

CALD Service Info Sheet:

Working with Refugee Families July 2008

Many families come to live in Australia under the Humanitarian Settlement Program and eventually gain permanent residency. Travelling to and resettling in Australia is a life-changing event for a client and their family, and it is helpful if service staff have some understanding of the issues for refugee families, to increase their sensitivity to families' needs.

A major challenge for many refugee families is addressing basic needs whilst adapting to different cultural, legal, financial, housing, religious and social systems. Some of the key settlement issues that impact on families include:

- ◆ Uncertainty about immigration status and it is important for service staff to understand the status of a family in order to understand which entitlements and social service they can access, e.g. disability support pension. Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) are granted to refugee migrants for 3-5 years. People on TPVs can work and claim Medicare benefits, but are not entitled to many social security benefits.
- ◆ Access to appropriate and affordable housing
- ◆ Health concerns and access to health services. People under refugee status may have lived with serious physical and mental health problems for many years which have gone untreated. Some conditions may lead to permanent disability.
- ◆ Employment and Income Issues.
- ◆ Education. Due to lack of education, migrant children and adults may demonstrate delays in learning and development. Limited literacy in English will impede parent's ability to complete forms, sign agreements and understand care plans. It is highly recommended that assessment forms & care plans be translated into the carer's preferred language, or be completed using an interpreter.
- ◆ Racism and discrimination. Migrants and refugees do experience discrimination in their general interactions with the community and in areas such as access to employment and housing. These experiences have a significant impact on their wellbeing and ability to settle successfully in Australia.
- ◆ Changes in family roles & dynamics. Families undergoing settlement often experience significant and rapid changes in family roles and relationships. Examples may include changes to the role of father as the income earner as a result of unemployment; or changes in the parent-child relationship as the result of children acquiring English skills and cultural knowledge faster than their parents. Children may be called upon to interpret for their parents which is usually inappropriate and undermines the parental authority.

(source: DOCS 2008, Practice Guide for NSW Out of Home Care Services)

The Impact of Trauma on Refugee Families

Refugee families have often experienced trauma prior to arriving in Australia as a result of living in situations of war, famine, government or military persecution and constant exposure to the threat of violence or starvation. Parents and children who have experienced these situations may be suffering trauma which can in turn affect:

- ◆ Their psychological, emotional & physical wellbeing.
- ◆ Their ability to function effectively as parents / carers and provide care and protection for their children.

See over page for support services for Refugee Families.

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Support Services for Refugee Families.

1. Migrant Information Centre PH: 9285 4888 www.miceastmelb.com.au
Suite 2/ 27 Bank Street, Box Hill.
MIC offers a range of services for new migrants, providing information and support with migration issues, employment, English classes, housing, health, aged care & disability , family support, childcare and volunteering.
2. Foundation House PH: 9388 0022 www.foundationhouse.com.au
6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick.
Foundation House provides direct services to refugees who have survived torture or war-related trauma. Services include counseling, advocacy, group work, psycho-education and therapies.
3. Refugee Council of Australia PH: 9348 2245 www.refugeecouncil.org.au
81-85 Barry Street, Carlton.
RCA provides advocacy, protection, support & legal advice for refugees and asylum seekers within Australia.
4. Asylum Seekers Resource Centre PH: 9326 6066 www.asrc.org.au
12 Batman Street, West Melbourne.
ASRC work directly with asylum seekers to provide a range of support including casework, counseling, human rights law, health, English language classes and home tutoring, social & recreation programs, employment assistance, food bank & material aid.

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