

Just Hanging Out: Young Refugees and Public Space

**Report prepared by
Multicultural Youth South Australia Inc (MYSA)**



**Funded by
Adelaide City Council**

**In collaboration with
Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Department for Families and Communities
and
South Australian Police**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by Multicultural Youth South Australia Inc (MYSa) in partnership with the Adelaide City Council (ACC), the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the Department for Families and Communities (DFC) and the South Australian Police (SAPOL). The project was commissioned by the ACC in response to concerns about young refugee's use of public space in the Central Business District (CBD) of Adelaide.

Report Contents

This report presents five sets of findings:

1. Results of face-to-face interviews with young refugees and other young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
2. Results from non-participant observation of CALD young people in the CBD.
3. Results from interviews with SAPOL.
4. Results of questionnaires completed by businesses and retailers based in the CBD.
5. Results from questionnaires completed by service providers based in the CBD.

Summary of Findings

Interviews with CALD Young People

In total, 271 young people were interviewed. Of these, 70% (189) arrived in Australia as humanitarian entrants, either as refugees, sponsored refugees or asylum seekers. The majority of the remaining participants were from CALD backgrounds and most were first or second generation migrants. The main findings of the interviews are as follows:

Current Refugee Youth Needs and Issues

- Of the 189 young refugee participants interviewed, 68% cited separation from family and friends as their most important concern;
- An important issue for 53% of young refugees was securing employment, in most cases part-time employment. There was no difference proportionally in the reports received from males and females. Participants expressed a sense of hopelessness at ever finding work, with some attributing their inability to find work to racism among employers;
- Half of all participants reported that they regularly faced racism from a range of sources including peers, teachers, the police, security guards, shop assistants

and managers and the general public. While there was no difference proportionally in the reports received from males and females, participants belonging to “visible” minority groups, reported increased exposure to racism. Experiences include being insulted, mocked, harassed, assaulted, stereotyped, judged, misjudged and excluded;

- While participants reported a variety of reactions and responses to racism, very few presented themselves as unfortunate victims at the mercy of social forces outside of their control. Indeed, many young people reported actively resisting racism, with males more likely to act out their anger in physical fights and “punch-ups” and females in verbal arguments;
- Racially motivated peer-on-peer violence was identified as a significant problem and is not just restricted to schools. Some young males get into fights at school when they are confronted with racism while others wait until they are outside the gaze of teachers and other authority figures;
- While racially motivated physical violence against and among females did not emerge as a significant issue (only one incident of female-on-female violence was reported), many young CALD females reported being insulted, teased, ridiculed, bullied, harassed and excluded. Such treatment is perpetrated by both females and males and occurs in and outside of school;
- Many young refugees reported difficulties adapting to their new home country, with home sickness (41%), difficulty understanding Australian culture (28%), learning English (15%), culture shock (21%) and problems adjusting to school life (16%) identified as the main concerns;
- Other issues facing refugees include difficulty finding acceptance from peers (11%), intergenerational conflict (10%), problems finding suitable accommodation (10%) and lack of friends (5%);
- Sixty percent (60%) of all participants reported very little or no involvement in their ethnic community events and activities;
- Many participants reported that they were associating with friends who were involved in potentially risky or undesirable activities, including alcohol, drug and tobacco use, truancy, violence, stealing, shoplifting, carrying weapons and vandalism;
- However, 83% of participants reported that they did not experience peer group pressure. The remaining 17% reported being pressured in one or more areas including alcohol, drug and tobacco use, truancy, fighting, stealing, shoplifting, going out or staying out, having sex, carrying weapons and vandalism.

CALD Young People's Use of City Space

- Just under half of the participants reported coming from the Western and Northern suburbs to visit the city;
- In total, 94% of participants reported visiting the city at least once per week, with 56% visiting three times or more;
- Friday was reported as the most popular day for visiting the city. Wednesday and Thursday were next and are equally popular. Saturday and Sunday were reported as the least popular days;
- Most participants (73%) reported visiting the city just to “hang out” with friends;
- The city was seen as appealing to CALD young people because it is well-frequented by other young people, it provides a place where young people can escape the gaze of parents, caregivers and other authority figures such as teachers and community leaders, and it has more to offer than the suburbs in terms of entertainment and atmosphere;
- While the majority of participants reported positive experiences when visiting the city, 27% described a range of negative experiences including street robbery, attempted robbery, intimidation, racism, assault, fights between groups of young people, sexual harassment and police harassment;
- Young people, mostly males, reported being subject to disproportionate and unrelenting police and security guard surveillance and interference, with many attributing this to racism. Young people reported being stopped, questioned, asked to produce personal identification (ID), moved on or arrested simply because they were street present. Despite these control measures, young people gave no indication that they would stop frequenting the city;
- In total, 48% or 130 participants reported that they had stayed in the city after the last public transport had left, ranging from 1-100 times in the last 12 months. The average was 15 times with a standard deviation of 21 times. While more males (53%) than females (37%) reported remaining in the city, the stakes may be higher for females who are widely considered to be at greater risk after dark. Of particular concern, 55% or 72 participants were under the age of 18 years and 80% of these were aged 16 years and under. More males (54%) than females (36%) reported staying in the city, ranging from 1-63 times in the last 12 months. The average was 12 times with a standard deviation of 19 times;
- While participants reported using different means and measures at different times to get home, 36% reported staying in the city until morning, 26% were picked up by friends or parents, 26% stayed the night with friends, 25% caught taxis, 19% walked home and 13% drove home. Younger participants reported using similar means and measures as older participants, including walking home. This often involved walking long distances (e.g., walking home to Findon or Kilburn);

- The main problems participants encountered when they stayed past the last public transport are as follows:
 - Young girls and women being followed and/or harassed by (usually) older men
 - Robbery (usually for cigarettes)
 - Assaults (usually racially motivated)
 - Verbal abuse (usually racially motivated)
 - Harassment (usually racially motivated or alcohol related)
 - Conflict with the police

Young Refugee Understandings of the Role of the Police in Australia

- The overwhelming majority of participants were familiar with the role of the police in Australia and the services they provided. However, many were ambivalent about whether the police could be trusted. The police were described by 30% of participants as racist, ageist, unfair, aggressive, reactionary, unhelpful and/or unresponsive. While most of these comments were received by young males, many comments were also received from females;
- While distrust of the police was an important issue for many participants, the picture is not one of uniform distrust. Seventy percent (70%) of participants did not report any problems with the police at all. Moreover, some reported positive experiences and interactions and many were also very complimentary and approving in their comments;
- Participants were asked if they would ask the police for help if they were in trouble. In total, 73% reported that they would seek police help and 23% reported that they would not. The remaining participants did not answer the question. Of those who reported that they would seek police help, 13% provided a qualified “yes”. Within this group, some reported that it “all depends” on the nature and severity of the problem; police help would only be sought if the trouble was “big”, “serious”, “real” or “an emergency”;
- Many male and some female participants reported that they would only seek police help if they were unable to resolve a problem on their own or if their friends were unable to help. Self-reliance or reliance on friends and, to a lesser extent, family, emerged as a key theme;
- Other participants reported that they would only seek police help if the police officers concerned appeared friendly and approachable. Some expressed doubts that the police would be “fair” to teenagers generally and CALD youth particularly;
- Of the 23% of participants who reported that they would not seek police help, most were young males. Major reasons for not seeking police help included self-reliance or reliance on friends and/or family, distrust of the police and perceived police racism;

- Participants, again mostly males, also reported that help-seeking could make situations worse. Concerns were raised that the police may “make a big deal” of minor issues or worse, they may “turn on” the victims instead of the perpetrators;
- Some young male participants also expressed concerns that help-seeking may result in them becoming a Person of Interest (POI) to the police;
- A few young male participants reported that they would not seek police help even if they were in serious trouble because it may result in them being investigated or arrested for unrelated unlawful activities;
- Some young male participants reported that they would not seek help because the police do not “listen” to or take young people “seriously”. Even among those who reported that they would seek help, many expressed doubts about being taken seriously;
- Many participants stated that they want to be left alone by the police when they have committed no offence. They do not want to be stopped, questioned, asked to produce ID, moved on, or arrested when they are peacefully assembled. Failing this, they want to be treated fairly and with respect in their interactions with the police. They want to be heard and they want to be taken seriously. Where conflict arises between different groups of young people, they want to receive equal treatment from the police. Finally, they want the police to understand that the vast majority of them are law-abiding; they do not want to be stereotyped or over-policed because of a few isolated cases of troublesome behaviour.

Service Utilisation

- Of the 271 young people interviewed, 62% reported having no contact at all with either city-based or local area services;
- The most frequently accessed services in the city were Centrelink, MYSA and the MRC. The most frequently accessed services in participants’ local areas were doctors, dentists and Centrelink;
- Only 7% of participants reported using community services in their local areas and none reported using youth-specific services;
- Participants reported a range of cultural and structural barriers to services. Lack of knowledge about services was the most frequently reported barrier, with many participants stating that they were not familiar with the services in the city or in their local areas;
- It was evident in the responses of many participants that they did not know what a community service was, for example, some participants identified public toilets, buses and churches as services;

- A number of participants implied or expressly stated that they did not believe services were helpful. While most did not identify which service/s they were referring to or elaborate on why they considered them unhelpful, some reported that they had asked for help but did not receive it;
- Other reported barriers to services included long waiting times for appointments, language barriers, services being too far away, service gaps in many local areas and fear that information given to service providers may not be kept confidential.

Non-participant Observation

The main findings are as follows:

- CALD young people tend to gather in small to large groups in the street or in shopping arcades. Hot spots include Rundle Mall, the MYER Centre, Hindmarsh Square and King William Street;
- While a broad range of CALD young people gather in these areas, the top four cultural groups are as follows:
 - Asian (mainly Cambodians and Vietnamese but also Filipinos, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese);
 - Middle Eastern (mainly Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians and Lebanese);
 - Second generation Greeks and Italians; and
 - African (mainly Sudanese but also Congolese, Ethiopians, Liberians and Sierra Leonean)
- The overwhelming majority of CALD young people were observed to be socialising with friends - very little unlawful behaviour was observed;
- Some CALD young people were observed to be a nuisance, for example, blocking the entrance to stores but they appeared to be unaware of the effect of their behaviour on retailers and shoppers;
- Public space was observed to be regulated and controlled differently for CALD young people. The police were often observed to stop, question and move CALD young people on, particularly those from visible minorities, for no apparent reason. CALD young people's right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, was often not respected or upheld;
- Bystanders were observed to stop and watch the police discipline CALD young people, raising concerns that the police may be contributing to negative public perceptions of CALD youth as troublemakers;
- There is a lack of space for CALD young people in the CBD that is inclusive and free of surveillance, harassment and coercive control.

Interviews with the Police

The main findings are as follows:

- CALD young people generally congregate in four key areas:
 1. Rundle Mall, particularly the food court in the MYER Centre. CALD young people usually congregate in these areas in the early mornings, late afternoons and evenings. Friday is the most popular day of the week for visiting the city.
 2. Hindley Street. CALD young people usually congregate in this area in the early mornings, late afternoons and evenings. Young people from Asian backgrounds also gather in Karaoke bars in Hindley Street.
 3. Hindmarsh Square. CALD young people usually congregate in this area in the early mornings, late afternoons and evenings.
 4. CALD university and TAFE students often congregate in North Terrace and Rosina Street near their educational institutions.
- While there are generally no serious problems associated with CALD young people's use of Rundle Mall, some can be a nuisance by blocking the entrance to stores;
- There are problems in other (unspecified) city areas, for example, under-aged CALD young people trying to gain entrance to nightclubs, fights between different groups of CALD young people, and drunken and disorderly behaviour;
- Conflict often arises when security guards move young people away from store entrances. This conflict was attributed to a mutual lack of understanding and communication. Security guards in particular were seen as needing to improve their communication skills and treat CALD young people with more respect;
- In general the police do not have many dealings with CALD young people but of the dealings they do have, these are increasingly with newly arrived refugees and, occasionally, their families and broader community;
- CALD young people, particularly refugee new arrivals, were seen as having a negative attitude towards the police;
- While it was suggested that police officers who are frequently exposed to problem behaviour can become a little jaded, the police do not believe they harbour negative attitudes towards CALD young people;
- A need was identified for the police, youth workers and refugee community representatives to collaborate to address problems;

- A need was identified for more people from CALD communities to be recruited to the police force;
- It was suggested that the police should attend more CALD community events and visit more schools with a high CALD youth population to improve relations between police and CALD communities.

Businesses and Retailers - Questionnaires

The main findings are as follows:

- The presence of CALD young people in the CBD was seen as being in the direct commercial interests of businesses and retailers. CALD young people were reported to make a significant contribution to commercial activity, comprising a moderate to relatively large proportion of participants' overall customer base - between 21% and 40%;
- Asian and African young people comprise the largest proportion of participants' CALD youth customer base;
- The most popular service areas accessed by CALD young people are fast food, fashion and computer and video games;
- Most participants reported no problems with CALD young people and of those who did report problems, in all cases concerns were related to nuisance behaviour, particularly fighting, loitering and blocking the entrance to stores and arcades;
- Of the participants identifying problems with CALD young people, all reported having to call security guards and/or the police at some time or other to intervene. However, only three participants reported having to request help on a regular basis;
- Some newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds were seen as being "difficult" customers, mainly due to the extra work added to staff who have limited skills in negotiating language and cultural barriers.

Service Providers - Questionnaires

The main findings are as follows:

- The most frequently used city areas by CALD young people are Rundle Mall and Hindley Street, with the usual gathering times being immediately after school and the most popular day being Friday;
- Young people were viewed as having a legitimate right to use public space;

- The only problem participants highlighted in relation to CALD young people's use of public space was over-policing. This was seen as exacerbating already strained youth-police and youth-security guard relations;
- Community elders and youth workers were considered to have an important role in resolving problems associated with CALD young people's use of public space;
- Young people were seen as needing alternative places than the streets and shopping centres to gather in the city.

Summary of Recommendations

CALD Young People

Current Refugee Youth Issues and Needs

The following recommendation has been developed to ensure that the needs and issues highlighted by CALD young people are addressed:

- That policy and decision-makers consult with the Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia (RYINSA) to develop responses to identified need in the areas of employment, education and housing.

The following recommendations have been developed to address the conflict, misunderstandings, racism and violence occurring between various groups of young people:

- That education and training be provided to young people in schools to raise awareness and promote acceptance of cultural diversity.
- That school curriculum programs be revised and reformed to reflect a stronger multicultural focus.
- That more targeted strategies and initiatives be developed to bring young people together for positive multicultural experiences.
- That more initiatives be introduced in schools to acknowledge and celebrate all cultures throughout the school year.
- That youth and community services develop targeted strategies to reduce conflict and disputes between offending groups of young people.

The following recommendation has been developed to reduce racism in the broader community:

- That mainstream youth and community services collaborate with CALD communities and agencies to develop more strategies to address racism and discrimination in the broader community.

The following recommendations have been developed to address refugee youth involvement in potentially risky and harmful activities:

- That research be undertaken to identify the prevalence and nature of potentially risky and harmful activities among young refugees.

- That education and training programs be developed for young refugees to enable them to make safe choices in relation to drug, alcohol and tobacco use.

Use of Public Space by CALD Young People

The following recommendations have been developed to address the disproportionate police and security guard surveillance and interference in the lives of CALD young people and to improve youth-police and youth-security guard relations:

- That CALD young people be fully and respectfully consulted about how to manage perceived problems associated with their use of public space in the CBD.
- That youth workers, not the police or security guards, be recruited to deal with non-criminal troublesome youth behaviour in public places.
- That consultations be undertaken with CALD young people, the police, youth service providers and relevant CALD representatives to explore ways to improve police-youth relations.
- That more initiatives be developed to bring CALD youth and police together for positive experiences.
- That ongoing youth-specific, cross-cultural training be made available to the police and security guards to improve knowledge and skills in working with CALD young people.

The following recommendations have been developed to address the needs of young refugees, particularly under-aged refugees, who are remaining in the city past the last public transport home:

- That a street work service be established for young refugees during the hours of 10pm and 4am on Fridays and Saturdays.
- That a transport service be established for young refugees under the age of 18 years who are wandering the streets after the last public transport has left.

Service Utilisation

The following recommendations have been developed to improve CALD youth access to community services, resources and support:

- That Government fund more strategies designed to increase access and equity in mainstream service provision to young refugees and migrants, in line with its stated commitment to the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*.
- That as part of its funding guidelines with mainstream service providers, Government introduce appropriate accountability mechanisms to ensure that access and equity obligations are met.

- That mainstream youth and community services periodically review their agency policies, practices and programs with the overall aim of improving the access of CALD young people to services.
- That mainstream youth and community services develop improved strategies for disseminating information to CALD young people about services.
- That as part of their introduction to school life, young CALD new arrivals receive orientation to key youth and other services to better equip them to cope with the process of cultural transition and resettlement.
- That an advisory committee composed of individuals with a range of skills, experience and expertise be established to advise all of government on policies and strategies to achieve greater social inclusion for young refugees and migrants.

Non-Participant Observation

- That a youth friendly and inclusive venue be provided and resourced for young refugees in the CBD.
- That MYSA take a leadership role in bringing stakeholders together to address the over-policing of CALD young people in public places.
- That developers, planners and policymakers consider the needs, interests and rights of young people, including CALD young people, in all current and future public space policy, design and management decisions.

The Police

- That the police undertake consultations with young refugees, youth services and refugee community representatives to explore ways to improve police-youth and police-community relations.
- That youth and refugee-specific cross-cultural training be made available to the police to improve knowledge and skills in working with young refugees.

Businesses and Retailers

- That consultations be undertaken with CALD young people, youth services CALD community representatives, businesses and the police to address persistent nuisance behaviour.
- That businesses and retailers experiencing persistent nuisance behaviour be provided with alternatives to the use of police and security guards.

Service Providers

- That an education campaign be developed to inform the police, security guards, businesses, retailers and the general public of CALD young people's legitimate right to public space.
- That CALD young people be educated about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in public spaces to ensure that they do not infringe upon the rights of other community groups.