

AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF YOUNG REFUGEES



Abridged report
2009

Report coordinator: Louise Olliff. Settlement Policy Officer

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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2008-09, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) undertook a literature review and a series of youth consultations across three Australian states and the Australian Capital Territory, with the aim of developing a targeted and informed strategy for the ongoing engagement of refugee young people in advocating to have their needs and concerns addressed and ideas recognised at a national level. This report is an abridged version of the findings from this project, omitting some of the findings and recommendations specific only to the Council.

People aged less than 30 years on arrival now comprise the significant majority and a growing proportion of new arrivals to Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

This project is premised upon the belief that amplification of the voices of young refugees and humanitarian entrants within national forums, such as RCOA's own annual community consultations, will facilitate the development of advocacy strategies, policy recommendations and project initiatives that are informed by and responsive to the priorities of a key and currently under-heard population. RCOA believes that this will in turn lead to the development of more sensitive public policies to address their concerns, while also positively influencing broader community understandings of the experiences and contributions of young refugees.

With this overarching aim in mind, the objectives of the *Amplifying the Voices of Young Refugees* project were that RCOA:

1. Identify and build relationships with refugee youth organisations and networks;
2. Engage refugee young people and key national networks advocating on refugee youth issues in generating ideas about how refugee young people can have their voices best heard at a national level; and
3. Identify key issues that young people want addressed at a national level.

Six youth consultations involving a total of 43 young people were conducted in Sydney, Melbourne, Shepparton, Canberra and Perth. An extensive literature review was also undertaken, as well as consultations with national networks advocating on refugee youth issues.

In terms of the findings, an initial literature review identified a number of potential national youth consultation strategies, which were subsequently tested with young people through the consultations. Young people nominated the establishment of a youth reference group as the best strategy for ensuring future youth engagement on national refugee issues. Other strategies that were considered favourably were: holding consultations in local areas; holding a national refugee youth conference; supporting refugee youth groups; and consulting through a national network of multicultural youth services.

Consultation participants were also asked which issues they thought were most important to young people. As a group activity, young people were asked to rank issues (pre-identified through a literature review) in order of those they thought were the 'biggest issue' down to the 'smallest issue', as well as to identify any additional issues not captured in the review. Although there was some variation between groups – possibly reflecting their age and gender make-up – there were identifiable trends, with the greatest concerns centring around: education and training; housing and homelessness; employment and money problems; family issues; and the accessibility of services.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them. RCOA advocates for flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, within Australia and internationally. RCOA does this by undertaking national and international research, policy analysis, political advocacy, training and community education.

RCOA embarked on this national youth consultation project in order to develop a targeted and informed strategy for the ongoing engagement of young refugees and humanitarian entrants in advocating to have their needs and concerns addressed, and their ideas recognised, at a national level. This report is an abridged version of the findings from this project, omitting some of the findings and recommendations specific only to the Council.

3.1 Why focus on refugee young people?

A growing proportion of those arriving to Australia as refugees and humanitarian entrants are young people, with 74 per cent of new entrants over the past five years aged under 30 years on arrival.

Refugee young people have needs that are likely to differ from those of their parents' generation by virtue of their age. Older refugees who have grown up in other parts of the world and arrive in Australia as adults bring with them a diverse range of education, employment and life experiences. Many were skilled professionals in their home countries, or were community or political leaders. Young people, on the other hand, are at a transitional stage in their lives, negotiating a path into adulthood. Many will have only lived a short period of their lives in their country of birth, and may have spent the majority of their childhood as refugees moving from place to place. A significant proportion of the young people settling in Australia over the past five years have been born in refugee camps and have had limited educational or employment experiences. These are factors which will impact on a young person's sense of identity and their settlement experiences in Australia.

For young people who arrive as refugees, the developmental challenges of adolescence are generally compounded by the traumatic nature of the refugee experience, cultural dislocation, loss of established social networks and the practical demands of resettlement (RRAC 2002: 4). Young people must negotiate education and employment pathways (many with a history of disrupted or no formal education), a new language and culture, make new friends, and navigate unfamiliar and complex social systems (such as Centrelink, Australian laws, public transport), while also negotiating individual, family and community expectations. (CMYI 2006b: 1). On the other hand, refugee young people often learn English and adapt to life in Australia more quickly than members of their parents' generation. Many have learned skills – like adaptability, resourcefulness and how to communicate cross-culturally – that stand them in good stead in navigating their new life in Australia, particularly when accompanied by the fierce determination to succeed which they so often manifest.

Every year RCOA engages in extensive community consultations on the needs, concerns and recommendations of refugees and humanitarian entrants, as well those working within the refugee and humanitarian sector. During these consultations, young people and youth service providers have noted that, while there are some very positive localised initiatives targeting refugee youth, there are limited opportunities available for refugee youth to present their stories and perspectives to the broader Australian public; to counter negative publicity about young refugees based on partial analysis; or to facilitate the presentation of their concerns and ideas directly to national decision-makers.

¹ DIAC Settlement Database, data extracted 22/4/09, for period 1/1/2004 – 31/12/2008.

3.2 Aim and objectives

The objectives of this short-term scoping project have been for RCOA to:

1. Identify and build relationships with refugee youth organisations and networks;
2. Engage refugee young people and key national networks advocating on refugee youth issues in generating ideas about how refugee young people can have their voices heard at a national level (that is, identify preferred mechanisms for national youth participation);
3. Identify key issues that young people want addressed at a national level (that is, prioritise issues identified through existing research and provide opportunities for identification of additional issues).

3.3 Methodology

The first phase of the project involved an extensive literature review, which was undertaken to identify pre-existing Australian research regarding issues affecting refugee young people and youth participation strategies. The findings of the literature review informed the consultation questions and structure.

The participants in RCOA's national youth consultation were recruited with the support of partner organisations and associations that are working directly with young refugees (refer to Appendix A for a full list of partner organisations). Young people were recruited on the basis of their capacity to articulate issues from a personal perspective as well as to advocate on behalf of other young people. Many of the young people consulted were refugee youth leaders, youth group members or young people who are well connected to local services and networks.

Six youth consultations, involving a total of 43 young people, were conducted in:

- Sydney (NSW)
- Melbourne (VIC)
- Shepparton (VIC)
- Canberra (ACT) x 2
- Perth (WA).

In terms of cultural background, the largest group represented in the consultations were Sudanese young people (65%). Other participants represented a broad spectrum of refugee communities including Afghani, Eritrean, Iraqi, Somali, Ethiopian, Sierra Leonean and Sri Lankan. There was roughly balanced gender representation across the six consultations, with 24 male and 19 female participants. There was likewise an even spread across age groups, with participants ranging from 12 to 25 years old. A detailed demographic breakdown of the participants is provided at Appendix B.

As this was largely a scoping exercise to determine future strategies and priorities, there were some methodological limitations. Consultations were not held in all states and territories, and participants in the youth consultations were not selected to be representative of the experiences of all refugee young people (e.g. those young people who are more disengaged, have lower English proficiency or are more recently arrived). The vast majority of participants had lived in Australia for more than two years and most were either employed or engaged in full-time study (many at University or TAFE).

In terms of consultation methods, groups were largely co-facilitated or attended by youth workers from partner organisations who were known and trusted by the participants and could provide follow-up support should any issues arise that could not be resolved within the session. The initial two consultations (held in late 2008 in Shepparton and Perth) used a traditional focus group approach to draw out issues and discuss ideas. Questions focused on three key areas:

1. Adjusting to life in Australia – what is important;
2. Engagement with community youth services; and,
3. Getting involved and having a say.

Upon reflecting on some of the challenges faced in facilitating these initial focus group consultations (see Barriers section 4.4), it was decided to move to a more interactive approach for the final four consultations.

The four consultations held in April 2009 (in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne) used a participatory approach based on the learnings derived from the first two focus groups. Activities included asking young people to come to a group consensus regarding prioritisation of pre-identified national consultation strategies and issues for refugee young people. Participants were asked to place visual cards on a “map” in order of priority, and were then invited to discuss the top priorities in more detail. Photos were taken of each of the “priority maps” to identify common themes and priorities across the different states and territories. Reaching a consensus on issues can be challenging for any group and may result in the loss of minority perspectives. In these consultations, facilitators used a range of strategies to ensure participation by all members (for example, asking each young person to vote on where an issue should go, and then expanding on divergent views in order to find a point of agreement). The groups largely arrived at consensus positions themselves through discussion and debate.

All participants will be sent a copy of this report either by direct email or through partner organisations.

3.4 Acknowledgements

The Refugee Council of Australia sincerely thanks the Foundation for Young Australians for its financial support of this national youth consultation, the findings and recommendations of which will guide and inform RCOA’s ongoing work with and on behalf of young people.

This report would not have been possible without the input of the young people who were generous enough to participate in the focus groups and share some of the issues and concerns that affect young people arriving under Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program, as well as their ideas for ensuring that young people’s voices are heard at a national level in the future. Their enthusiasm and commitment to see change was both inspiring and infectious.

Our warm thanks also goes to the service providers and community associations that helped to organise the consultations and provided us with their own valuable insights. A full list of partner organisations can be found in Appendix A. Particular thanks to Bec Hopkins, Goy Leek, Atem Atem, Amanda Thompson and Faten Mohamed for helping to organise and facilitate consultations.

This research project was coordinated by Louise Olliff, Settlement Policy Officer, RCOA Melbourne. Youth consultations were led by Louise Olliff, Rebecca Eckard and Chris Nash.

4. AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF YOUNG REFUGEES

One of the key objectives of RCOA's youth consultations was to identify ways in which to involve young people in advocating for their own needs and concerns at a national level. The following section highlights the findings of some of the literature documenting effective youth participation strategies, as well as the views of consultation participants regarding the most effective means of ensuring that refugee young people's voices are strongly heard in the future.

4.1 Why involve refugee young people?

Involving young refugees in influencing decision makers is essential. As Cornfoot and Francis (2007a: 14-15) argue:

Young people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, as is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). Ideally, participation processes result in meaningful inclusion of young people, better outcomes, and long-term opportunities to influence change. Youth participation has positive effects on health and wellbeing, social connectedness, identity and developing interpersonal skills that may help with education and employment.

However, consideration has to be given to the avenues for young people's participation, the potential barriers to their participation and mechanisms for ensuring that their involvement is meaningful. As highlighted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2001: 3):

Young people from refugee backgrounds bring with them a diversity of understanding about participation from a variety of cultural contexts. Many refugee young people have lost a sense of belonging to a community and consequently different mechanisms are required in order to involve them in participatory processes.

At the beginning of each of the RCOA youth consultations, participants were asked whether they thought it was necessary for young people to be directly involved in consultations about their needs and concerns (such as in the Refugee Council of Australia's annual community consultations on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program). The responses were unanimously in favour of young people being directly involved, with comments including:





- *Our parents think that we're lost and acting badly, but they don't understand.*
- *We are the people who know what is really going on.*
- *We want to help other young people and share our experiences of what we have been through. We understand because we have been through it.*



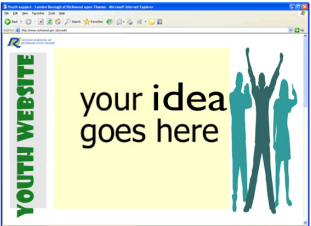


4.2 Strategies for consulting refugee young people

There are a number of key resources that have identified potential mechanisms for engaging refugee young people in advocating for change, as well as considerations and limitations of using these different approaches (see CMYI 2007; CMYI 2001a; Chandra-Shekeran and Singer 2006; Gifford et al 2007; YACVic 2004). Figure 1 provides an analysis and overview of some of these strategies and their applicability for consulting refugee young people at a national level.

Among the options explored in Figure 1 is cooperation with the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (NMYAN), a national policy and advocacy body with representatives from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. It was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues. A key objective of NMYAN is to increase collaboration and coordination between states and territories in order to highlight the rights and interests of multicultural young people living in Australia. (NMYAN 2008: 3)

Figure 1. Strategies for consulting refugee young people at a national level

Strategy	Involves	Benefits	Limitations
	<p>Holding youth consultations in local areas with support of local agencies</p> <p>Utilising youth participatory methods to gain responses and ideas from young people directly.</p> <p>Co-facilitating with trusted local workers who have existing relationships with young people, or employing youth peer facilitators.</p>	<p>Young people feel more comfortable being involved in discussions with trusted workers and in familiar locations.</p> <p>If well supported and planned, can provide opportunities for more disengaged young people to be involved.</p> <p>Can explore particular issues in more depth in small groups.</p>	<p>Requires significant resources (e.g. covering travel costs, vouchers) to support young people's participation.</p> <p>Only works if there is buy-in by local services which can promote consultation to young people.</p> <p>Multiple consultations required in multiple locations for sample to be nationally representative.</p>
	<p>Developing a database of refugee young people who would like to be contacted by email to share their ideas and opinions.</p> <p>Young people can sign up to register interest through RCOA and other youth websites.</p> <p>When canvassing ideas and issues, email young people questions.</p>	<p>Any young person who is passionate about advocating for refugee youth issues can be involved.</p> <p>Cost-effective.</p> <p>Can consult with young people across Australia on identified themes.</p> <p>Young people can participate in their own time, from their own location, when it is convenient.</p>	<p>Language and literacy barriers.</p> <p>Access to computers and internet limited, particularly for newly arrived young people.</p> <p>Time-lapse in responses.</p> <p>Keeping database updated.</p> <p>Not particularly interactive or responsive medium for generation of creative ideas.</p> <p>May not get many responses to mailout.</p>
	<p>Setting up a 'refugee young people in Australia' Facebook group (or some other social networking website)</p> <p>Young people can join and participate in facilitated discussion forums on particular issues.</p> <p>Events can be posted, such as local forums and consultations.</p>	<p>Provides a forum that can connect young people with each other across Australia.</p> <p>Interactive and cost-effective medium.</p> <p>Young people can bounce around ideas and see what others have suggested.</p> <p>Young people can participate in their own time, from their own location, when it is convenient.</p>	<p>Language and literacy barriers.</p> <p>Access to computers and internet limited, particularly for newly arrived young people.</p> <p>Privacy concerns.</p> <p>Young people may be reluctant to post about sensitive issues.</p> <p>Difficult to moderate members and ensure representation across ages, location and communities.</p>
	<p>Engaging and supporting existing national networks of services that are working with refugee young people.</p> <p>Asking network members to hold consultations with young people in each state and territory, or to represent youth issues.</p> <p>Participating in national refugee youth advocacy network to stay regularly updated on issues as they arise.</p>	<p>Services are already working with young people and are trusted.</p> <p>Supports existing structures and national coordination.</p> <p>Avoids duplication.</p> <p>National network already exists (i.e. NMYAN)</p> <p>Can be less resource-intensive than one organisation holding formal youth consultations.</p> <p>Can avoid over-consultation of young people.</p>	<p>Participation may be a low priority for under-resourced national networks that are already supporting/ facilitating youth consultations.</p> <p>Priorities of network may not align with goals of consultation.</p> <p>Reluctance of network to open membership to organisations that are not directly working with refugee young people?</p>

 <p>NATIONAL REFUGEE YOUTH CONFERENCE</p>	<p>Refugee young people from across Australia coming together in one place to share ideas. Involving young people in planning and facilitation of forum. Inviting key decision-makers (e.g. politicians, media, services) to attend so as to hear directly from young people.</p>	<p>Builds capacity and empowers refugee young people to advocate for own needs. Opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas from across Australia. Large number of young people can be directly involved.</p>	<p>Extremely resource-intensive. Young people need to be financially supported to participate (travel, accommodation, support workers). Parent/guardian concerns about young people attending inter-state event.</p>
 <p>PHONE AND SMS</p>	<p>Developing a database of refugee young people who would like to be contacted by phone for their ideas and opinions. Young people can sign up to register interest through RCOA or other youth websites. When canvassing ideas and issues, notify by SMS and call young people for phone consultation.</p>	<p>Any young person who is passionate about advocating for refugee youth issues can be involved. Cost-effective in comparison to face-to-face consultation. Can consult easily with young people across Australia (large geographical area) on identified themes. Can call young person at a time that is convenient for them.</p>	<p>Time-intensive to call young people individually – relatively small number of young people realistically contacted. Young people may be reluctant to discuss sensitive issues over phone with unknown person. Database needs to be updated regularly to ensure ongoing informed consent. Reluctance to give phone number.</p>
 <p>REFUGEE YOUTH WEBSITE</p>	<p>Developing a website where refugee young people can post their ideas and opinions, or vote on issues. Involving young people in the planning, design and content development. Moderating and maintaining site.</p>	<p>Cost-effective. Can consult easily with young people across large geographical area. Young people can generate ideas that they want to address. Young people can participate in their own time when it is convenient.</p>	<p>Language and literacy barriers. Access to computers and internet limited, particularly for newly arrived young people. Difficult to know who is contributing comments to website and whether they are from refugee communities.</p>
 <p>SUPPORT REFUGEE YOUTH GROUPS</p>	<p>Developing a database of refugee youth associations and groups. Holding consultations with youth leaders and associations or groups by phone or in person. Supporting the leadership and sustainability of youth groups.</p>	<p>Youth groups already committed to supporting young people, so desire to be involved in decision-making forums already exists. Builds capacity of youth groups to advocate for own issues and develop leadership.</p>	<p>Groups may not be seen as representative by particular segments of youth population (e.g. gender, age). High turnover of leadership means difficult to maintain relationships and contacts with groups across Australia.</p>
 <p>YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP</p>	<p>Convening a youth reference group with representatives from each State and Territory. Reference group members being nominated and supported by key services across Australia. Members being responsible and accountable to young people they represent. Consulting reference group regularly on issues through teleconference or annual national meeting.</p>	<p>Strengthens and builds capacity of youth leadership to advocate for own issues and needs. Empowers and provides opportunity for young people to provide strategic advice and inform national advocacy strategies. Issues can be explored in more depth. Youth reference group members motivated and passionate about advocating for change.</p>	<p>Only a small number of refugee young people can be directly involved. Requires buy-in from key services to nominate and support reference group members (particularly to consult with other young people). Can be resource-intensive to hold regular meetings of a national reference group. Difficult to find members that will be representative of such a diverse group of young people.</p>

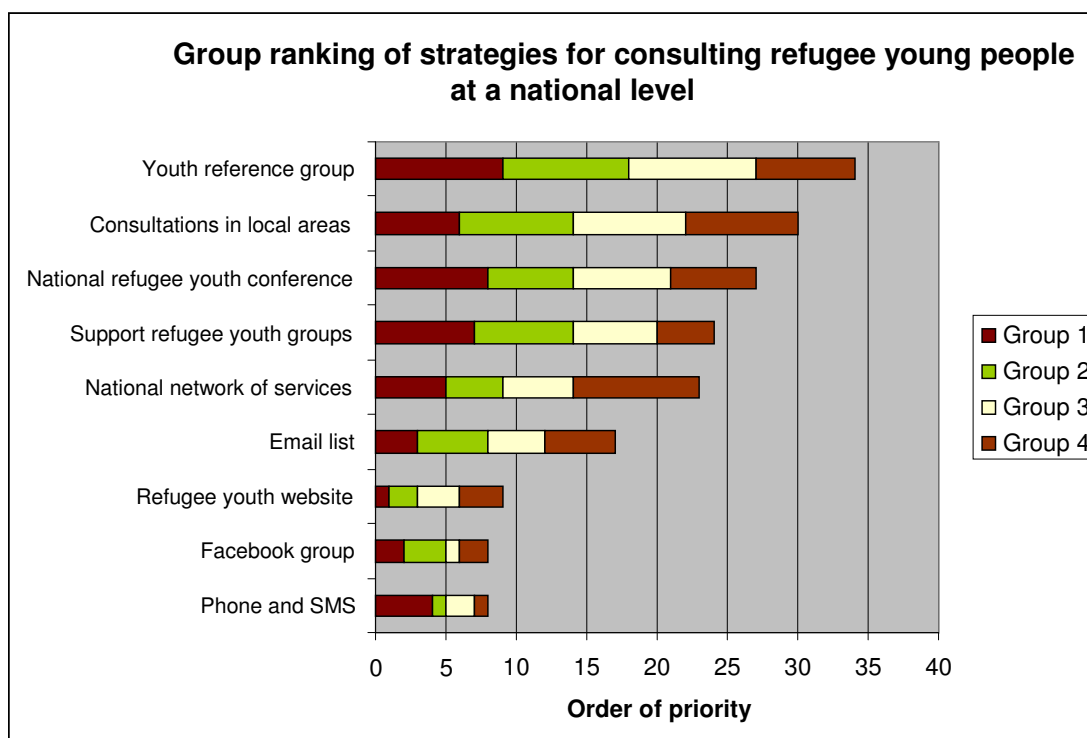
4.3 Priority strategies identified through youth consultations

In the initial two consultations held in Shepparton and Perth, participants were asked how they thought young people could get involved and have their say. Some young people in Perth spoke positively about leadership programs run by services in their local area (e.g. the Edmund Rice Centre). They talked about having opportunities to share ideas about issues and what works through groups in different states, with young people from each state elected to meet nationally once a year. In Shepparton, participants also talked about the idea of a National Youth Network.

The strategies outlined in 4.2 and those identified through the initial two RCOA consultations were used in the subsequent youth consultations as a starting point for discussing how refugee young people wanted to ensure their voices were heard nationally in future. Each of the four groups was asked to rate which of the above strategies they thought was “a good idea”, an “okay idea”, or “would not work”, and to identify any other ways in which young people could be involved in national advocacy on refugee issues. A photo was taken of how each group rated the effectiveness of these different approaches (see Appendix C), and then the “good ideas” were discussed in more detail to ascertain how they could best be implemented.

Figure 2 shows the relative weighting that each of the groups gave to the different consultation strategies. Interestingly, three out of the four groups selected youth reference group as the best idea. Other strategies that were seen as good ideas were: holding consultations in local areas, holding a national refugee youth conference, supporting refugee youth groups and consulting through a national network of multicultural youth services.

Figure 2.



The groups were asked to comment on how these strategies should be implemented in order to ensure their effectiveness. Comments included:

Youth reference group

- Services to nominate one girl and one boy from each state as representatives.
- Need to make sure that reference group members are representative.
- Select one person per state.
- Reference group members need to feed back to young people.
- Reference group members should be supported by a credible organisation [like Multicultural Youth Service in ACT].

- Need to ensure that reference group members are accountable and accessible to other young people.
- Young people should vote for their representatives.
- Members should be nominated by a worker who knows young people and understands who would be best [like Granville Multicultural Community Centre youth worker].

Consultations in local areas

- Young people need to be told in advance.
- Make sure there are clear aims and objectives.
- Try to get an interested group of people.
- Young people need to have trust in the credibility of the service that is holding the consultation.
- Advertise more.
- Get more people.
- Hold a public debate where young people can put forward their ideas and find it more interesting.

National refugee youth conference

- Transport needs to be provided.
- This should be held twice a year.
- They should be held in a different state each year.
- There should be t-shirts for participants.

Support refugee youth groups

- Need to make sure they exist!
- Need more financial support for volunteer groups.
- Resources and paying people for their time.
- Consult young people to make sure refugee youth groups are representative.
- Need youth groups that bring people together rather than separate groups.

National network of multicultural youth services

- Services [like CMY in Victoria] can help organise local consultations and nominate young people to be on reference group.

4.4 Addressing barriers to participation

Whichever strategies are pursued to ensure young people's voices are heard on a national level, consideration needs to be given to overcoming the potential barriers to participation that refugee and newly arrived young people face. For example, while some useful information was obtained from the initial two RCOA focus group consultations held in Perth and Shepparton, they also emphasised particular issues and challenges in interfacing with young people – for example, the need to ensure more structured involvement of local project partners in preparing and facilitating consultations, and also how best to meet the challenge of consulting with a range of age groups (e.g. use workshops or fun exercises).

The following barriers, identified by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2007) provide an overview of considerations:

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may...

...lack awareness of Australian structures and systems

- *Newly arrived young people are sometimes unfamiliar with Australian and Western social systems, institutions, structures and assumptions.*
- *Participants may hold values that differ from commonly assumed concepts such as democracy, adolescence and individualism.*
- *Some refugee and migrant young people may not be used to adults asking for their opinion on issues.*

...have other priorities and responsibilities

- *Refugee and migrant young people are frequently very busy with settling in a new country, learning English, school work and family responsibilities (including caring for siblings), preparing meals, interpreting and generating income.*

...have limited English language skills

- *Newly arrived young people may have low levels of written and spoken English.*
- *Many refugee young people have experienced interrupted or no schooling and may not be literate in their first language.*

...have had previous negative experiences of consultation

- *Poor prior experiences of consultation, where no change was apparent post consultation, may discourage young people from future involvement. They may be sceptical about the process and believe that no change will occur.*
- *Refugee and newly arrived young people may fear reprisals related to speaking out about government policies and programs, based on experiences in their countries of origin or due to their temporary visa status in Australia (e.g. asylum seekers).*

...experience financial difficulties

- *Many migrant and refugee families are under enormous financial pressure as they may be rebuilding finances, looking for work, sending money to relatives overseas, have a large family, or be reliant on Centrelink. The costs associated with participation (e.g. transportation costs) may be prohibitive or may clash with work commitments.*

...lack confidence and have difficulties with comprehension

- *Migrant and refugee young people may lack confidence in saying what they need and have difficulty understanding the consultation process.*

...experience gendered expectations

- *Cultural norms for young women and men may impact on their availability for consultation. For example, mixed gender activities may not be seen to be culturally appropriate.*

...face difficulties getting parental permission

- *Parents/guardians frequently fear for the safety of their young people. Consent for young women in particular may be limited by considerations of time of day and safety concerns.*
- *Parents/guardians may feel concern or suspicion about consultation processes.*

(CMYI 2007:6-7)

4.5 Making it meaningful

In addition to addressing barriers to youth participation, consideration also needs to be given to how processes engaging young people can be made most effective and meaningful for those involved. The following provides some additional considerations, identified via literature review, for ensuring that any refugee youth consultation strategy is well conceived.

Avoiding over-consulting

Refugee and newly arrived young people are often extremely busy juggling competing priorities – e.g. family responsibilities, study, language acquisition and work. To avoid unnecessarily consulting young people, it is worth considering whether the information being sought can be sourced by other means, such as by consulting services which are working with young people, by reviewing existing research, or by “piggy-backing” on to consultation structures already in place. As Gifford et al (2007:435) argue,

“Research with newly-arrived people, regardless of their age or background, needs to take account of a range of issues that will impact on data collection. In addition to the methodological issues inherent in cross-cultural research, research with newly-arrived refugees needs to deal with issues of literacy, lack of familiarity with research, issues of

informed consent (especially where human rights have been violated) and the fact that participating in research may represent an additional burden within the early stages of resettlement.”

Realistic expectations of outcomes

It is important to be clear at the outset about the goals of a consultation, so that communication with prospective participants encourages realistic expectations regarding the likely outcomes of their involvement. For example, it is important to take the time to explain what the outcomes of similar consultations have been, to talk about realistic timeframes for seeing change (e.g. structural change takes a long time!), and to ensure that young people understand what will be done with the information that they are providing.

Following through

Linked to the previous point, it is important to ensure follow-through on actions that have been committed to, so that young people can see that there have been outcomes from their participation and that there is a two-way exchange. For example, if the purpose of the consultation is to work out a strategy for future engagement of young people in a service or organisation, it is important to involve the young people consulted in implementing the strategy that has been decided upon. As Cornfoot and Francis (2007a: 15) argue

Meaningful youth participation requires adequate support structures and resources, and particularly the full involvement of young people in planning and implementation.

Acknowledging young people’s time and experiences

Young people, in general, are extremely busy. It is important, then, to acknowledge the time that young people have given to participating in consultations, at the very least so that they are not financially disadvantaged by their participation. Providing an acknowledgement of young people’s participation also demonstrates that their ideas and experiences are valued. Ways to acknowledge young people’s participation include: covering transport costs; providing refreshments; providing gift vouchers that can be used in a variety of stores (e.g. supermarket voucher); providing movie tickets; and paying young people who have made significant contributions. Factoring in these costs at the outset will determine the size and scope of the consultation process.

Providing feedback

It is important to ensure that opportunities to provide feedback on the outcomes of consultations are also structured into the process. For example, a CMYI (2007: 15) focus group which asked young people about their experiences of consultation found that all of the young people had had an expectation of follow-up or feedback after they had been involved in consultations, yet none had ever received any. Feedback may be given through a follow-up meeting, giving participants a call, or emailing the final report.

Ethical considerations

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) outlines a range of principles for the ethical conduct of research that seek to protect the welfare, rights, and dignity of participants and that their wellbeing takes precedence over the expected benefits to knowledge. These reflect the basic ethical values of:

- **Integrity** – Expressed as a commitment to the search for knowledge, to recognised principles of research conduct and in the honest and ethical conduct of research;
- **Respect** – Expressed as a regard for the “welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage” of those involved in research;
- **Beneficence** – Expressed in researchers’ responsibility to minimise risks of harm or discomfort to research participants;
- **Justice** – Expressed as the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of participation in research

(Commonwealth of Australia 1999:11).

Based on the principles of ethical conduct in research outlined above, the NHMRC has developed guidelines that apply specifically to research involving children and young people which should be factored into the planning and implementation of any youth consultation:

- 4.1 *Research is essential to advance knowledge about children's and young people's wellbeing but research involving children and young people should only be conducted where:*
 - (a) *the research question posed is important to the health and wellbeing of children or young people;*
 - (b) *the participation of children or young people is indispensable because information available from research on other individuals cannot answer the question posed in relation to children or young people;*
 - (c) *the study method is appropriate for children or young people;*
 - (d) *the circumstances in which the research is conducted provide for the physical, emotional and psychological safety of the child or young person.*
- 4.2 *Consent to a child's or young person's participation in research must be obtained from:*
 - (a) *the child or young person whenever he or she has sufficient competence to make this decision; and either*
 - (b) *the parents/guardian in all but exceptional circumstances; or*
 - (c) *any organisation or person required by law.*
- 4.3 *An HREC [Human Research Ethics Committee] must not approve, and consent cannot be given for, research which is contrary to the child's or young person's best interests.*
- 4.4 *A child's or young person's refusal to participate in a research project must be respected.*

(Commonwealth of Australia 1999:25)

5. ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE

5.1 Refugee young people and resettlement: Key issues

There has been some excellent research undertaken that explores key issues and experiences for refugee young people settling in Australia (for example, Brough et al 2003; CMYI 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2005; Cornfoot and Francis 2007a, 2007b; Coventry et al 2002; MYSA 2009; NMYAN 2008; RHRC URL; RRAC 2002; SANYC 2008; Selvamanickam et al 2001; VFST 2000; VEOHRC 2008). Without going into extensive detail, Figure 3 provides an overview of the range of issues organised by key theme areas, as well as some of the literature exploring these issues.

It should be noted that the themes focus on areas of concern, and that the many stories of young people's resilience, success and determination have been omitted. This does not mean that refugee young people only experience challenges as they negotiate their new life in Australia. However, as the RCOA consultations aimed to highlight issues of concern where young people wished to advocate for change, the literature review focussed predominantly on identifying problems.

Figure 3. Key themes in literature on refugee young people in Australia

Theme	Main issues or concerns	Key studies
Education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive English language programs on arrival (access, variations, length of time, resource limitations). • Supporting transitions into mainstream education. • Experiences of young people with disrupted education. • Impact of trauma on education and learning pathways. • Lack of targeted education and training pathways for post-compulsory school age young people and young people with severely disrupted education. • Young people being placed in school based on chronological age not ability. • Family and individual expectations vis-à-vis expectations of education and training system. • Families' limited understanding of Australian education and training system. • Homework support. • Financial issues for post-compulsory school aged young people in accessing higher education. 	Cassity and Gow 2006; VSPC 2008; CMYI and SELLEN 2004; Earnest et al 2007; REPP 2007; RHRC 2007c
Police and legal issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor relationship and lack of trust between police and refugee young people based on pre-settlement experiences. • Lack of information/ understanding about police, laws and justice system in Australia. • (Perceived) stereotyping and discrimination by police. • Culturally-appropriate practice at the local police level and within juvenile justice. • Culturally-appropriate responses to violence. • (Perceptions of) gangs and responses. • Fines and other legal issues. 	Cornfoot and Francis 2007a, 2007b; MYSA 2009; RHRC 2007b; VEOHRC 2008
Racism and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit and implicit discrimination and racism. • Inadequate responses to discrimination and racism in school environment. • Discrimination in employment and housing. • Media representation of refugee young people. • Impact of racism on young person's self-esteem, health and settlement experiences. 	Berman et al 2008; Carland and Chandra-Shekeran 2003; MYSA 2009; RHRC 2007a; VEOHRC 2008
Housing and homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of (culturally appropriate) public housing options (e.g. for large families, young pregnant women, proximity to transport). • Difficulties accessing private rental market (referees, rental history, discrimination, financial barriers). • Overcrowding and sub-standard housing stock leading to youth homelessness. • Intergenerational conflict, settlement stresses and homelessness. • Access to crisis accommodation and accessible/inclusive housing support services for refugee young people. • Understanding tenants rights and responsibilities. 	Coventry et al 2002; CMYI 2001b; SANYC 2008; NMYAN 2008

Employment and financial problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of recognition of prior learning and/or training when accessing employment opportunities. • Lack of job seeking skills and understanding of employment pathways. • Experiences of racism and discrimination. • Pressure on some young people to leave school and work to support family. • Debt associated with sponsored humanitarian settlement (e.g. SHP visas). • Financial literacy and debts related to mobile phone and car loans, taking out personal loans, repaying fines etc. 	Berman et al 2008; NMYAN 2008; RCOA 2008; Cornfoot and Francis 2007
Family issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to family relationships due to refugee experience and settlement (e.g. separated families, reunited families, changing roles). • Conflict arising from young people arriving with people other than parents (e.g. aunts, siblings, cousins). • Pressure to support family members overseas. • Role-reversal as young people interpret and translate for parents. • Intergenerational conflict (e.g. parents wishing young people to maintain 'traditions'; young people adopting practices of new culture/peers). • Lack of family-inclusive service system (particularly youth services). • Culturally-relevant parenting programs. 	Cornfoot and Francis 2007; CMYI 2006b; CMYI 2005; NMYAN 2008; Brough et al 2003
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge about Australian laws (e.g. driving, public transport laws). • Cost and accessibility of public transport (particularly in outer metropolitan and regional areas). • Interactions between young people and public transport ticket inspectors. • Transport-related fines (due to restrictive costs, lack of understanding of system, driving unlicensed). • Barriers to obtaining driver's licence (cost of lessons, attaining required driving experience with limited access to fully-licensed drivers in community). 	RHRC 2008b
Health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and information about available services. • Language and cultural barriers to accessing services. • Unresolved health issues due to pre-settlement experiences (e.g. illness or injury not treated adequately leading to complications, malnutrition). • Mental health and wellbeing issues impacted upon by family conflict, pressures at school, financial hardship, resettlement etc. • Torture and trauma recovery. • Sexual health issues: lack of information, early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases. 	Cornfoot and Francis 2007; MHSS 2008; RHRC 2008a; Brough et al 2003; Gifford et al 2007; Selvamanickam et al 2001; VFST 2000
Alcohol and Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol misuse (related to disengagement, family conflict, accessibility of alcohol and culture of drinking in Australia, homelessness, mental health issues). 	SANYC 2008; DrugInfo Clearinghouse 2006; MYSA 2009
Accessibility of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of policy frameworks at national (and state) level regarding linkage of refugee young people to services • Accessibility of services includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ visible accessibility (awareness of service); ○ physical accessibility (transport, location); ○ procedural accessibility (referral and registration processes); ○ economic accessibility (affordability); ○ psychological accessibility (beliefs and expectations of service users); ○ cultural accessibility (language, values and behavioural norms). 	Cornfoot and Francis 2007b; NMYAN 2008; CMYI 2006b
Sport and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under-representation of refugee young people in structured sport programs and competitions. • Knowledge of sporting services and structures. • Family support of young people's participation in sport and recreation vis-à-vis education/employment. • Financial and transport barriers to participation. • Racism in sporting environment. 	CMYI 2007b
Understanding my own culture or identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acculturation. • Negotiating individual, peer, family and community expectations. • Access to community language education. 	SANYC 2008; CMYI 2006a; RHRC URL

5.2 Priority issues identified by young people

In all of the six RCOA youth consultations, young people were asked to nominate the most significant issues that they wanted to see addressed. In the initial focus group discussions in Shepparton and Perth, participants were asked to identify issues without reference to research findings. Their responses included: missing friends from overseas, making friends in Australia, family issues, difficulties learning English and bullying in school.

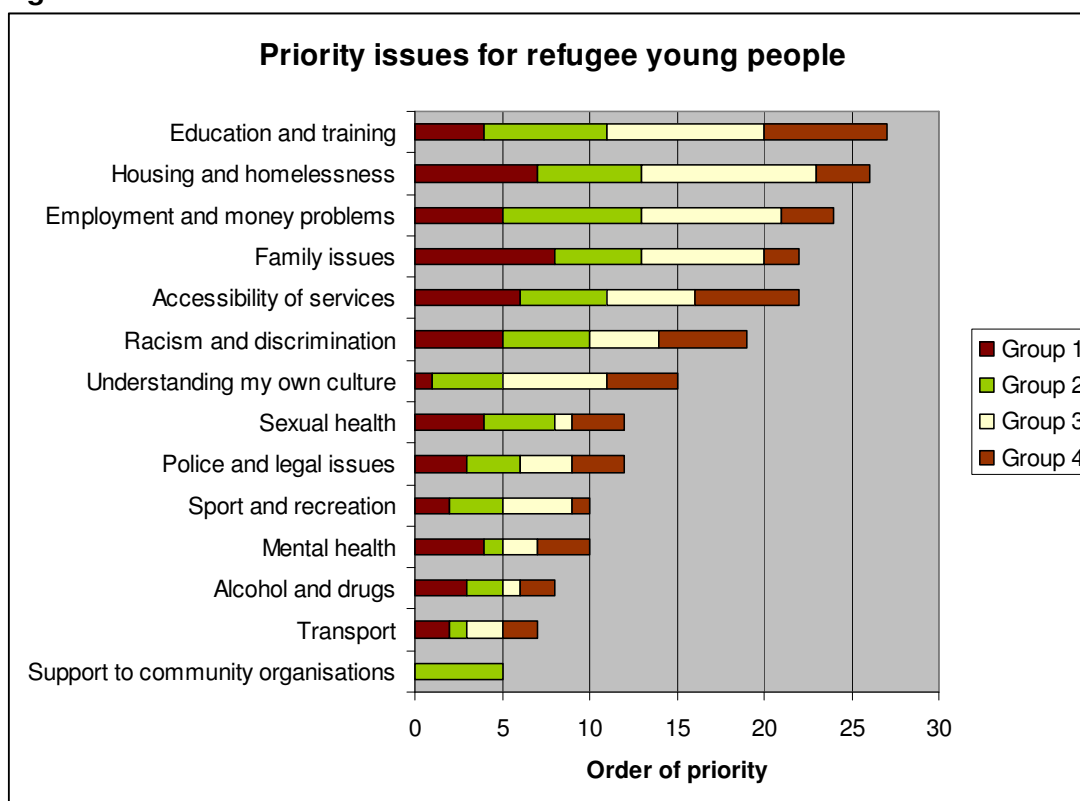
A different approach was used in the four subsequent consultations, held in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. Participants were asked to work as a group to rank issues that had been previously identified through the literature review, along a sliding scale of “biggest issue” down to “smallest issue”. The groups were also asked to nominate any issues that had not been previously identified. Only one group identified an additional issue: the lack of support for ethnic/community youth groups to advocate for their own needs. The “biggest issues” were then discussed to ascertain key areas of concern to young people and a photo was taken of the “issues maps” created (see Appendix D for photos of the issues maps).

This activity elicited much animated discussion and debate across each of the consultation groups, and highlighted the interconnectedness of many of these issues. The activity required groups to come to a consensus and work together. Where individual members of a group disagreed on how important an issue was, consensus was usually reached by talking through how the various issues impacted on the lives of young people and trying to find middle ground. Having a visual map meant that issues could be placed alongside each other if they were considered of equal importance.

Figure 4 indicates the prioritisation of issues across the different groups. Issues are numbered from 1 (for smallest issue) to 10 (for biggest issue).

Although there was some variation between groups – possibly reflecting their age and gender make-up – there were identifiable trends in the importance given to the different issues, with the greatest concerns being around: education and training; housing and homelessness; employment and money problems; family issues; and the accessibility of services.

Figure 4:



After prioritising the issues, each of the four groups were asked to identify key concerns that needed to be addressed with regards to their “biggest issues”. Many of these concerns were also reflected in the initial two focus group discussions in Perth and Shepparton (comments also included below). Of the top five issues, comments included:

Education and training

- There is not enough time to learn the language.
- English is not enough.
- The age difference – and lack of appropriate programs.
- Family expectations are too high.
- There is a lack of role models who have been through similar experiences and have succeeded in education system.
- Teachers need to be more considerate of refugees and their experiences.
- Lack of programs for young people who arrive when they are 20 years or older.
- Young people in Uni or TAFE need financial support.
- School – difficulties with language, making friends and bullying.
- Need more scholarships for refugee young people.
- Shepparton needs a specialised language service to get refugee youth speaking to others.

Housing and homelessness

- Renting is expensive and leases are hard to obtain.
- Racism is a big problem with real estate agents.
- Lack of housing.
- Need more 1-2 bedroom apartments for single parents in Canberra.
- Shared accommodation options with strangers (i.e. boarding houses) are not culturally appropriate.

Employment and money problems

- Lack of work experience.
- Discrimination by employers.
- Refugee young people are underestimated.
- Job Network is not helpful – it is paid for keeping young people unemployed, and doesn't do anything.
- Young people need help to get work experience/placements.

Family issues

- Parents not understanding or accepting young people.
- Expectations are different.
- Domestic violence.
- Reuniting families (particularly young people who are separated from their parents).
- Difference of values between parents and children.
- Parenting styles are old, and there's a communication breakdown. There needs to be more talking.
- Difficulties with families about going out or boyfriends/girlfriends.
- Family cheer you up but also punish you.

Accessibility of services

- Not enough workers from different backgrounds.
- Services need to use interpreters (including phone interpreting).
- Orientation to services in Australia should be compulsory for all new arrivals.
- Computers are not particularly useful for older refugees, and you need them to access Job Network, banks, school.
- Navigating services is difficult.

6. RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Partner organisations

Organisations that supported facilitation of consultations

Region	Partner organisation
Sydney	Granville Multicultural Community Centre
Melbourne	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Canberra	Multicultural Youth Services
Canberra	Sudanese Australian National Youth Council
Shepparton	Cutting Edge Uniting Care
Perth	Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka

Additional consultations

Region	Network consulted
National	National Youth Multicultural Advocacy Network
National	FECCA Youth Policy Committee

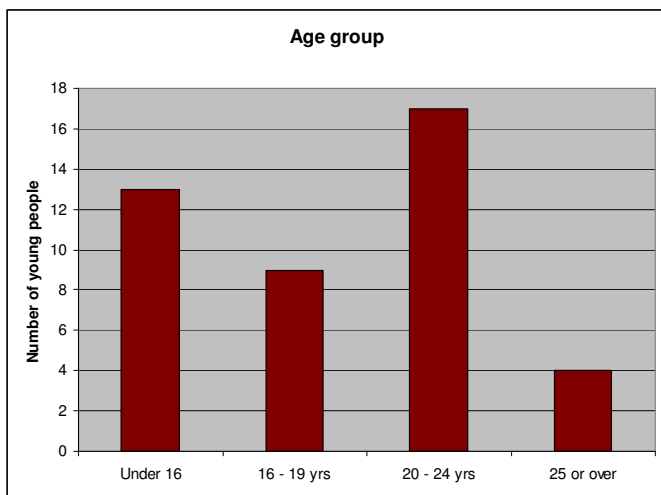
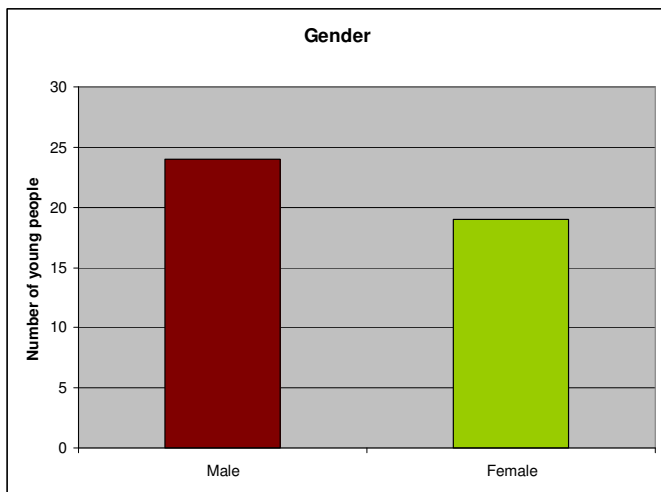
APPENDIX B: Demographics of young people consulted

Cultural background

Sudanese	28
Afghan	2
Eritrean/Sudanese	2
Ethiopian	2
Sri Lankan	2
Eritrean	1
Iraqi	1
Kenyan	1
Sierra Leonean	1
Somali	1
Karen	1
Other	1
Total	43

Number of participants by location

Shepparton	3
Perth	13
Canberra (MYS)	4
Canberra (SANYC)	12
Sydney	4
Melbourne	7
Total	43



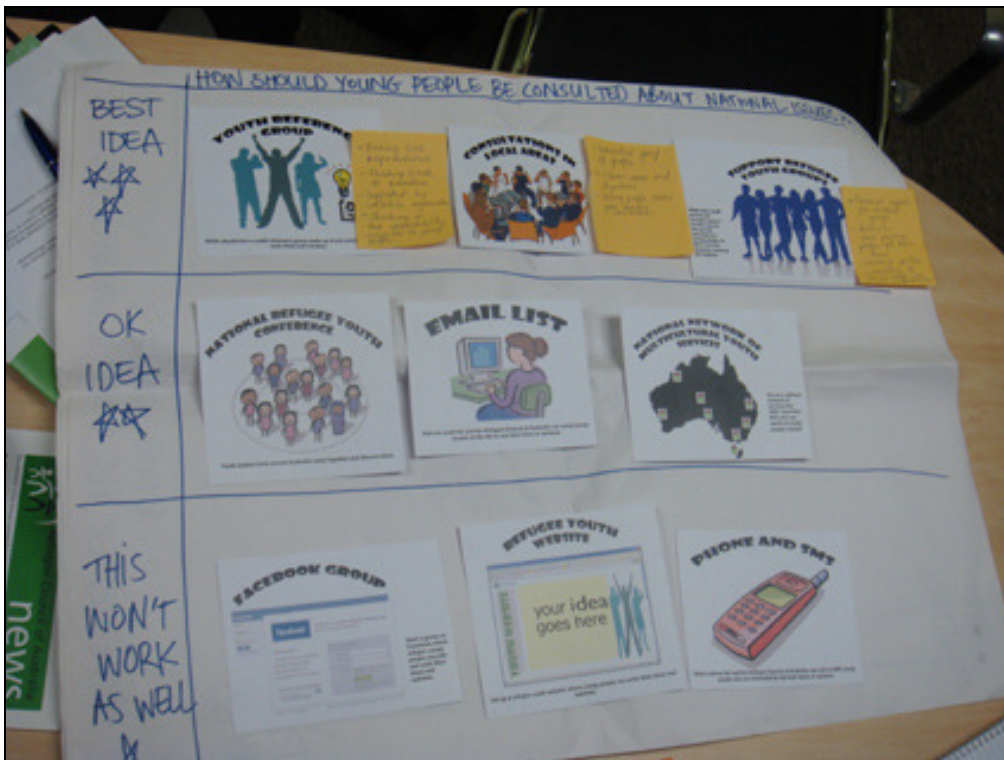
APPENDIX C: Youth consultation strategies

The following photos show the priority national consultation mechanism maps produced by participant groups in four consultations.

Group 1: Canberra



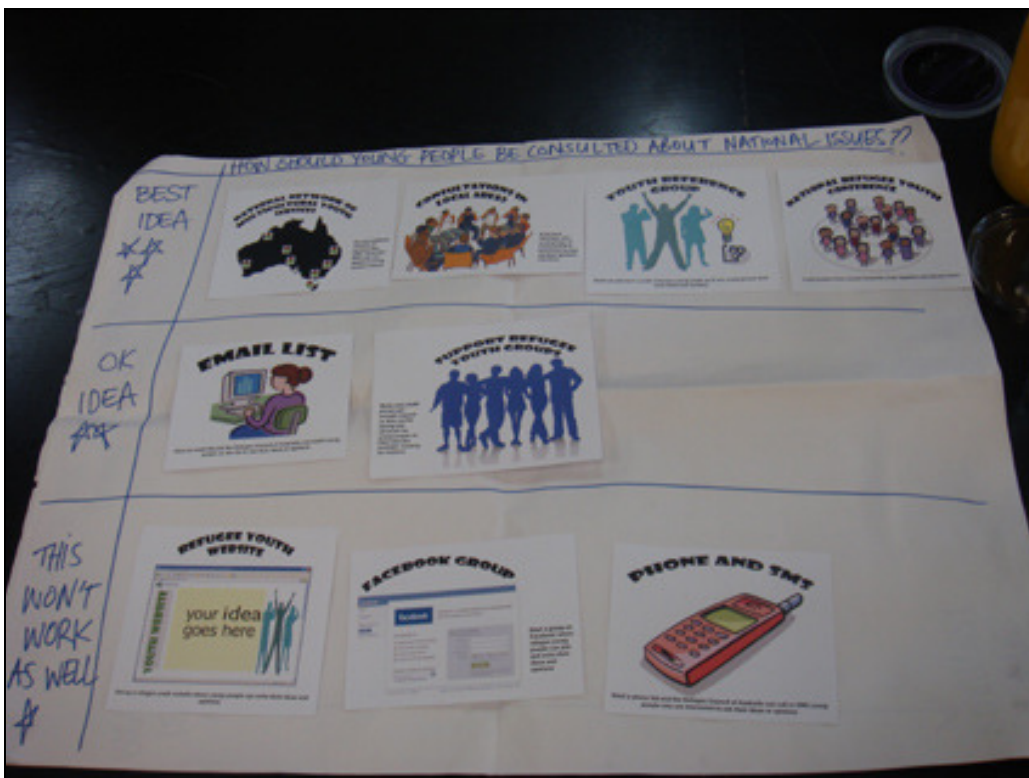
Group 2: Canberra



Group 3: Sydney



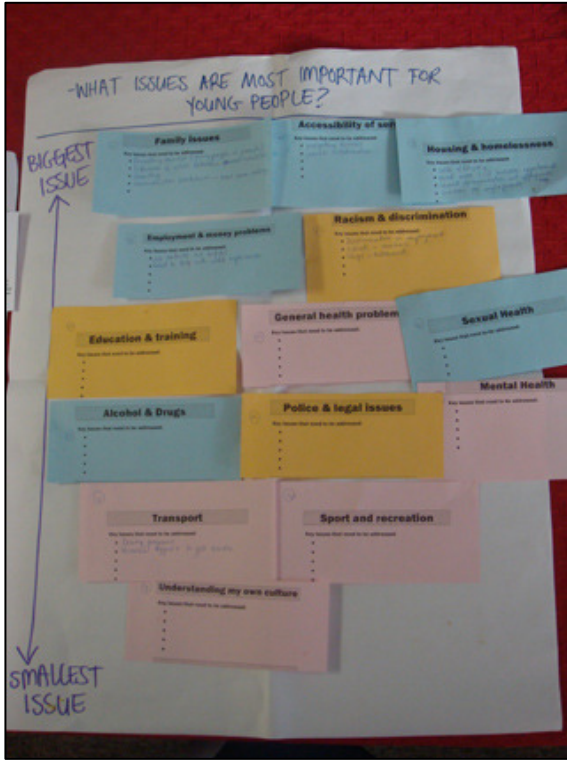
Group 4: Melbourne



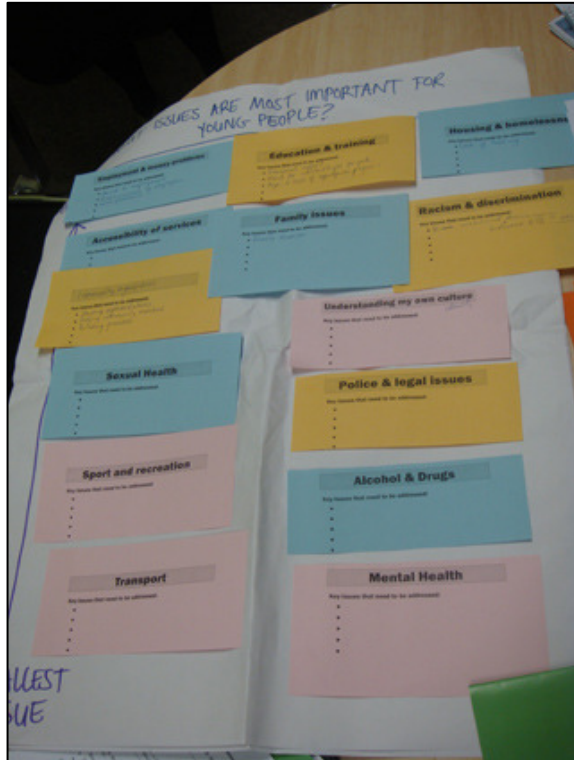
APPENDIX D: Priority issues

The following photos show the 'priority issues maps' produced by participant groups in four consultations.

Group 1: Canberra



Group 2: Canberra



Group 3: Sydney



Group 4: Melbourne

