

## ***A Mentoring Pilot: Colony 47 and CMYI in Victoria***

On gaining funding to provide a specialist refugee JPET service, Colony 47 approached CMYI seeking to organise a visit by their staff to CMYI with a view to this being a mentoring experience. CMYI agreed to the visit and set out to document, using action research, the experience for all staff involved.

The initial phase of this project commenced with planning. Much of this was done prior to staff arriving in Melbourne and the result of this planning was that the following action research question was developed to guide the interactions of the two agencies over a two-day intensive visit.

*"What would it take to communicate our experiences working with refugee young people in order to:*

- *improve our own work practice, and*
- *improve outcomes for refugee young people"*

As part of the planning stage the two staff teams (five staff from CMYI and two from Colony 47) also identified the following additional goals from this pilot.

1. To provide an opportunity to step out of our service and see how others do things
2. To provide an opportunity to share our experiences and skills
3. To reflect on what we have done this time and consider how we might work together in the future

The 'act' stage saw the two staff teams collaborate through a detailed and comprehensive two-day program (see Attachment A). The two day program sought to provide an insight into how CMYI programs work, avenues for sharing good practice between the two staff teams' experience of the actual work. For example: attending client appointments, using an interpreter, attending a specialist multicultural youth network.

The following observations were made at the conclusion of the second day of the pilot:

- This experience confirmed our own work practice: "we're on the right track"
- When you're part of a larger context, you realise that issues are similar and there is greater potential for solutions
- Things aren't so different here in Victoria – many issues are similar
- We gained a glimpse of the future - communities here (Vic) are more established
- Documenting our discussions would have been good
- African Australian Welfare Council (AAWC) links good – looks like issues are just specific to VIC but actually are similar for Africans all around Australia
- Opportunities were created for future collaboration
- Having made space and time for discussions between both staff teams was really great
- We learned a lot through exchanging experiences and ideas
- It was really healthy to step outside our normal work context
- It was interesting to see other mixes of strategies e.g. case work/group work balance
- We came away, appreciating the importance of oral communication

- Simple strategies emerged like using UNHCR posters – the importance of visual material around workplace
- “This is what we wanted”

Highlight:

- Our visit to AAWC and time with the CMYI African Australian bi-cultural worker in that it was all Horn of Africa specific which is really relevant to our current client mix
- The introduction/discussion of Islamic faith – especially in current climate

The above observations were made by both the visiting Colony 47 staff and CMYI staff who also gained a great deal from the exchange.

The following reflections were made at the conclusion of the second day of the pilot following the time spent on observations:

- We realised it is not only workers that need to experience broader connections
- Young people really need older members of the community (& young leaders) to look to – leaders from Melbourne could be supported to visit communities in Hobart. This would offer connection, support and reassurance to the young people we work with
- Was great to experience work being done on the (school) multicultural festival – engaging parents, food, music, welcome – we could encourage this in Hobart schools
- Interesting to see how CMYI staff are able to build capacity in their own region with other services
- We need to consider posters (eg: UNHCR) displayed across Colony 47 – visually symbolic. “This is a place for me”
- It is important to talk to those community leaders who’ve been here longer – straddle both cultures
- We will also look around for bi-lingual workers and consider this in future employment into our service