



INQUIRY INTO MIGRANT SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES

Submission from Anglicare Victoria

31 January 2017

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**BETTER
TOMORROWS**

Dear Mr Wood,

Thank you for allowing the opportunity for Anglicare Victoria to contribute to this Parliamentary Inquiry. We feel that we are in a strong position to usefully contribute to the Inquiry, given our experience as a service provider.

Anglicare Victoria is a leading social services organisation, with a total expenditure of approximately \$100 million. The majority of this expenditure is on Victorian Department of Health and Human Services funded out-of-home care services and family services. The agency also provides a great many other community programs funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, and the agency's own resources, including family violence services, alcohol and other drug counselling services, and other programs.

Anglicare Victoria is an experienced provider of services to migrants. This includes having provided community detention services (now known as the status resolution support service) for the Commonwealth – both directly funded by the Commonwealth, and as a sub-contractor for the Red Cross.

In the course of providing these services, Anglicare Victoria was recently responsible for 121 housing units throughout North-West and South Metropolitan Melbourne, as well as in Ballarat. Within these units were housed over 100 migrant families, as well as over 400 unaccompanied minors (the majority of whom were Afghani males, as well as a substantial cohort of Sri Lankan males).

In preparing this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes, we have drawn on our experiences and insights as a service provider, as well as referring to relevant research and police data. I trust that you will find our comments and recommendations useful, and encourage you to contact me personally at [redacted] if you would like any further consultation regarding these matters or for Anglicare Victoria to provide evidence to this Inquiry.

Paul McDonald

CEO, Anglicare Victoria

Troubled young people in Melbourne

Contrary to the claims of tabloid media, there is demonstrably no epidemic of young people committing crimes in Melbourne. Youth crime in Victoria rose very slightly between mid-2015 and mid-2016 (by 7.6%), but is down, overall, since 2011.¹ We note that within Melbourne in particular, significant community concern has arisen about the so-called “Apex gang”, who have been reported to comprise mostly African and Pacific Islander migrants. Certainly, some serious and concerning crimes (including public brawls, and aggravated burglaries) have been committed by young people claiming membership of this gang, and we do not wish to downplay the impact that these crimes have had on victims and the community. However, portrayals in some media of Apex as a large, organised and coherent gang have been contradicted by Victoria police.

As Superintendent Paul Hollowood, Divisional Commander for the Dandenong Victoria Police division, has stated, “They are not a gang per se... “They're young men connected via a whole range of social networks. They don't have colours or a clubhouse, often they meet for the first time when they're incarcerated”.² As Superintendent Hollowood has also stated, the media focus on this cohort of youths is a case of people “looking to put a round peg in a square hole”.³

Melbourne does not have a gang problem, but rather, continues - as it has since the birth of the state - to contain a proportion of young people who come from difficult family situations, are poorly integrated into society and engage in antisocial behaviours. Some of these young people are migrants, but these are a minority. As Victorian police statistics show, the majority of aggravated robberies, car thefts and home invasions - the types of crimes which sensationalist media stories have linked to the Apex gang – are committed by people born in Australia.⁴

To quote the Southern Metro Assistant Police Commissioner Bob Hill, young people who commit crimes of the type that the media have linked to Apex are “disengaged with their family, their community; they're disengaged with their family values, their community values and their faith”. For those troubled young people who are also migrants, this disengagement is frequently related to difficult settlement experiences they have had.

The settlement experiences of young migrants

As a provider of community detention services, we have observed that young migrants vary greatly in how well they acculturate and settle in Australia. Both our own observations as well as empirical research support that there are several key factors which shape young migrants' experiences in this respect. These include connection to community and employment, access to services, family cohesion, and the influence of peers.

¹ Cowie, T. (2016, June 18). Crime is up in Dandenong but can the Apex Gang be blamed? *The Age*. Retrieved January 25, 2017, from <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/crime-is-up-in-dandenong-but-can-the-apex-gang-be-blamed-20160617-gplftk.html>

² As above.

³ As above.

⁴ Farnsworth, S. & Wright, P. (2016, December 6). Victoria youth crime: Statistics raise questions about calls to deport youth offenders. *ABC News*. Retrieved January 25, 2017 from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-04/statistics-raise-questions-about-calls-to-deport-youth-offenders/8087410>

The importance of connection to community and employment

Numerous studies have demonstrated that migrants are much better able to integrate into the broader culture and structure of their host country when they are assisted to do this by an established, local community comprising people from their culture of origin, as well as services specifically focused on people of their culture.⁵ Such local communities and services can buffer against new migrants' experience of culture shock and social bewilderment, whilst helping them to learn about the cultural norms and expectations of their host country. People within these established communities and services also assist new migrants to engage with important structural systems (e.g. how to apply for a driver's license, open a bank account, register as a student, etc.), and can link them with employment opportunities. In our experience as a service provider, this last point can be particularly important.

Research has shown that access to employment is a major factor affecting settlement success.⁶ With regard to young South Sudanese migrants in Melbourne (the ethnicity reported to comprise many young people who participate in the Apex gang), specific research has highlighted some key benefits to employment. These include, aside from obvious financial benefits, the opportunity to learn from workplace culture and to further develop positive social connections.⁷ These effects, in turn, promote further acculturation and pro-social community participation.

As we have found in providing services to unaccompanied minors, however, there can be limited employment opportunities for new migrants which are appropriate to their needs (i.e. potential limitations in English language ability, and incomplete understanding of Australian social norms). It is for this reason that connection to a local community comprising people from their culture of origin is so important for young migrants, in terms of finding a suitable job. People in these established communities may be able to provide the jobs themselves within their own businesses (e.g. working at a restaurant), or may be able to funnel the new migrants into jobs with their own employers - where these business owners already employ other people from the migrant's culture and are happy with their performance, and where English language ability is of less pronounced importance (e.g. general labourer positions).

The importance of access to services

In addition to being able to access services specifically focused on people of their culture, young migrants need access to mainstream healthcare and social services. This is critical to their settlement success.

It is important to note that many young migrants are much more likely to have mental health problems related to experience of trauma than people in the general population; with this, for many, owing to their experiences of war, social breakdown and persecution in their countries of origin. Notably, rates of mental illness related to trauma have been shown to be particularly high for Sudanese refugees.⁸ As is well established by psychological research, and as we have frequently observed ourselves as a service provider, such trauma often has cascading effects through generations. This is because traumatised

⁵ See ABS (2012), Bartels (2011), Brewer (2009) Gorman et al. (2003), OMI (2009) and Women's Centre for Health Matters (2010) as cited in Shepherd, S. (2016). Criminal Engagement and Australian Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations: Challenges and Implications for Forensic Risk Assessment. In *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 23(2): 256-274.

⁶ See Abdelkerim & Grace (2012), Blustein (2008), Fozdar & Torezani (2008), Paul & Moser (2009) and Taylor (2004) as cited in Abur, W. & Spaaij, R. (2016). Settlement and employment experiences of South Sudanese people from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne, Australia. In *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 37(2): 107-128.

⁷ Abur, W. & Spaaij, R. (2016).

⁸ Schweitzer et al. (2006) as cited in Shepherd (2016).

people may struggle to be nurturing parents, leading to their children developing their own emotional and behavioural problems. Accordingly, the children of migrant parents – despite not having been directly exposed to war, social breakdown or persecution themselves – may still be adversely impacted by their parents' experiences of these adversities, and develop significant psychosocial problems.

It is for this reason that migrants need access to mental health services that can provide them with effective treatment (which will often need to be longer term than a just a few sessions of psychotherapy, and provided in a culturally informed way). Without such treatment, mentally ill migrants may adopt maladaptive strategies to ease their suffering, such as abuse of alcohol and other drugs – which can exacerbate mental illness further. Substance abuse/dependence, in turn, increases the risk of criminal offending.⁹ We would point out that there are well established causal links between substance abuse/dependence and both property crimes and violent crimes – both of which have been associated with the activities of the Apex gang.

Unfortunately, however, migrants face barriers to accessing mental health services. Key barriers in this respect include lack of awareness of these services, and services not employing the use of translators as proactively or often as they should.¹⁰ These barriers also function to limit migrants' access to other healthcare services, as well as social services. Consequently, untreated health problems, and other unaddressed problems which social services might otherwise assist with (e.g. housing insecurity) can serve to limit migrants' connection to community and employment – the benefits of which to acculturation and settlement were espoused previously in this submission.

Another type of service which is especially important for migrants to be able to access are those which help them to improve English language capabilities. The importance of being able to speak the national language for improving acculturation and settlement outcomes cannot be overstated. Concerningly, we have heard anecdotal reports of dedicated English language schools and courses for migrants holding waiting lists, meaning that migrants may languish for a period as they wait for assistance in improving their English language skills.

Additionally, we have observed variation in how well secondary schools attended by young migrants provide English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Those schools which are very good at this tailor their approach to the specific learning needs of particular cultural cohorts (e.g. taking into account the cultural norms and worldviews of newly arrived Afghani students, for example, and synergising teaching approach with these). Staff at such schools also provide practical support, such as waiving fees for the loan of school laptops, or school uniforms. Schools that are not as successful in their provision of ESL courses, by contrast, tend to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, and do not make full use of Commonwealth and State funding that is available to help meet the needs of ESL students.

The importance of family cohesion, and the influence of peers

The processes of acculturation and settlement can strain family relationships; particularly those between parents and their children. There is evidence suggesting that young migrants find it easier to acculturate more quickly than their parents, as children and young people are generally much more adaptable to new linguistic and social environments. This can cause particular problems. It has been observed within Pacific Islander communities that tensions can arise in families as older family members seek to preserve traditional Pacific Islander customs, whilst younger family members seek to adopt mainstream attitudes and behaviours.¹¹ This dynamic has been observed in other cultures as

⁹ Andrews & Bonta (2010), Borum et al. (2006), Borum & Verhaagen (2006), Farrington & Loeber (2000) as cited in Shepherd (2016).

¹⁰ Shepherd (2016).

¹¹ See Shepherd & Italio. (2015). Maori and Pacific Islander overrepresentation in the Australian criminal justice system – what are the determinants? In *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 55(2): 1-16.

well. Moreover, in the families of migrants that come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, children may take on roles in their family (e.g. translator, person who fills out forms and makes arrangements with services/businesses) which weaken parental authority over them and undermine traditional family dynamics.¹²

Ultimately, differing speeds of acculturation between parents and children can lead to parents feeling disempowered, humiliated, frustrated and, sometimes, result in them lacking the capacity to protect children from undesirable influences.¹³ Chief among such undesirable influences is association with peers who engage in delinquent behaviour, which is established as a significant risk factor for violence and other criminal offending.¹⁴

Having a strong family structure and experiencing healthy family functioning, conversely, act as protective factors against the risk of offending.¹⁵ Young migrants who have access to such family environments have better settlement outcomes. Services, such as family services, can play a useful role in improving such family dynamics. Moreover, it is important to note that for those migrant families which have experienced loss of family members (through death or separation – possibly occurring in the country of origin), the capacity to experience strong and positive family functioning can be shored up through good relationships in the community. This is because family friends can take on roles as “defacto family members”, thereby reducing strain and isolation. This is yet another benefit of migrants having connection to an established, local community comprising people from their own culture of origin.

Shepherding, not booting, young people into the community – the importance of extended care

In contemporary Australia, young people in the general population are now more likely to continue to live with their parents well into their mid-20s, entering and exiting the family home several times as they pursue various personal development opportunities. Driven by such factors as the increasing uptake of post-schooling education, delayed marriage and the rising cost of housing, almost 50% of people aged between 18 and 24 are still living with one or both parents.¹⁶

In recent years, Anglicare Victoria has engaged in significant public advocacy that young people living in out-of-home-care environments should not be abruptly exited out of the care system when they turn 18. This is because such young people are subjected to the same factors which influence the needs of their peers in the broader population to live with their families later into adulthood. However, young people in care are generally less equipped with skills and resources to survive and thrive on their own, due to the impact of adversities they have experienced that led to them coming into care.

The same is true of young migrants who are living in community detention care contexts, except that such impeded capacity to survive and thrive on their own in the community is often compounded by incomplete acculturation, as well as limited English language capability. We have witnessed a number of young people “age out” of community detention care contexts designated for minors before they were ready to fend for themselves in the community, and suffer poor outcomes as a result (which are expensive for State and Commonwealth Governments to deal with)– including chronic unemployment and a slide into criminal offending. Accordingly, it is our contention that new migrants should be

¹² OMI (2009), Queensland Government (2010) as cited in Shepherd (2016).

¹³ As above.

¹⁴ Andrews & Bonta (2010), Borum et al. (2006), Borum & Verhaagen (2006), Farrington & Loeber (2000) as cited in Shepherd (2016).

¹⁵ Shepherd (2016).

¹⁶ ABS as cited in Anglicare Victoria (2016). *Raising our children: Guiding young Victorians in care into adulthood. Socioeconomic Cost Benefit Analysis by Deloitte Access Economics*. Melbourne: Victoria.

supported to remain in care environments which they entered as minors past the age at which they become adults, until at least age 21.

Moreover, we note that this Parliamentary Inquiry is focused on the issue of offending behaviour committed by young people who come from migrant backgrounds. We would take this opportunity to again point out that, as Victorian police data has shown, the majority of aggravated robberies, car thefts and home invasions in Victoria - the types of crimes which sensationalist media stories have linked to the Apex gang – are committed by people born in Australia (whether from migrant backgrounds, or of Anglo-Celtic heritage). However, we would also point out that research has established links between having lived in out-of-home care and risk of criminal offending, as well as a host of other poor outcomes – including unemployment, youth pregnancy, homelessness, substance problems and increased hospitalisations.¹⁷ These issues cost both Commonwealth and State Governments a great deal of money, and international evidence suggests that their incidence amongst care-leavers could be diminished by allowing young people to remain in their out-of-home care placements into early adulthood (at least to age 21).¹⁸

Anglicare Victoria, with the assistance of Deloitte Access Economics, has produced modelling (detailing projected savings to Government) and proposals regarding this issue – see https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Raising-Our-Children_Guiding-Young-Victorians-in-Care-into-Adulthood.pdf . We invite the Commonwealth Government to consider and support these proposals as one strategy for reducing criminal offending (and other poor outcomes for young people and the community) within Victoria.

In particular, we draw the Government's attention to the following cost/benefit analysis (see overleaf), supporting the case for extending care to age 21. We would also make the point that, aside from this very concrete fiscal argument for extending care, Governments also have a responsibility to extend care so as to act like “good parents” to those youths who are ultimately their charge. Much current scientific research has now shown that, from a neuroscience perspective, the period of adolescence does not end at age 18 but rather continues well into the mid-20s. When young people are 18 (or 17, or even 16 – the ages at which some young people are very prematurely exited from the care system), this is a time in their neuropsychological development where they are prone to greater risk taking, and more open to undesirable peer influence. As such, young people at this age need support and guidance from adults who care for them in order to buffer against the potential volatility which can be wrought by their adolescent characteristics. Just as “good parents” in the community would not abruptly halt the provision of such support and guidance to their own children during the period when they need it so substantially, nor should Governments do this to young people in their care if they are to act as “good parents”.

¹⁷ See Anglicare Victoria. (2016).

¹⁸ As above.

Deloitte Access Economics: Cost and Benefit Analysis Findings



Improving the service response to troubled young people

It is our contention that Australian Governments and communities have an ethical responsibility to nurture troubled young people – whether migrants or not – so that they can overcome adversity, achieve their full potential and contribute to society. We call on the Commonwealth Government to exercise mature leadership by avoiding the temptation to take a hardened “law and order” stance with such young people. In particular, we urge the Government not to deport young people on visas who commit criminal offences. Many such young people have grown up in Australia, having left their countries of origin at a young age. It is our communities and service landscape that have contributed to these young people failing to walk a more desirable path, so it is our responsibility to correct their behaviour and improve their prospects.

In light of the observations and research findings outlined in this submission, we make the following recommendations for actions the Commonwealth Government can engage in to improve the settlement outcomes of young migrants.

1. Alter the visa system so that refugees on temporary visas are not restricted from participating in employment, given the importance of employment for promoting acculturation and settlement.
2. Alter the visa system so that refugees on temporary visas are not restricted from accessing Medicare, or any healthcare services available to residents and citizens.
3. Invest in services and initiatives that help improve new migrants’ connection with established, local communities comprising people from their culture of origin.
4. Fund more settlement services and mental health services targeting specific cultural cohorts (i.e. ethno-specific services). These should be made available to all new migrants irrespective of their entrance pathway to Australia (i.e. services should not exclude migrants based on whether or not they came to Australia via humanitarian intake).
5. Invest in campaigns to raise the awareness within specific migrant groups about the availability of social and healthcare services (particularly mental health services).
6. Advocate to State Governments that they ensure healthcare services (particularly mental health services) are more proactive in their use of translation services.
7. Undertake a campaign to link newly arrived migrant families to family services which can improve family cohesion and functioning.
8. Ensure that young migrants who enter care contexts as minors are allowed to remain in these placements after they reach the age of adulthood, to at least 21 years of age.
9. Appoint a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in the Commonwealth Government, following the example of the Irish and United Kingdom Governments. Such a Ministerial position could oversee inquiries into issues such as youth crime. These are more helpfully viewed as youth issues than immigration issues.