

Girls' Space: Good Practice Principles

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The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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Overview

Young women of refugee and migrant backgrounds represent a group of young people in our community who, for a number of reasons, are at increased risk of not accessing services and information that they need. Newly arrived young women can experience additional settlement challenges including increased family responsibilities and duties, negotiation of different cultural expectations about gender roles, economic disadvantage, social isolation, lack of experience and knowledge about services and lack of confidence to engage with services.

This guide outlines a specific approach that CMY took in a program called Girls' Space to address gender inequity. In collaboration with other service providers, CMY developed a set of Good Practice Principles for working with newly arrived young women.

These principles are not an exhaustive list of possible approaches and many can be applied to both mixed and gender specific groups. However, it is hoped that these guiding principles will help to ensure that youth programs and services engage and include new arrival young women.

These Principles are:

Act on Gender

Some young women are not able, and /or do not want, to participate in groups with young men. Newly arrived young women in both mixed and gender specific groups sometimes face significant barriers to full participation. Act on Gender asks services to not only become more aware of gender issues but to take action to ensure programs and services are inclusive.

Empowerment & Ownership

Programs and services that are designed for, and with, young women are more likely to be successful. This approach acknowledges and values young people's existing strengths and incorporates the principle of youth participation.

Engagement

Newly arrived young women do not easily participate in, or know how to access, mainstream youth services and programs. Recruiting newly arrived young women requires extra thought and effort. Engagement requires services to ask whether we have done everything we can to ensure that newly arrived young women can access our programs. This might include:

- Going to where young women are including organisations delivering English Language Classes and Settlement Services such as AMES, TAFE, neighbourhood houses and women's services.
- Using 'word of mouth' and speaking to women face to face (do not assume that written or translated information will be understood)
- Confidently offer to use interpreters
- Provide transport options and question how accessible your program or service is

Family Considerations

Showing respect and supporting newly arrived young women in the context of family is fundamental to ensure programs and services successfully engage. This means we need to develop trust with participants' family, understand the role of young women within their families and be prepared for the complicated dynamics that this can sometimes present. Some things to consider:

- Gender of staff members
- Offer to meet young women's families and be prepared to provide information and referral for family members
- Allow siblings or children to attend the program if appropriate and needed
- Be transparent in your approach, provide information so that the young person and family can make informed decisions and be available to discuss these issues as needed
- Understand that some newly arrived young women may have no family support

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence recognises that culture is an essential part of everyone's identity. Cultural competence is about being aware of one's own cultural beliefs and values and understanding how this can impact on your work with the community. To enhance your cultural competence:

- Do not make assumptions about an individual's cultural identity, values or beliefs
- Learn more about the communities you are working with and how pre-migration experiences may impact on life in Australia
- Participate in cultural competence training
- Learn to use interpreters and provide translated information and resources

Flexibility

Every young woman will have her own individual experience, knowledge and skills regardless of cultural background. Flexibility is key to ensuring that services and programs can respond to emerging needs and aspirations as identified by participants. This means being prepared to deviate from your original plan. Participants may have their own ideas about what they would like to achieve from the program. While aiming to meet their needs, negotiate what is possible with participants.

Remember

Involvement in your program may be the first interaction that a young woman may have had with a service in Australia. This could mean the difference between accessing support outside of existing networks or not, so it is important that the experience accessing your service is a positive one. To enhance outcomes CMY recommends adopting a community development framework that works in partnership with other services. Seek out secondary consultations from organisations with particular expertise and establish referral pathways so that newly arrived young women have the opportunity to learn about and develop the confidence to access other support services.