



Best Practice Paper

Under the Radar project

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Purpose of the paper | 2 |
| Background information and overview..... | 2 |
| Key learnings of the project..... | 2 |
| Making mentoring count for refugee youth at risk..... | 2 |
| Using a mixed-methods approach to research with youth at risk..... | 3 |
| Working more effectively with youth at risk | 3 |
| Sector development to support youth at risk..... | 5 |
| Advocacy and policy development to address issues affecting youth at risk..... | 5 |
| How to develop and deliver group work with refugee youth at risk..... | 6 |
| References..... | 10 |

Purpose of the paper

Based on the key learnings of the *Under the Radar* project, this paper aims to provide insights into the complex issues affecting refugee youth at risk to help the broader community services sector to more effectively engage and support them.

Background information and overview

Multicultural Youth South Australia Inc. (MYSA) was funded by the Scanlon Foundation under the auspice of the Australian Multicultural Foundation to deliver *Under the Radar*, a three-year project that began in 2007 and concluded in 2010. The project was supported by a reference group comprising the South Australia Police, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Families SA (Youth Justice Team), the Department for Families and Communities SA, the African Communities Council SA and the Multicultural Communities Council SA.

The purpose of the project was to identify, investigate and respond to the key issues and needs impacting on the lives of at-risk young people from refugee backgrounds. A combination of research and targeted programs were delivered to increase support to young people, the sector and the broader community. As a result of the project, young people gained greater confidence and capacity to positively participate in and contribute to community life, ultimately resulting in greater social inclusion and social cohesion.

The aims of the project were to:

- provide an evidence-based approach to service delivery for at-risk young people
- increase awareness of youth issues among service providers and the broader community
- reduce social isolation and disengagement among some of the most disadvantaged youth in South Australia
- increase knowledge, skills, confidence and willingness of young people to take control of their lives
- improve relationships between young people and mainstream services, particularly law enforcement.

Key learnings of the project

The following information highlights the key learnings from the *Under the Radar* project. These learnings can be implemented to effectively engage and support refugee youth at risk.

Making mentoring count for refugee youth at risk

MYSA's research with refugee youth at risk has found that many lack supportive adults and positive role models in their lives. A key feature of the project was to increase young people's access to informal networks using a mentoring program that fostered the development of supportive relationships between mentors and mentees in order to improve confidence and skills and achieve personal goals.

The traditional method of mentoring through an individual one-on-one approach did not provide sufficient support to either the mentees or mentors, as it did not allow for the effective building of rapport. It was found that a combination of both individual and group mentoring was more effective in engaging refugee youth at risk. The group mentoring model brings together the mentors and mentees for positive interactions through sport and recreational activities, which fosters a safe environment for the development of trust. This leads to genuine opportunities to exchange information and learn from each other's experiences, providing substance and meaning to the relationships formed.

The success of a mentoring program also depends on the commitment of the volunteers. It is important to invest time and resources in equipping volunteers with the knowledge and skills to effectively engage young people. Accordingly, the project included an induction and orientation training package and provided cultural awareness support to the mentors.

To sustain volunteer involvement throughout the life of a project, it is important to understand the reasons why volunteers choose to get involved, clarify the expectations of both the agency and volunteer from the very start, be flexible and show a genuine appreciation for the volunteer's time and other commitments. It is important to communicate effectively with volunteers and let them know in advance the schedule planned for the program and to ensure that support is readily available should they need it.

While it is understandable that there are volunteers who cannot attend each session, it is important to ensure that there is always a higher ratio of mentors to mentees so that each young person is always linked to a mentor and is not left out.

Using a mixed-methods approach to research with youth at risk

Part of the project involved research to ensure that service delivery was informed by evidence. MYSA found that a mixed-methods approach provided the best means for understanding the key issues affecting youth at risk. A questionnaire was used to assess emotional and behavioural problems, and focus groups were used to provide context-rich information on these issues and a range of other issues affecting young people's lives. Quantitative indicators, such as the number of young people affected by emotional and behavioural problems and the type and range of problems that affect them, provided important information to plan for their needs. However, while a questionnaire is useful for identifying the presence of emotional and behavioural problems, it is inadequate for exploring how young people understand and respond to these problems. The research therefore also obtained qualitative information to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their issues and needs.

Working more effectively with youth at risk

Successfully working with refugee youth at risk depends on building rapport and trust, and it is important to allow enough time to develop this. The most significant challenge of this project was engaging those who were disengaged and disinterested in participating in community life. Although MYSA has extensive experience in working with young people from new and emerging refugee communities, engaging youth at risk who refuse to participate in their own community, let alone with the broader Australian community, required more time and effort. The process of building rapport is intensive, requiring creative approaches and strategies. MYSA focused on outreaching into places where young people were 'hanging out', finding and following up on any leads and advice from other young people and community members, and organising activities, such as a sport and recreation, to build rapport.

Based on the key learnings of the project, the following best practice principles will help other service providers to effectively engage and support youth at risk.

Individualised service delivery

Using an approach that provides intensive individualised support to the young person is the most effective. This approach gives the young person a worker as a single point of contact, which leads to the development of trust and support and the active participation of the young person in addressing their own issues and achieving personal goals. MYSA works from a strengths-based perspective, which identifies and uses the young person's skills, talents, achievements, resources and capacities to address issues and develop potential.

This approach also involves working collaboratively with other service providers and individuals to ensure the best possible outcomes for the young person. To serve the best interests of the young person, it is important to communicate effectively and to work transparently, cooperatively and professionally.

Meeting young people at their point of need

Trust is developed by meeting young people at their point of need, as defined by them. In part, this involves outreaching into key local hot spots to genuinely engage those most at risk and establishing close links with agencies (e.g. shelters and the police) that have increased contact with youth at risk. Service providers need to leave their offices and get out and about — if MYSA had not actively sought out young people, they would not have accessed services and would have remained isolated from community ties.

It is also important for service providers to seek opportunities to build on and enhance their cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Be aware that there are important differences within and between cultural groups based on the level of acculturation, English language ability, education, socioeconomic status, religion, and so on. Doing your homework and familiarising yourself with the target population assists in building rapport with the young people.

Building trust for 'little wins'

MYSA found considerable cynicism among at-risk young people; a common belief is that agencies are 'out for themselves' and do not genuinely care. MYSA's approach was to aim for 'little wins', whether this was providing a needed bus ticket, linking the young person to a needed service, playing a game of billiards, or providing home goods. Young people responded positively to any effort made on their behalf. They came to realise that service provision was about action not empty promises, and that they were people, not statistics.

It is also critical to respect confidentiality. While this is important to all young people, it is even more so to youth at risk because many have lost trust in people outside their close informal networks. Be very careful with using interpreters and same-culture professionals, as they are in a position to share confidential information with the young person's family and community. Also, make no assumptions about the role and influence of community elders and leaders in the lives of young people.

Building informal support networks

As well as creating new networks, it is very important to build on the informal networks young people already have if personal aspirations and goals are to be achieved. Informal networks play a critical role in encouraging and supporting young people to pursue their goals and to persevere in the face of difficulties and barriers. The importance and value of informal support networks was clearly evident in the mentoring program.

Create and maintain partnerships with key multicultural agencies and others involved in work with refugees and migrants.

Learn to earn pathways

Focusing on education, training and job-readiness skills to enable young people to improve their employment prospects was a significant contributor to improved confidence and self-esteem. By focusing on what mattered to the young people, MYSA was able to address other issues in their lives.

Building independent living skills through 'action learning'

MYSA found that information sessions and lecture-style workshops were of very little value or benefit to youth at risk. Through an 'action learning' approach, young people developed the knowledge and skills to live independently. For example, to address the need for healthy eating, a session could involve young people helping to prepare food.

Similarly, to address the need for budgeting skills, the session could involve young people shopping for goods on a limited budget. A hands-on approach is more effective in translating learning into practice.

Sector development to support youth at risk

As part of the project, MYSAs undertook research, which informed the development of a train-the-trainer toolkit. The toolkit was important to ensure that information and practical strategies were captured and shared with the broader sector to improve the quality of service provision. Ensuring that the toolkit was informed by the research findings and was properly evaluated by respected service providers prior to distribution added to its credibility and reputation and encouraged broader sector support.

The toolkit consists of six separate modules in loose leaf format. This provides flexibility; new modules can be added, updated, or removed completely as required.

The modules in the toolkit are:

1. Achieving access and equity in service provision for refugee youth at risk
2. Issues affecting refugee youth at risk
3. Youth perceptions of problems and needs: research with refugee youth at risk
4. Engaging refugee youth at risk
5. Engaging the parents/caregivers of refugee youth at risk

Advocacy and policy development to address issues affecting youth at risk

From the research undertaken, MYSAs developed a research report, which was condensed into an executive summary highlighting the key findings from the study with refugee youth at risk. The research findings and recommendations were widely distributed to state and federal government departments, community service providers, refugee community leaders and others with an interest or stake in refugee youth issues.

From the research and outcomes of the project, MYSAs obtained the evidence required to strengthen its advocacy work and to actively participate in the development of government policy that affects refugee youth at risk. MYSAs advocated widely to government ministers, policy makers, service planners and decision-makers with relevant portfolio responsibility to highlight the research findings and ensure the recommendations were given careful consideration.

Advocacy work cannot be achieved alone. Using a project reference group with a responsibility to address identified issues ensured the recommendations were translated into practice.

It is important to strengthen relationships within the sector to support the work undertaken and achieve identified outcomes. Accordingly, MYSAs developed partnerships with young refugees, their broader communities, and a range of state and federal government departments and community organisations to ensure a collaborative and cooperative approach to addressing identified issues.

While the research focused on the South Australian experience, the findings, recommendations and strategies for addressing identified needs will have resonance with other states.

How to develop and deliver group work with refugee youth at risk

The *Under the Radar* project found that at-risk refugee youth need considerably more support than their peers, and engaging with this client group requires more time for rapport and trust building to ensure that their needs and issues are met. MYSA has seen firsthand that young people have the potential to thrive if they are given a chance within a safe and supportive environment.

The purpose of this guide is to provide youth workers with an easy-to-follow checklist to facilitating group work, with tips and pointers for effective engagement and for working with refugee youth at risk. This is intended as a guide only. If you require further information, please consult your manager or contact MYSA on (08) 8212 0085.

Step-by-step guide

1. Identify and address the issues relevant to refugee youth at risk. Learn as much as possible about your client group before trying to engage with them. For effective planning, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to problem behaviours among refugee youth at risk.

Do you understand the general pre/post-migration issues of refugee youth? Yes No

Do you understand the current emerging issues of refugee youth at risk? Yes No

*If yes, continue. If no, refer to **Module 2** of the toolkit and the **Executive Summary** of the *Under the Radar* project.*

2. Identify the target audience. For example, will the workshop participants be all male, all female, or a particular age group? MYSA has found that to appropriately address specific topics with refugee youth at risk, workshops most often need to be gender or age specific.

Have you identified your target audience? Yes No

Do you know young people to invite to the session? Yes No

If yes, go to **Step 5**. If no, continue.

3. Select a topic and consult with refugee youth at risk. However, involving this client group in planning of any group work can be challenging. MYSA has found that identifying a small group of young people who are already engaged to provide advice and guidance on the project is important.

Have you chosen your topic? Yes No

Is the topic relevant to refugee youth at risk? Yes No

Have you consulted with young people? Yes No

Have you engaged a young person to help you with planning (MYSA's CBCs)? Yes No

If yes, continue. If no, refer to **Module 3** of the toolkit.

4. Attract at-risk refugee youth to your program. Youth at risk are most often socially disengaged from community services. MYSAs found that simply inviting at-risk youth to a program or activity does not work. Building rapport with refugee youth at risk requires an investment of time to get to know individuals, a commitment to address personal issues, and empathy to genuinely show you care.

Are youth at risk accessing your services? Yes No

Have you considered a recruitment strategy? Yes No

If yes, go to **Step 5**. If no, refer to **Module 4**, and then continue.

5. You cannot expect refugee youth at risk to knock on your door asking for help. It is important to get out and about to meet young people, whether at schools, shopping malls, sporting venues or community events, etc. MYSAs found that outreach into key local hot spots, building close links with agencies including shelters and the police, were of key importance to genuinely engaging the most at risk.

Are you outreaching into the community? Yes No

Have you visited schools and spoken to the teachers? Yes No

Have you met with the police and youth justice team? Yes No

Do you know where the youth at risk hang out? Yes No

Have you approached youth at risk and community leaders to participate? Yes No

6. If yes to all the above, continue. If no, refer to **Module 6** of the toolkit for more strategies. Address potential barriers to participation. You need to identify and address any barriers that prevent or limit at-risk refugee youth accessing your program. For example, because many youth at risk do not access services, MYSAs found that organising transport can be highly effective in ensuring young people participate in the program. Once they are familiar with the service, they should be able to make their own way. Some young people may not have enough money for transport, so providing a bus ticket will help.

Is the space youth friendly? Yes No

Is there a need for interpreters? Yes No

Is the program culturally/gender/age appropriate? Yes No

Has transport been considered (pick up or bus tickets)? Yes No

Is the program free? Yes No

If yes to all the above, continue. If no, refer to **Module 1** of the toolkit.

7. It's time to promote the program to youth at risk. MYSAs has found that a flyer is not the most effective way to promote a workshop to refugee youth at risk. MYSAs creates pocket-sized 'individual invitations' for this client group, because they can easily fold it and put it in their wallet or back pocket. The invitation is personal and conveys the importance of attendance.

Have you considered promotions? Yes No

Do the young people know of the group session? Yes No

8. With the development of the curriculum, keep in mind that participants most likely will not engage in standard classroom lecture-style learning. MYSA has found that the most effective way to engage and provide information to youth at risk is through interactive and informal discussions, practical activities, use of visual aids, and pairing up with some form of either sport or recreational activity. MYSA has also found the use of action learning in group work to be effective with youth at risk. For example, if the topic is on nutrition this would involve going with the young people to the local supermarket, and the young people then creating and preparing meals to learn about healthy eating practices.

Depending on the time allocated for the group work, MYSA's standard format for group work includes:

- welcome (introduce MYSA and what we do, introduce speakers, volunteers and anyone else in the room at the time)
- get to know you game/icebreaker (do something fun but not too personal with at-risk young people so that they can get used to you, the speaker and other participants)
- ascertaining their existing knowledge (find out what they know about the subject as this will help you evaluate the session and will also give you a good indication of what level to pitch the session, i.e. basic, advanced, etc.)
- having one clear message (don't give too much information in one session, but have one message and keep reinforcing it)
- using fun interactive activities (you should have at least one active learning section in the workshop, e.g. role playing, game, etc.)
- assessing what they have learned (allocate time to ask them what they have learned)
- providing links (tell young people how to find out more, promote MYSA casework, expert services, etc.).

Once the curriculum has been developed, ask yourself:

Is the information relevant and interesting to this particular group? Yes No

Will there be interactions and discussions with participants? Yes No

Have you considered visual aids? Yes No

Are you including a recreational, art or sport element? Yes No

Have you considered catering? Yes No

*If yes, continue. If no, refer to **Module 4** of the toolkit for further information on engaging with at-risk youth.*

9. If the workshop is facilitated by an external agency, it is important to meet with the speaker to brief them on the target group and provide tips for working with the client group. It is also important to have additional support for supervision. MYSA has found that group work with youth at risk can be challenging, as some young people lack concentration. Having several volunteers to assist on the day is an informal and effective way for at-risk youth to build their networks. MYSA's volunteer-to-participant ratio is 1:6.

If delivered by an external agency, have you met and advised the facilitator? Yes No

Do you have volunteers helping on the day?

Yes

No

10. MYSA has found that written evaluation with at-risk youth does not work and that verbal feedback and quotes are more effective. Throughout the session, it is important to capture what the young people say, particularly if they share a story that links into the issue being discussed as it shows they relate to the content. While MYSA's usual practice is to follow up with participants no later than one week after the session, with this highly mobile group it should be within the first three days. Ask them what they learned, whether they enjoyed the session and what they would like done differently. Ask them if they want to make an appointment with a caseworker/youth-worker. Group work has been the best vehicle for accessing young people at risk, so ask them in for a game of pool or a snack after school. Ask the young person if they want to be included on a mailing list to gauge their interest in other programs and confirm their details.

Do you understand why evaluation is important?

Yes

No

Have you prepared your evaluation questions?

Yes

No

Have you followed up with the participants after the session?

Yes

No

Have you offered case work and other services to the young person?

Yes

No

Have the participants accessed your service since the group work?

Yes

No

11. Evaluate the process and yourself. Ask yourself how well you did. Was the session successful? Why or why not? What can you do better next time? Share your learning with staff (what worked well, what didn't work well) so others can learn and improve their approach to group work.

Have you made time to evaluate yourself?

Yes

No

Did you share your learnings with your colleagues?

Yes

No

If you require further information or support, please contact Multicultural Youth South Australia on (08) 8212 0085 or email us at info@mysa.com.au

References

Multicultural Youth SA Toolkit — A Practical Guide for Working with Young Migrants and Refugees

Under the Radar project: Research Executive Summary