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NESB Youth Needs Consultation **in the Macarthur region**

An NESB youth needs consultation with service providers was held at Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre in Campbelltown on 15th April 2003. It was promoted through the local youth services, the Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre and the local Macarthur Migrant Inter-Agency.

We had a good attendance of local youth and community workers, from a wide range of services. They included:

- ❑ David Freeman – Traxside Youth Health Service
- ❑ Sana Al-Ahmar – Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre
- ❑ Vanessa Ford – Macarthur Legal Centre
- ❑ Ta'ane Tupola – Campbelltown Police
- ❑ Mark Berriman – Campbelltown Council
- ❑ Jenny Franke – Campbelltown Council
- ❑ Samira Halouf – Australian Lebanese Welfare Group
- ❑ Sina Winterstein – Macquarie Fields Police
- ❑ Mary Mann – Burnside Campbelltown
- ❑ Marcela Vergara – Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre
- ❑ Jioji Ravulo – Mission Australia
- ❑ Tony Pacesibski – Centrelink Youth Outreach

Discussion was recorded onto audiocassette, and then transcribed and distributed to all participants at a consultation follow-up meeting. The transcript has now been presented as a survey to evaluate some of the main points in the discussion. The following pages contain excerpts from the transcript that have been identified as NESB youth issues.

“Anger management”

One of the first issues that arose at the consultation was conflict and anger management. Often the way NESB youth respond to stress and youth workers misunderstand pressure, which makes it harder when their parents and community also don't understand where the young people are coming from. Participants identified that NESB youth are not really understood appropriately and that more training is needed about how to work with diverse families and communities.

“A large number of these young people also have anger management issues that they need to come to terms with, and some, in some cases corporal punishment has been accepted overseas, in the islands, and to make their parents aware of the extent of that, and how their young people are exposed to that environment so they think that that's ok.”

“And most of the time their development of that anger and how they deal with that anger actually stems back to that upbringing, and how the family, and also the parents, and also the father deals with the anger, and they just mimic basically what's happening. It comes back to identifying at the environmental needs and maybe looking at the communication within the family, trying to help the family. So going back to the ECLO, what he was saying with the islanders is that parents play a huge role when you are trying to understand the individual. It's a bit of a

catch-22, because a lot of young people, a lot of the Islanders and New Zealanders are finding it a bit of a challenge to sort of work in two frameworks, in regards to 'am I Australian, or am I an islander', 'how do I respond to an Australian way of thinking, and how do I respond to an Islander response from my parents', so that's a bit of a shift."

"Stereotypes about culture"

Stereotypes and assumptions about culture were discussed among the workers present, many of whom have seen young people responding to stereotypes in their programs. They discussed how stereotypes affect both clients and service providers. There was also interesting discussion about consultation and assumptions about cultural groups, especially the generalisations about large groups such as 'Pacific Islanders' or 'Arabic' young people.

"A lot of the time they give you what the stereotypes are, so those young people know they are stereotyped, and they know you think they are going to react in a certain way, so they give you that. It's easier to give you that than to give what they really are. It's breaking that down, and it's all about building relationships with young people, and their parents, seeing where they're at. It's a draining and long process, and some workers see how that's valuable and others don't."

"The challenge is also identifying how much that stereotype is entrenched in cultural stereotypes, because a lot of young people will act up according to cultural stereotypes."

"I really believe that we need information and maybe more education, educating people about our culture or your culture. I mean we do think that we know about Arab culture, but we really do not, we only know just general things about this culture, and that's where stereotyping comes in."

"You see we are all Arabs, but we are so different, I mean, we are so many communities; there are such big differences, even within the same. Lets say talking about the Iraqis, where I come from. Iraqis are Iraqi but there are so many communities, and each community needs to be talked to individually, they come from a completely different point of view."

"People don't consider me to be Australian"

The consultation involved mainly youth and community workers from a NESB background themselves, and they raised issues about how they have been treated by the wider community. The difficulty for young people to identify as Australian, or NESB, or as a refugee came up as we discussed NESB issues through the perspective of NESB youth workers.

"In terms of your identity then, a lot of young people say they are Australian, but to other people who are Anglo, they don't see them as Australian. A perfect example is myself, I don't think its in my blood, some people don't consider me to be Australian. They ask me what I am and I say Australian and then they wait, ... and that happens to other young people. If you look different and you don't fit into that stereotype of what Australian is, then people know you are different, and then you have that identity issue because 'I consider myself to be this', but then other people don't. The reflection of myself is different. And then you go home and have a totally different upbringing to other people, and you have all these issues and it's very difficult to find yourself and who you are".

"Even for us older people when we leave our country, and come here, its difficult for us. It's no wonder the kids, really, it must be sometimes so confusing for them, everybody tells them something different."

"My son for instance he is Australian, and sometimes when we talk about Iraq and about Islam, sometimes he looks at me strangely. You know, we try to teach them things about where we come from, but they consider themselves Australian but then somebody looks at him and tells him 'ah, you are a Lebbo' or whatever the word is – and to him, sometimes they take it as an insult, he thinks he is an Australian of Arabic origin but when somebody gives him another name, to him this is very upsetting".

“Making them responsible for their own”

The problem of targeting identified NESB workers to NESB youth problems was discussed as we looked at access and equity for communities in the area. It is clear that NESB workers cannot be expected to be responsible for ‘identified’ problems. The group agreed that NESB youth issues could only be dealt with sustainably when all youth workers and projects are accessible and responsive to the local youth population.

“Are we setting up identified positions to be responsible for the problem, or are we giving them a chance to respond appropriately? That’s putting the onus on security guards to actually be youth workers as well as their role of security. Its making them responsible for their own community, you’re an islander and these kids are islanders, so go and ‘relate’, but that person has no connection to them, they might as well be from any culture. And it’s not identifying the issues, why they are acting out”.

“There are benefits to having identified positions, but they only last a year to 18 months because every issue that comes up goes to that individual to work with, and they have a lot of other connections to families and community group, so then they have the community expectation and pressure. ‘Why didn’t this happen, can you help us out here?’”

“In a youth service the NESB worker will be the one who has to work with the families, they will have to do all of that work. Juvenile Justice are sort of doing identified positions, the interesting thing though is that my position is not an identified position but they employed me on the assumption that I will take a Pacific Islander caseload as well as my other caseload. Officially I am not an identified position but they have employed me because of my background. So it might be the case that someone goes these young people are from Pacific Islands, we’ll just call you because ‘that’s what you deal with’, and its not the case.”

“The identified position is only one position in an organisation, but for that person to progress in the organisation, there are very little identified management positions, the identified positions are usually on the ground, in either customer service or programs. They miss out on training opportunities, to get into management positions and responsibility, so it doesn’t become an integrated workplace with all kinds of different backgrounds at all levels of the organisation.”

“Approaching the parents”

Workers from several different communities emphasised the importance of providing clear and accessible information to parents of NESB youth, otherwise they simply won’t get the young people attending their service. Migrants and refugees often don’t understand what youth services are, who they work for, and how they can help young people. The youth services in Campbelltown have to involve the NESB communities in planning youth services, and in promoting them, and then they will begin to see more NESB youth attendance.

“To get to do a project you have to go through their parents, the Pacific Islander parents are very strict with their kids, doesn’t matter how hard you try, if the parents don’t know what you expect from the kids they wont let the kids come near it. So listening to the session here, no-one even mentioned approaching the parents, having the parents knowing what programs are running. It means that a lot of people wont be involved, because most of the programs that have been run by council, and youth centres, most of the parents are not aware of what are the programs and what the program is for. Even the Youth Week, I received a bill from the council, and I start going to all the different communities and explaining to them, the questions from the parents are ‘what do the children do here?’ Because I didn’t have any more information, of what the program was, I didn’t even talk about what’s involved, so all I do is supply the poster to advertise the program, but particularly for the parents, if they are not fully aware of what the program is all about, they wont let the kids out.”

“I also put it into their own languages, so Samoan or Fijian, so they fully understood what’s in it and what’s happening. If I tried the kids themselves, probably two or three would turn up, if I try the parents and the community, I have the whole room full.”

“I think that’s why the programs I’ve run last year especially were successful, because I tend to have a relationship with the parents, they call up on a weekly basis to see where you’re at, with the hip-hop and radio program that we ran, that we still run, it’s accessing the parents and talking to them about how it would benefit in terms of professional development for the young people, self esteem, then once you build that relationship it so much easier for them to come.”

“A lot of youth workers and youth services say ‘but I’m not trained to work with parents, I’m not funded to work with parents’ and I think a lot of youth services feel ‘how do I work with families?, I’m supposed to be working with young people’. We need more discussion about that”.

“Cultural Awareness”

The group identified a need for more cultural awareness training for youth workers, and for more discussion about NESB youth issues in practice. Cross-cultural awareness training would provide insight into how some of the stereotypes work, and also give youth workers some background knowledge so they could address stereotypes when they are used by young people.

“Is it possible to look at giving training to youth workers in the community on a cultural needs basis from the MRC?”

We’ve run cultural awareness training last year from the MRC, two sessions last year, looked at NESB youth and training from STARTTS on working refugee young people and that’s going to happen again. We should do culture specific stuff, we haven’t done culture specific stuff but we’re looking at doing that.

Because that way you’re looking at it holistically, In a sense of looking at the ability of youth workers to work with the individual and then their family”

“We did a cultural awareness session last week with DOCS, very positive, we invited elders from different languages, and basically even myself, I spoke about culture, not behaviour, particularly with the youth, how they deal with individual backgrounds, also going deep into the parents, and when they are confident of going toward the parents, they will have a resource whenever they need to use it for the kids. Having a cultural awareness of the different backgrounds is very positive way to approach especially those youth workers.”

“I suppose it’s also up to the youth worker to value the parents, to value the fact that the parents are important, I don’t think that I’ve had training in how to work with parents, but it’s really important, approaching them, listening to them and validating them in the process rather than excluding them and thinking ‘I only work with young people’.”

“It’s understanding how the parent plays a role in the individual’s life that’s important, as dependent on the culture. It’s about understanding the support culturally, can you tap into cultural needs and supports, and how does that fit in?”

“When I had some Sudanese clients, I didn’t know anyone, so I just looked up on the Internet about what life was like, it helped me to understand and communicate about what was important”

“It’s a bit of a Catch 22 because you don’t know if that perpetuates the issues between her and her parents. It clearly does with Pacific Islander communities, with some of the things that have happened in the area, young people have said they wanted specific things, the youth workers have tried to accommodate for that, then having some family members knocking on the door saying ‘how dare you do this’, giving some cultural information, especially around STDs to some particular groups, whose parents weren’t all that crash hot about the same information going to everyone, boys and girls.”

“The culture is definitely something that needs to be identified as a factor in the young person’s offending behaviour. So it’s looking at the support network behind their offending behaviour in the first place, but it’s actually on a ‘what works’ model for the individual, and how they are placed amongst the support found in their family and within the community itself. We’ve also got to look at subcultures and the way the young person actually thinks within the groupings they are associating with, there could be a mentality within their group, within their clique, that being involved with JJ formulates their identity, and the way they actually see themselves

in the community. So there might be an attraction to offend because being involved with Juvenile Justice gives them a way to think 'yes I am involved with this group'."

"Homeless NESB youth"

Concerns were raised about NESB youth homelessness, and a lack of appropriate services to refer on to. There were some accommodation services represented, who presented their perspective and discussed the gaps in resources and services.

"We are talking about kids who are at home, that have got parents, from my service's perspective, in my organisation, we see a lot of at-risk kids that aren't at home, that are on the streets, homeless. I think yeah, what you're saying is good, you need to take that into account with the kids who are at home, what about the kids who aren't at home, how are you going to tap into that type of audience and tell them, hey, this is what's around."
"Some people don't even live with their parents, they live with aunties or relatives or cousins. I'm talking about people who are homeless".

"Well, accommodation in the local refuges that I'm aware of, off the street into some sort of supported accommodation, that is a big issue for Macarthur in itself. Organisations like Burnside have resources they can tap into, house the young person in Macarthur or Liverpool or Fairfield or wherever".

"At the Drum we see quite a number of young people on a daily basis who have accommodation issues, many scenarios. We can refer to Reconnect and an education program, social things like workshops and activities and we use outreach. We are conscious that a lot of NESB young people are not comfortable using youth services, it's quite confronting so we try to make the environment safe and comfortable, so maybe having other culturally diverse services which is part of our strategic plan for 2004, to diversify the actual service to reach out."

"Samoan, Tongan, South Sea Islander population"

One of the most interesting points that came out of this consultation was the recognition that youth from the Pacific Islands are not regarded as migrants, or ethnic or being NESB. Workers identified that youth services need to work more effectively with parents from Pacific Island communities, to inform them of the activities involved in the youth programs and consult with parents about their expectations of youth services.

"It's Samoan, Tongan or South Sea Islander population who I see the majority of using the youth centres in the Macarthur area at the moment. Predominantly people from those kind of ethnic backgrounds are the predominant ones that I see, that come and use my service".

"In Miller, I think the youth centre have worked really closely with the multicultural community, they're actually building a six-foot hand-carved timber canoe, so they're really out there trying to get the kids involved, maybe Tongan or South Sea Islanders, I think they've got it down pat as to how to tap in to the community to work with youth. Even two years ago they took kids to go and train with Kostya Zu, the boxer, and two of the kids got picked up to train with him, by his trainer, that just blew me away, that project, and to have something out here, just fantastic."

"I think that could be because our links to the Islander community are quite established in this region, but this year there have been a lot more clients accessing the service from an Arabic background, more of a group moving this way."

"Small and Emerging Communities"

The group also discussed newer communities in the Macarthur region, and how to provide information to their youth about activities and programs available in the area.

"There is a small Somali community moving into the region who had not accessed the service before, and the Somali young people really wanted to go, their parents didn't know what a youth service was for, but they wanted

their kids to be in a supportive environment. So we hired a Somali worker to be with us so that we could make the connection, and we had Maj who was at Traxside at the time who was dark, and he was from a Muslim background, so we could break up into guys and girls, that was quite successful, but we weren't able to run it again.

Some of the kids continued to use other services that we provide, through other youth programs, and I think a lot of the kids went out to Camden, so it also made me aware to act myself as a caseworker, and to think about the issues. The age group was from 10 – 20, but we had different age groups for each session”.

“How do we make contact with the smaller communities, and find whether they require any services? Those groups that aren't accessing mainstream services have limited resources, and need to have particular services aimed and targeted at them. Like you have young women's programs, sole parents, NESB, ATSI programs, they need to be in place so those partnerships and awareness can be created. My program is the only program in Campbelltown that is NESB focused for the three local government areas. Looking at other areas, I think most services should have a worker who is working with one particular community.”

Language Barriers

The consultation looked at NESB language barriers, and the other access barriers that are involved for NESB youth. Using interpreters and translators is only part of the solution, and the group discussed cultural and social access barriers that affect youth participation.

“On that point, you're just taking language to be a barrier, a lot of these young people speak English quite fluently, their barriers are to do with intergenerational conflict, with their parents and the old cultural values they have that are different to their upbringing, its not just, when we say barriers its not just about language, they speak and write in English, but then they go home and they have other issues. Like with the Somali program, all of them spoke English, most of the young ones didn't even speak Somali.”

“If a lot of the young people are comfortable in speaking and reading English, because a lot of the information around the city is basically in English. So obviously if they are unable or have some difficulties they are going to have difficulty accessing all the different information and services that are around, unless they have the connections with an agency that can assist them.

But if there are a lot of emerging communities where those language barriers are more challenging, for those young people, then there's a need to be some intervention to assist them or provide other information about what's around, but the difficulty is how to find out that information, especially with a lot of the smaller isolated communities. Can they be included into specific programs or do they have specific needs that need to set up? A balance between the two is what we need in the area, depending on what communities are coming in, and the size, and some of their cultural issues. Sometimes having a specific translator means they can get a lot more out of it, and there's not as much disruption as having different backgrounds together.”

“Why should I be treated differently?”

Some participants, who said they have had feedback from youth saying they would not attend an identified group if it were seen that they were being treated differently, raised the difficulty of getting NESB youth involved in ethno-specific projects.

“Schools in this area have this program specifically for NESB and youth, and we still get complaints from 3rd and 4th generation born in Australia, ‘how come you have these programs specific for NESB people?’ ‘How can we access the service?’ And on the other hand we still get the other youth from NESB saying ‘you are treating us differently, this means we are different from the others’. I think sometimes people don't get into the specific programs because they think they are for certain people, and so they just want to stay away from them.”

“I used to get comments from students that ‘I was born here, I am Australian, why should I join this group? ‘I speak English, my parents are from NESB, why should I be treated differently?’ There's nothing wrong with the

way I speak', sometimes these programs should be defended. In a way we are treating them differently, but they are Australian, part of the community, we are trying to help them but sometimes it is the title 'NESB' that makes young people feel different.

For the Somali project, others working with different groups should also participate, so they don't feel intimidated."

How effective are programs within Drop-in?

The group also looked at the problem of youth workers using drop-in and self-referral, which may not be most effective for NESB youth, and discussed how to move beyond drop-in.

"We have statistics to show most youth services are working to capacity; its saying do youth services actually need more programs? No they don't, its about looking at who is using the youth service, and making sure that those people reflect the people in the community who have that need."

"Is it also trying to evaluate how effective the programs are, how effective are the programs within drop-in, are they running programs within drop-in? I'm not questioning the efforts of the youth workers, just the effectiveness of the programs that are run, and bringing it back to how effective NESB-wise is it? Whether those groups that youth workers put on are NESB specific?"

"Talk to them about community inter-agency involvement, or getting in people from specific groups in the community and running workshops around those cultures for the young people which will help services access them and start dealing with issues around their needs, but looking at their offending behaviour as well. By me attending forums like this and work meetings I am able to gauge a better understanding of services in the community available for specific groups, and in doing that looking at developing programs and working in conjunction with community based organisations, in partnerships."

Conclusions:

This consultation group clearly identified that more work is needed to develop appropriate youth programs for the NESB population in Campbelltown. There were needs identified for:

- Funding and development of NESB targeted projects for young people
- Improved access for NESB youth to mainstream youth services
- Clear information for NESB parents on youth projects in the area
- Youth crisis accommodation, especially for NESB youth.
- Anger management resources and training for staff working with NESB youth
- More cross-cultural awareness training for youth workers
- Need for clearer data about new, and established, migrant and refugee communities in Macarthur.
- Need for youth workers to work more closely with generalist community workers, especially the Community Settlement Services workers at the Migrant Resource Centre.