



# Interim Findings from ECCV's Intergenerational Relationships Roundtables

## Report of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's Roundtable Discussions in May 2015

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a peak advocacy organisation for Victorian ethnic and multicultural groups. ECCV has identified intergenerational issues as some of the settlement challenges and impacts of migration and displacement on families.

ECCV conducted two Roundtable Discussions on intergenerational relationships in new and emerging communities in Carlton and Footscray in May 2015. Participants included ethnic communities' leaders, multicultural and multi-faith service providers; and individuals with culturally diverse background from the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. The intimate setting of the roundtables encouraged honest conversations about issues affecting disconnected youth and their parents in new and emerging communities.

These roundtables are part of a series of community consultations that ECCV intends to conduct on the topic in 2015. Outlying growth suburbs and regional Victoria will be included. The purpose is to gather culturally diverse community perspectives on issues relating to family misunderstandings and youth disengaging. ECCV will then endeavour to find community solutions to advocate to the Victorian Government and key decision makers.

ECCV is working with Deakin University's Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation to analyse the issues from these conversations to better understand the dynamics of intergenerational relationships within new and emerging communities in Victoria. That report will be available from ECCV from July 2015.

## KEY POINTS

The key points arising from the consultations include the need for both young and older people from new and emerging communities to have a safe space to connect with their cultural heritage and to improve relationships in families. A pertinent issue was how to achieve better communication in families around cultural parenting styles and varying intergenerational expectations rather than a focus on intergenerational conflict.

The need for more cultural competence training for service providers was highlighted as important to enable them to engage better with new and emerging communities. Some exemplar parenting and support programs were identified.

Discussion around economic stress in families raised the need for bilingual financial literacy education for recent arrivals. Other insights included the need for improved English language proficiency; employment support and a better understanding of the impact of migration on cultural parenting approaches.

## INTERIM FINDINGS:

The following is a snapshot of issues raised by roundtable participants.

- We talked about the issues of new people coming to this country. For African communities who come to Australia, the first issue is the culture. The children get two cultures in the school and the home. It leads to a culture clash and an identity crisis.
- Another issue is the language. Some of the parents have a language barrier because the children speak half in their language and half in English. They don't always understand everything. Often the young person takes on the responsibilities of the father because of this which causes conflict.
- Mental health issues are not acknowledged. Coming from a war torn country to Australia people feel lonely. Even if they have some relatives, it is lonely and stressful in a nuclear family. Pressures to bring the family back home to Australia mixed with their children's needs become stressful for parents.
- While parents and their children had similar differences in outlook on their career choices, friends and social activities, participants said

that some migrant families faced additional pressure because of discrimination in the broader society.

- The children say the parents don't understand their life at school. They get bullied at school. Parent's inability to comprehend these pressures causes conflicts.
- For some migrants, their approach to parental discipline is contrary to parental expectations in Australia which can create some problems.
- In extreme cases, where children are removed from families due to domestic violence, they sometimes do not come back to the family because there is no facilitation to connect the young people with their culturally diverse families and community.
- The question was posed: is there any information about children in schools for their recently arrived parents? The answer was: No not for parents. A typical comment was, "We need programs for parents helping them to communicate with their children in a new country - those groups and programs work. But the funds to support them run out."
- Some young people come to Australia on visas as orphans or unaccompanied minors. After a certain time, family reunification has become more difficult for them as they ended up disconnected from their families.
- In some cultures such as South Sudanese, it is absolutely normal for young men to socialise in public places. A typical comment was, "It's natural to have at least ten guys hanging around together. In the western society that is seen as a gang." The police and community, however, may find this threatening instead of social behaviour.
- Spectrum MRC launched a website *Parenting in a New Culture* about improving parenting and communication in newly arrived families accessible at [www.parentinginanewculture.org.au/](http://www.parentinginanewculture.org.au/). *Parenting in a New Culture* was developed at Spectrum MRC jointly with OMAC (Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship) in 2012. That is a good practice example.

- A personal story told by a young woman from the Horn of Africa described coming to Australia with her grandmother and two brothers as hard. Her grandmother tried to culturally discipline the brother when he was missing from school and helped him integrate in the culture. Eventually DHS took him away and he became disconnected from the culture. Fearful of him committing crimes and going to jail, the young woman convinced him to go back to their country and she has lost contact with him as a result.
- Often the service providers do not have a good connection with the culturally diverse people they serve. A typical comment was, "They need to go out and find the people and consult. It's not sufficient to just be talking to two people. That's not consultation."
- There are no role models for young men from new and emerging communities.
- Many specialist services have been scrapped. Community initiatives miss out on funding. Service providers are under huge pressure to go out and help.
- One person commented, "We come from a very collective community background. What one suffers is shared by all. We are a collective family, community and the broader community. The raising of a child is the collective responsibility of the community. In the western culture there are families that have different ways. The kids don't accept the guidance and communication. In the family there is not much support for drugs and alcohol issues. There is not much support to get a job. For example you need to have an address to get a job. You need to have a commitment and do something to work towards it."
- There was significant pressure to send money back home. Participants from new and emerging communities felt that overseas payments compete with their local bills and fines as well as the cost of sporting activities for young people. There was a perception that the young people do not understand the extent to which that their families are connected with relatives overseas. Typical comments were, "If they don't send money you are not valued. If overseas families phone and ask for money and if you don't send money back home it is a great shame for the person."
- The focus of young people needs to fit in with their peers here in Australia and being able to afford to do so. Sport was highlighted as a way of engaging young people, but when the family is preoccupied with sending money overseas that's not easy to maintain.
- As a cultural practice in some overseas countries, managing money is usually in the hands of the father. Comments included, "In Australia when young people get benefits money, families make sure it goes to the dad. The kids don't understand why. When they eventually find out, it is properly explained to them."
- Participants commented that unemployment contributes to financial hardship. They said there is limited opportunity for jobs for them. There are many challenges in finding job and people felt that name changing is often needed. Some said they get demoralised because in Australia you have to have local experience and need for a local referee to apply for a job.
- There was a lack of bilingual financial literacy information sessions for people from new and emerging communities.
- Safe public spaces to express and heal family conflict are needed. One comment was, "What needed are facilities where kids and elderly people can engage. A local hub. That is not there. They need somewhere where they can socialise and talk collectively in their language and about their culture. That will help the community to transform their situation."
- Residential home-care or out of home care are often lack cultural competence. Examples include not being able to provide culturally appropriate food or understand religious observances which lead to disconnection from their family.
- Some people commented on the role of police which sometimes took the place of parents in terms of both authoritative advice and emotional affirmation, which some felt weakened the bonds of family and community.

- Stories touched on young migrants who experienced homelessness because of the lack of ethnic-specific services. One service provider stated that at one period of time, 75 per cent of people at one major homeless shelter in the city were from a refugee background.

This policy brief provides a preview into the ECCV series of briefs on pertinent issues around social cohesion arising from on-going consultations with people from culturally diverse, and new and emerging communities backgrounds.

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