

Session 5 BACKGROUND READINGS

Working with Refugee Children and Young People

There are some wonderful resources available to assist people who want to learn more about working with refugee children and young people. Some of them are:

1. Good Practice Principles Guide for Working with Refugee Young People

Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (VSPC)

Available at: www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/pdf/GPP_July2005.pdf

3. Resources from the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST):

Available at: www.survivorsvic.org.au/publications.php

School's In for Refugees: Whole School Guide to Refugee Students

The Rainbow Program for Children in Refugee Families: A collaborative, school-based program to support refugee children and their families

Guide to working with Young People from a Refugee Background

Taking Action: Human Rights and Refugee Issues Teaching Resource

Healthwise: Health Literacy Teaching Resource for Refugee and Other ESL Students

We have summarised some of the key points below, but this short training course is just an introduction to a very complex issue. We would encourage people to do further research for themselves.

Section a

MAKING SCHOOLS A PLACE OF RECOVERY

The school environment is thought by many to be *the* most important influence on the successful resettlement of refugee children. School teachers are ideally placed to identify problems as they emerge and to foster a supportive and encouraging environment to help refugee children adjust and recover.

Psychological help in schools may include therapy for the children and families and consultation with teachers, educational psychologists, and social workers. Liaison with the school health service to which children may present with physical symptoms should be facilitated.

In addition, teachers can do a lot to promote a supportive and encouraging environment to help refugee students adjust to life in Australia. There are many things teachers can do with their students to foster a respect and understanding for refugees' experiences and cultures and help them to adapt to school life, including:

Be kind and patient and speak slowly

Assist refugee students to integrate into school life and make friends

Teach them about Australia and its culture

Provide opportunities for refugee students to share their culture and some of their experiences, eg. have them give cultural presentations so that they are able to share and appreciate each others' cultural backgrounds
Foster relationships of trust and support with refugee children

It is crucial that refugee children are given support and assistance *before*

1. If refugee students receive appropriate psychosocial support – from family, community and service providers , they are able to begin to recover from their pre-arrival trauma and therefore adjust to life in Australia more quickly.

2. The resettlement process itself can be very traumatising for refugee students. How difficult it is largely depends on whether there are adequate services for children and their families to help them settle quickly and comfortably. Whether or not the mainstream community is welcoming of refugees also plays a big role in maximising or minimising resettlement trauma.

3. Refugee students' mental health is significantly affected

Daniella's father and mother have now set up a cleaning business together. Daniella has been learning English at high school and she works in a supermarket two nights a week. To celebrate their anniversary in Australia, Daniella's family held a party for all the members of the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme group. They served Columbian food and they danced all night.

The CRSS group members also gained new friends and new experiences. The rewards of helping refugees go both ways.

Section e

4 RECOVERY GOALS

The 4 recovery goals provide a framework for holistic support for refugees.

Recovery Goal 1

To restore safety and enhance control, reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety

How:

- provision of basic needs – health, welfare, education and accommodation
- identify causes of anxiety and address the effects of anxiety
- restore safety
- provide information about the trauma reaction (normalise)
- relaxation exercises to deal with the effects on the body

Recovery Goal 2

To restore attachment and connections and overcome grief and loss

How:

- foster a continuing, trusting connection with an available, caring adult
- group participation to reduce social isolation
- promoting a sense of belonging by overcoming resettlement problems
- link the young person with supportive groups and agencies
- provide opportunities for social/political action which may be valued by the young person and restore sense of purpose

Recovery Goal 3

To restore identity, meaning and purpose in life

How:

- group programs for promoting communication, reducing isolation and enhancing self-esteem
- integrating past, present and future through activities such as art, story telling and drama
- create new opportunities to facilitate a view of the future
- explore concepts of self, other and the community
- validate the trauma and difficulties experienced

validate profound cultural differences in values between country of origin and Australia and potential for conflict
education in human rights and the political background to violence

Recovery Goal 4

To restore dignity and self-value

How:

- strategies to reduce guilt and shame
- allow the expression of guilt and shame
- reflect to the young person that it is normal for them to wish that they could have done more to prevent others from being harmed
- in counselling sessions, allow young people to tell and retell events and stories in order to reduce guilt
- assist with developing ways in which the young person can actually do something to reduce guilt
- community acknowledgment of human rights violations and the need for redress

If teachers and counsellors can devise and implement activities and strategies to assist in these recovery goals within their own school communities, they will assist refugee students to capitalise on their innate resilience and to begin the process of healing from their trauma. This may require referral to specialist services and teachers and counsellors will have to explore what is available in their own areas.

Here are some places to start:

Section f

Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). (<http://www.startts.org.au>)

STARTTS services include:

- Individual counselling, group activities and camps
- “Rock and water” program for young men

Victoria: www.foundationhouse.org.au

Western Australia: www.asetts.org.au

NSW Refugee Health Service (<http://www.refugeehealth.org.au/>)

NSW Refugee Health Service is funded by the NSW Department of Health and provides services including refugee health clinics, including for refugee children, orientation to health system, advocacy and advice regarding access to health care. Telephone: (02) 8778 0770.

Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy – service providers

Schools requiring assistance should contact the relevant service provider listed below.

Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong

ACL Pty Ltd
3 Mary Street, Auburn NSW 2144
Telephone: (02) 9749 3300

Northern and Central NSW

Anglicare North Coast (Coffs Harbour) Migrant Services
2 McLean Street, Coffs Harbour NSW
Telephone: (02) 6651 8764

Southern NSW

St Vincent de Paul
Suite 12, 47 Baylis Street, Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
Telephone: (02) 6971 7175

Vicarious traumatisation

“Repeated exposure to the atrocity that one human commits against another can result in experiences of terror, rage and despair on the part of therapists” (Regeher & Cadell, 1999, p.56).

doubt the therapy. Lack of empathy or emotional unavailability on the part of the therapist can inadvertently re-traumatise the client (Hesse, 2002).

While these are natural defence mechanisms, it is essential that they are identified and addressed early on, for the wellbeing of both therapist and client. Refugee women, in particular, have to overcome so many obstacles – economic, linguistic, cultural, psychological – to even reach the point where they can begin to share their horrifically traumatic stories with anyone, that it is extremely important that they are provided with a supportive environment when they do so. Without experiencing empathy and understanding, they will be unable to begin to unpack the emotional baggage they carry with them from the refugee experience.