such as "at risk" and "vulnerable" to describe young people may be offensive or off-putting



Think about how you can honour the lived experiences of the young people you hope to work with, without allowing their experiences as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers to define and limit them. Support them to build on their lived experience as advocates – lived experience is only one part of their perspective and expertise.



Check in with young people about the process and wherever possible, address anything that isn't working as you go. You may not always get it right but make sure you try to address anything not working as quickly as possible and involve young people in doing so wherever appropriate.

Case study

Project: Global Refugee Youth Consultations

Organisation: MYAN Australia with the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)

In 2016 MYAN Australia and RCOA collaborated to undertake the Global Refugee Youth Consultations (GRYC) in Australia. The GYRC was a joint initiative of the UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission which involved the participation of 1,267 young people in 56 national or sub-national youth consultations held in 22 countries.

There were three key components of the Australian consultations:

1. National consultations with young people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds - 555 young people across all states and territories participated, with the support of 31 organisations. They discussed their fears, their concerns, how they were able to settle into a new country and what they think should be improved.
2. Selection of four youth delegates to attend the GRYC Global Youth Workshop in Geneva, as well as the UNHCR-NGO Consultations, UNHCR Standing Committee, the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) and other bi-lateral meetings, in June 2016.
3. Opportunities for the four youth delegates to report back to key stakeholders and decision-makers in Australia on the findings of the consultations, outcomes of the Geneva GRYC and the other advocacy activities they took part in in Geneva.



5. Checklist

Use this checklist to guide your youth participation planning and delivery

- ☐ 1. Have you asked young people what they want to do/how they want to participate?
- ☐ 2. Are you considering young people as partners, with whom you work with, rather than those you are programming for, or delivering services to?
- ☐ 3. Have you considered or asked young people about barriers to their participation and endeavoured to address these?
- ☐ 4. Have you engaged staff with skills and expertise in youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?
- ☐ 5. Have you explained what you are doing and why in clear, simple English?
- ☐ 6. Do you need an interpreter?
- ☐ 7. Have you allowed time and a safe space for debriefing or follow-up with young people?
- ☐ 8. Have you created a safe space for young people, both physically and emotionally? What are the factors that you need to consider for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?
- ☐ 9. Have you organised refreshments?
- ☐ 10. Are you asking young people to share their perspectives beyond their lived experience as a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant?
- ☐ 11. How are you recognising and/or rewarding young people's participation?
- ☐ 12. Have you explained the process and outcomes and allowed young people to choose not to participate?

6. Finding Out More



// When we are offered opportunities ... that's when we start making changes and we get to appreciate who we are and our heritage. Then you can start seeing young people as a resource"

FURTHER INFORMATION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION -

To learn more about young people's participation, have a look at the following resources:

- [*Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* \(Roger Hart, Unicef, Florence, 1992\)](#)
- [*Understanding and Supporting Children and Young People's Participation* \(Andrew Cummings, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, Sydney, 2015\)](#)
- [*Involving Children and Young People: Participation Guidelines* \(Commissioner for Children and Young People in WA, Perth, 2009\)](#)

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2. The National Youth Settlement Framework, MYAN Australia, 2016, pp.17-18
3. Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, Articles 12 and 13, 1991
4. UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Youth and Human Rights, 2017, pp.2
5. Understanding and Supporting Children and Young People's Participation, ACYP, 2015, p.4
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