Supporting Young People and Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CLDB)

Youth and Children Policy Statement
2007
About FECCA

- FECCA is the national peak body representing and advocating for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Our role is to advise, advocate, and promote issues on behalf of our constituency to government, business and the broader community.

- FECCA promotes Australian multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice, community participation and the rejection of discrimination so as to build a productive, culturally rich Australian society.

- FECCA’s policies are designed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion, and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

Recognising the needs of Young People and Children from CLDB

Research indicates that young people are decreasing as a proportion of the overall population as our population ages. Demographic information about young people and children from CLDB enables us to ensure their needs are taken into account in service planning and delivery. The identification of issues relevant to young people and children of CLDB will help to ensure resources are allocated to meet the needs of the community.

Factors Impacting the Quality Of Life of Young People and Children from CLDB

The quality of life of young people and children from CLDB is affected by the following:
Access to Services
Lack of culturally appropriate services discourages young people of CLDB from accessing the service system. Services often do not take account of dress codes, dietary needs, prayer times, restrictions around gender mixing and other cultural or religious practices.

Access to Education and Employment
Students with a language background other than English, or English as a second language (ESL) were generally found to have lower school achievement scores across the board. Many young people find it difficult to cope with language acquisition particularly if they are not literate in their first language. The current education system is inflexible and does not provide adequate ESL support for young people of CLDB. Also families of children from CLDB often have little knowledge of the education system and may have unrealistic expectations of their young people. There is a lack of alternative pathways for young people between school and further training and employment which particularly impacts on young people from CLDB who have experienced disrupted or no formal education.

Maintaining a language other than English however, also assists young people with a number of career opportunities. Research has shown that people with bilingual and bicultural skills have been successful in a number of careers, this including business, diplomacy, journalism, education, tourism and government. For young people with CLDB backgrounds, maintaining and exploring their culture can be a commitment that leads to personal development and fulfilment. More importantly, it builds an understanding of people from other countries and cultures, which also contributes to a more vibrant society.

Representations of CLDB young people in the media
Media reporting often includes negative images of CLDB young people including allegations of ethnic gang violence and drug related issues.

Racism and Bullying
Violence and bullying in schools are an ongoing cause of concern for schools and communities in general. It is increasingly being recognised that bullying can have a number of detrimental effects on both the victims and the perpetrators, including detriment effects to physical and psychological health, educational performance and social development. The Kids Help Line identifies racial harassment, discrimination and prejudice as forms of bullying. Around 50% of calls to the Kids Help Line in regard to bullying come from children of CLDB.
Police and Justice Issues
Young people from CLDB often have a poor understanding of the Australian legal system and their legal rights. There is also an overrepresentation of young people from certain cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the justice system. Within the juvenile justice system there is a perceived lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity to the needs of young people from CLDB. Young males recounted that if they are of a particular "ethnic" background they are labeled with the negative term "members of a gang". This often leads to over-policing and being perceived as a threat.

Refugees
Issues for young people and children as refugees stem from both their experience of oppression, persecution, violence and emotional trauma associated with the situations which drove them and their family from their home; and the lack of access to services particularly for those on temporary protection visas.

Housing and Homelessness
Newly arrived young people and children from CLDB may arrive unaccompanied; they may have significant guardianship roles for younger siblings or may have to live within completely changed family arrangements. Families may be restructured due to family members missing, separated or unable to migrate. The lack of affordable and appropriate housing is an important issue particularly for large families who may have to live in overcrowded conditions. As well the roles of young people within the family can change as their ability to acquire language skills means they are asked to be an advocate for the family, help with settlement and provide interpreting services. Intergeneration conflict can arise around financial issues, independence, activities outside the home and sexual relationships. Refugee young people have been found to be six times more likely to become homeless than their Australian born peers.

Participation in Society
Sport and recreation are important ways for children and young people to develop social networks and a sense of belonging and well-being in the wider community. There are also substantial health benefits to participants and the participation of people from CLDB promotes understanding, harmony and multiculturalism. Unfortunately children and young people from CLDB experience barriers to active participation such as a lack of parental support, financial costs, lack of information about sporting clubs and culturally inappropriate programs.
FECCA’s Position on Policy and Programs for Youth and Children from CLDB

FECCA supports:

- The Federal Government’s ‘Communities for Children’ initiative which targets disadvantaged communities and provides funding for local early childhood development initiatives.

- The Federal Government’s ‘Skills for the Future’ package which addresses the need for Australians to gain new skills and to upgrade those skills over their working lives. The package includes initiatives that will help adults to gain the critical literacy and numeracy skills they need in the workforce as well as incentives for workers to take up an apprenticeship mid-career.

- The Federal Labor Party’s commitment to establishing the Australian Youth Forum and restoring the position of the Minster for Youth. The Australian Youth Forum should recognise the special concerns and needs of ethnic youth and should ensure the equitable distribution of funds and allocation of resources. The Australian Youth Forum should also encourage participation from young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, reflecting on the needs and difficulties faced by the next generation of Australians.

- A non discriminatory approach to service delivery the addresses the access needs of young people and children with cultural, linguistic, physical or other specific requirements.

- Policy planning and development for youth issues that always incorporate a youth perspective.

- Practical initiatives that improve the well-being of young people and children including making information available in a range of community languages and addressing community concerns about issues that affect young people and children.

- Young people and children programs that are flexible and have the capacity to respond to changing individual and community needs.
FECCA’s Recommendations for the Formulation of a Responsible Youth and Children’s Policy

Policy Objectives

FECCA advocates the following policy objectives to support young people and children:

- Provision of services that encourage and support the development and cultural identity of young people and children of CLDB.
- Ensuring that all youth and children services such as maternal and child health centres, youth centres, legal and accommodation services be accessible, supportive, understanding and responsive to young people and children of CLDB.
- Increased awareness by the community about issues that impact on the ability of young people and children from CLDB to participate fully in society.
- Positive promotion of young people and children from CLDB in the media.
- Recognition that young people and children from CLDB have valuable and positive contributions to make to society.

Ensuring an Effective Youth and Children’s Policy

FECCA believes that the following would positively address issues confronting young people and children from CLDB.

- **Program development and service delivery for young people and children that effectively incorporates linguistic, cultural and faith diversity** and which includes:
  - The provision of flexible service delivery models that are culturally relevant to the CLDB community.
  - Organisations to monitor service delivery and design to ensure that programs address the needs of young people and children from CLDB.
- Ongoing cultural sensitivity training, evaluation and accountability for program staff.
- Professional development for staff to include key cultural competency skills.
- Coordination/collaboration with other services including culturally or ethno-specific services.
- Recruitment of staff from diverse backgrounds to more accurately reflect the demographics of the Australian community.

- **Improved access to information in languages other than English** for young people and children that include:
  - Effective utilisation of bilingual staff to provide information where possible
  - Provision of qualified interpreter services when required
  - Improved cultural competence in the workforce of youth and children services such as youth centres, maternal and child health centres, health, legal and accommodation services.
  - Help lines and translated materials for young people and children that support the provision of information in languages other than English.

- **Adequate ESL support in all education environments** such as childcare centres, kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities which includes:
  - Additional funding and resources for ESL teaching
  - Orientation programs in all education centres for newly arrived migrants and refugees
  - Support for children from war zones or who are unfamiliar with classroom environments.

- **Investment in apprenticeships and employment programs** that specifically address the needs of young people from CLDB that include:
  - Promotion of apprenticeships and employment programs for young people from CLDB who have experienced limited or disrupted educational opportunities
  - Widening apprenticeship opportunities beyond traditional manufacturing industries to meet recognised workforce shortages
• Development of alternative pathways for young people from CLDB to support them in accessing tertiary education, training programs or whilst seeking employment.

• **Promotion of positive images of young people and children from CLDB** in the media by:
  - Programs that portray young people and children from CLDB in a positive light
  - Facilitate the access of young people and children from CLDB to creative media related opportunities.

• **Advocating for the eradication of racism and bullying** towards young people and children from CLDB via the development and implementation of programs to combat racism and bullying in educational environments.

• **Development of programs that improve access to the legal system and the cultural awareness and competence of the police and justice system** by:
  - Supporting the Australasian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau and Multicultural Police Initiatives in each police force.
  - Professional development for staff within the police and justice system to include key cultural competency skills.
  - Develop a data system to identify the cultural backgrounds of clients of the juvenile justice system in order to evaluate and develop culturally appropriate policies.
  - Provide information on the Australian legal system and legal rights in languages other than English.

• **Development of specific programs to meet the needs of refugees** which include:
  - The establishment of a national refugee youth strategy to address issues such as trauma, disrupted education, fragmented families and dislocation.
  - Adequate resourcing of support programs to assist refugees in settlement in Australia including counselling and health care support, particularly for trauma related matters.
  - Review of the length of time that resettlement programs are available to children and young people from CLDB.
  - The phasing out of the Temporary Protection Visa system and the development of an open, fair, timely and equitable process to be followed in determining the residency status of children and young people from CLDB, which includes adequate legal support.
• **Maintaining of accurate and reliable data on ethnic youth issues** by Government and non-government organisations and agencies.

• **Improve access to appropriate housing and address issues of homelessness** for children and young people from CLDB which include:
  - The provision of youth housing and accommodation options that are culturally appropriate such as gender specific accommodation.
  - Programs to address youth homelessness that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for young people from CLDB.

• **Support the participation of children and young people from CLDB in sport, recreation and the community** by:
  - Developing programs which promote sporting and recreational opportunities to children and young people of CLDB.
  - Develop culturally appropriate guidelines for sporting clubs and recreational venues which include information about dress codes, gender and other cultural issues.

• **Ensure that all school children, regardless of their ethnic, racial or religious background, can realise their potential and experience a healthy and welcoming education environment.**
  As a minimum this should include:
  - Teachers and principles taking strong action against racial or ethnic discrimination at school.
  - Employment of non-English speaking background teachers, particularly where they have a second language.
  - Greater funding for tertiary institutions on the study of LOTE and cultures, acknowledging that knowledge and understanding of a second language and culture could greatly increase an individual’s chances of employment.
  - Proper use of English as a Second Language (ESL) funding to ensure that those students who need ESL get it.
  - Integration of ESL with appropriate welfare assistance, such as vocation and welfare counselling for young people who are unemployed and require ESL.
  - Support for young people with literacy problems, as distinct from ESL needs. The integration of ESL training with vocational assistance and training is especially important for
young people, who often lack work experience and have limited knowledge of the labour market.

- Opportunities for children with a LOTE and refugee background to access ESL education from pre-school up to, and including Year 12. ESL provision for children should not be denied or limited due to demographic, social or economic disadvantages. There should be full access to ESL courses for newly arrived children and longer term students in more advanced ESL. ESL education for children should be culturally sensitive, provided within the school system wherever possible and affirm the dignity of the child and their home culture. ESL education should be taught by ESL qualified teachers, who have ongoing professional development and are recognised as ESL teachers within the school system.

- Provision of specialised career counselling to assist CLDB youth to make appropriate choices in relation to their future study or employment.

Sources

This policy has been formulated using feedback, comment, information, consultation and advice from the following:

1. FECCA’s members and their networks across Australia
2. Service Providers, case workers, healthcare professionals and workers, volunteers
3. Federal, State and Local Government agencies
4. Advocacy bodies, peak bodies and professional organisations
5. Community leaders and members
6. Individual comment and experience

Endnotes


iv Ibid.

v Ibid.


vii Kids Help Line (2004) "Newsletter." Volume, DOI:


xi Ibid.

xii Migrant Information Centre (2005). City of Whitehorse Youth Project - Increasing Access to Sport and Recreational Clubs in Whitehorse by Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds.