



Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of CALD Communities

Victorian Foundation for
Survivors of Torture

21 October 2019

Introduction

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, commonly called Foundation House, welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of CALD Communities.

Foundation House was established in 1987 to assist survivors of torture and other traumatic events, of refugee backgrounds¹ who had settled in Victoria.² Our work is guided by an understanding that recovery and wellbeing is affected by a complex interplay of pre-arrival experiences and the risk and protective factors encountered by people of refugee backgrounds in Australia.

The engagement of children and their families of refugee backgrounds with early childhood services can provide an effective means to promote their health, wellbeing and settlement in Australia.

The submission describes significant barriers to and facilitators of the engagement of children and their families of refugee backgrounds with early childhood services and provides recommendations for the Inquiry to consider in order to promote the accessibility and responsiveness of services to this population.

It is informed by the work of Foundation House with a number of those services, our work with people of refugee backgrounds, and evidence from research literature, including that arising from studies in which we have been involved.

We have had the opportunity to study the excellent submissions of two other contributors to the Inquiry provided by:

- Murdoch Children's Research Institute (with whom we have conducted research into maternity and maternal and child health services for a number of years) and the Royal Children's Hospital;
- The Victorian Refugee Health Network, of which we are a member.

These cover some of the same issues addressed in our submission and other issues within their specific areas of expertise.

¹ Broadly, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a treaty which has been ratified by 145 nations including Australia, defines a refugee as someone who has left their country and cannot return to it owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking to be recognised as a refugee and is awaiting the outcome of their protection claims. In this submission we use the term "people of refugee backgrounds" to refer to those who: have arrived in Australia with, or who have subsequently been granted, permanent or temporary humanitarian visas; people seeking asylum; and those who come from refugee backgrounds and who may have another visa type. Where the immigration status a person currently has or had on entry to Australia is significant to service eligibility this is noted.

² Information about the work of Foundation House is provided in the Appendix and our website, www.foundationhouse.org.au.

Summary of recommendations for the Inquiry to consider:

Foundation House requests the Inquiry to consider adopting the following recommendations

Improvements in the collection and publication of data

1. The Inquiry should:
 - a. request the Department of Education and Training provide to the Inquiry data pertaining to the participation of CALD children generally and children of refugee backgrounds in particular, in State-funded early childhood services;
 - b. request the Department of Education and Training brief the Inquiry about current requirements for services to collect and report data on the participation of children and families of CALD background in general and refugee background in particular in State funded early childhood services; and
 - c. recommend that the Victorian Government require early childhood services to collect data on the engagement of children and families of CALD background people in general and those of refugee backgrounds in particular, and regularly publish the data.

Improvements in the provision of information

2. The inquiry should recommend that:
 - a. the Victorian Government and local governments produce information about early years services in languages spoken by refugee background communities and monitor how well it is reaching the audiences;
 - b. Local councils in areas of high refugee settlement employ and train bicultural workers to support communities to engage with early childhood services provided in their region;
 - c. The Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth government to provide access to funded interpreting for all Commonwealth-funded early childhood services.

Enhancing cultural competence and trauma-informed care

3. The Inquiry should recommend that the Victorian Government:
 - a. continue to fund professional development for early years services staff focusing on cultural competency and trauma informed care;
 - b. consider the particular resource implications of funding professional development for staff located in rural and regional areas.

Ensuring access to early childhood services is affordable

4. The Inquiry should recommend that until universal three-year-old kindergarten is fully rolled out across Victoria, the state government should expand the eligibility criteria for state-funded Early Start Kindergarten to include children of refugee backgrounds (including asylum seekers).

An overview of Foundation House work relating to early years services

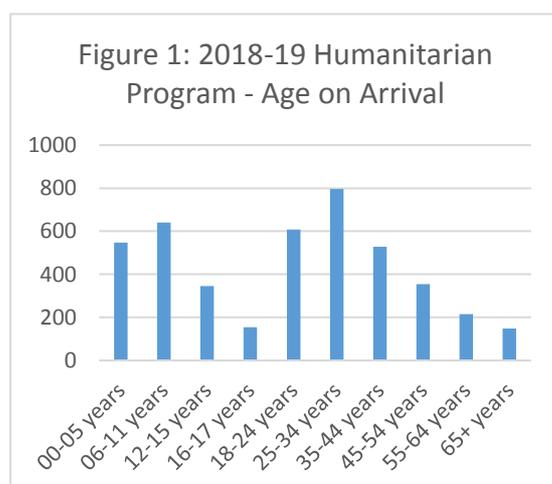
Our work relating to ‘early years’ services explores barriers and facilitators to inclusion, and develops strategies to promote full inclusion of families of refugee backgrounds in early years services. Specific activities include:

- Developing resources, professional development and consultancy.
- Collaborative place-based projects establishing dialogue between refugee-background communities and early years sector representatives.
- Collaborative projects with local and state-wide early years service providers.

The work of Foundation House in the early years sector with community advisory groups is described in more detail in Appendix 2.

More generally, Foundation House undertakes work to strengthen the capacity of newly arrived refugee communities to engage with Foundation House and other service providers. This work includes community engagement, contributions to networks and advisory groups, co-facilitation of community groups, leadership support and development, and direct service work.

People of refugee backgrounds living in Victoria



Over the past decade, over 51,000 people have settled in Victoria under the Commonwealth Government Refugee and Humanitarian Program,³ including 4,338 people in the past financial year.⁴ Each year a large proportion of arrivals are children, and another large proportion are of childbearing age (see Figure 1). In the past year, people have come from over 30 countries of origin, the top ten of which are displayed Figure 2.

At September 2019 there were another 5400 people living in Victoria on ‘temporary protection visas.’ These are of two types, the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) lasting for 3 years and the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) for 5.⁵

³ “Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program helps people in humanitarian need who are:

- Outside Australia (offshore), and need to resettle to Australia when they do not have any other durable solution available
- Already in Australia (onshore), and who want to seek protection after arriving in Australia” from “About the program,” Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, accessed 21 October 2019, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/refugee-and-humanitarian-program/about-the-program/about-the-program>

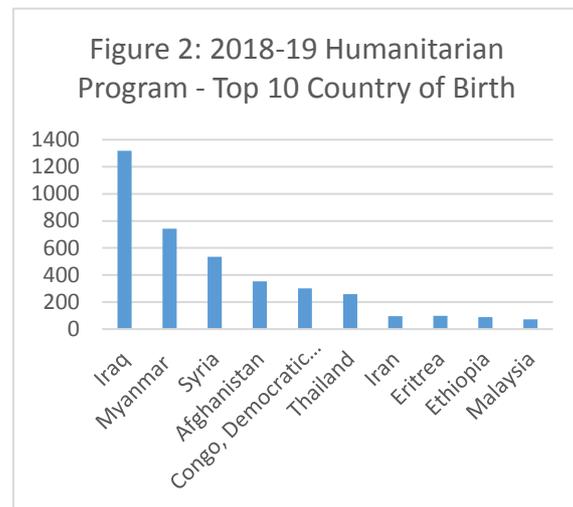
⁴ “Settlement database”, Settlement Data Team, Department of Home Affairs, accessed via email September 2019, settlement.data.request@homeaffairs.gov.au

⁵ Department of Home Affairs, *IMA Legacy Caseload: Report on Processing Status and Outcomes September 2019* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019), <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/ima-legacy-caseload-sept-2019.pdf>

There are over 6000 people seeking asylum living in the community who had arrived by sea, or were born to parents who had arrived by sea, 15 per cent of whom are under the age of eleven.⁶ A large number of people who arrived by plane and have claimed asylum are also living in the Victorian community but data about this group is not publicly available.

Rural and regional settlement

Fifteen per cent of humanitarian entrants over the past year settled in rural and regional areas, and the Commonwealth government has indicated plans to increase rural and regional settlement. Combined with incentives for people who hold Safe Haven Enterprise Visas to move to regional LGAs, it is likely that rural and regional settlement of people of refugee backgrounds will increase significantly in coming years.



The importance of early childhood engagement for children and families of refugee backgrounds

The importance of a child's early years to their future positive development has been recognised globally and in Australia, impacting on long term health, social and educational outcomes and even life expectancy⁷.

People of refugee backgrounds may have had limited, disrupted, or in some cases no access to health and other services, including maternal and child health services in their countries of origin, and having a baby is for many women their first reason for sustained contact with health services in Australia.⁸ Evidence also indicates that, compared to Australian-born women, immigrant and refugee women are at a greater risk of poor maternal and child health outcomes⁹. Evidence suggests that the 'first

⁶ Department of Home Affairs, *Illegal maritime arrivals on Bridging E Visa: 30 June 2019* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019), <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/illegal-maritime-arrivals-bve-june-2019.pdf>

⁷ M McDonald, T Moore and R Robinson, *Policy Brief No 26: The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia*, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Centre For Community Child Health, 2014

⁸ Jane Yelland Et Al., "How do Australian maternity and early childhood health services identify and respond to the settlement experience and social context of refugee background families?," *Pregnancy and Childbirth*14, 348(2014), <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2393/14/348>

⁹ Multicultural Women's Health Australia, *Sexual and Reproductive Health Data Report* (Multicultural Women's Health Australia, 2016), http://www.mcwh.com.au/downloads/MCWH_SRH_Data_Report_July_2016.pdf

1000 days', that is, the period from conception to the end of a child's second year, offers the best opportunity to positively impact a child's development¹⁰, and high quality, timely and sustained early childhood care and education beginning in this period has been associated repeatedly with benefits for children's development, with the strongest effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participation in early childhood education and care can positively impact children's development, school readiness, and enable early identification of developmental vulnerabilities¹¹. For example, research conducted by the University of Melbourne demonstrates a causal link between preschool participation and Year 3 NAPLAN scores¹², and concluded that disadvantaged children who were less likely to attend preschool would have experienced the greatest gains compared to those who had attended.¹³ This is of critical importance for children from non-English speaking backgrounds, including children of refugee backgrounds, who are at greater risk of being developmentally vulnerable.^{14 15}

Additionally, engagement in education, health and community services are widely understood as important means and markers of integration¹⁶. Participation in education allows children of refugee backgrounds to develop the necessary skills to fully participate in their host country society, and is also likely to be the environment in which they have greatest opportunities for building social connections. Likewise, engagement with health services allows children and families of refugee backgrounds

¹⁰ Dr. Tim Moore, Noushin Arefadib, Dr. Alana Deery, Megan Keyes, Sue West, *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper* (Parkville: Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2017), <https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/CCCH-The-First-Thousand-Days-An-Evidence-Paper-September-2017.pdf>

¹¹ Productivity Commission, *Volume 1: Childcare and Early Childhood Learning* (Canberra, 2014) , 2, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report/childcare-volume1.pdf>

¹² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, *Early Bird Catches the Worm: the Causal impact of pre-school participation and teacher qualifications on Year 3 NAPLAN Outcomes* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/preschoolparticipationandqualisummarypaper2013.pdf>

¹³ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, *Early Bird Catches the Worm: the Causal impact of pre-school participation and teacher qualifications on Year 3 NAPLAN Outcomes* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/preschoolparticipationandqualisummarypaper2013.pdf>

¹⁴ Productivity Commission, *Volume 1: Childcare and Early Childhood Learning* (Canberra, 2014) , 2, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report/childcare-volume1.pdf>

¹⁵ Australian Early Development Census, *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018*, <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2018-aedc-national-report>

¹⁶ Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework", *Journal of Refugee Studies – Advance Access Publication* 21, no. 2 (April 2008): <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>; the term 'means and markers of integration' is used to acknowledge that engagement with education, health and community services is both representative of achievement in integration and also supports integration.

to develop and maintain the good health that is an important facilitator of active participation in a host society.¹⁷

Alongside universal services in Victoria, there has been significant investment in evidence based programs to target families experiencing vulnerability, such as the Best Start program, *smalltalk* supported playgroups, Early Start Kindergarten and the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service. These services can facilitate engagement with universal early childhood and other services. For example, Supported Playgroups are a “targeted program for families experiencing disadvantage whose children are at risk of poor developmental and learning outcomes”.¹⁸ Research shows that participation in these playgroups contributes to positive outcomes for children, and can also provide a ‘soft entry point’ for families of refugee backgrounds to connect with mainstream health and early years services.¹⁹

Utilisation of early childhood services by refugee background communities

Various reports have identified that children and families from non-English speaking and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may be accessing early childhood services at lower rates than the general population. For example, a 2017 Victorian Auditor-General’s (VAGO) Report reported data showing kindergarten attendance rates from 2012 to 2016. In four out of the five years, children with a language background other than English attended at significantly lower rates than the general population. The report did not provide disaggregated data about specific countries of origin.²⁰

The same VAGO report noted that the “government lacks a sound understanding at the state and local levels of who is accessing kindergarten services and whether eligible children are missing out”²¹, as is affirmed by the lack of publicly available data pertaining to participation rates of children of refugee backgrounds.

In the absence of published data, it is not possible to ascertain whether and to what extent children and families of CALD backgrounds generally, and children and families of refugee backgrounds in particular, are participating in early childhood services. This

¹⁷ Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework”, *Journal of Refugee Studies – Advance Access Publication* 21, no. 2 (April 2008): <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>

¹⁸ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, Appendix 2: Overview of early childhood services (birth – eight years)* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Training, 2016),

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/VEYLDFAAppendix2.pdf>

¹⁹ Child Family Community Australia, “Supported playgroups for parents and children: the evidence for their benefits,” Australian Institute of Family Studies, published May 2016, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/supported-playgroups-parents-and-children/benefits-supported-playgroups>

²⁰ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, *Effectively planning for population growth* (Melbourne 2017), <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/20170823-Effectively-Planning-for-Population-Growth.pdf>

²¹ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, *Effectively planning for population growth* (Melbourne 2017), <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/20170823-Effectively-Planning-for-Population-Growth.pdf>, 40

is the case with respect to both services that are general in nature and those that aim to target 'vulnerable' population groups, such as the Best Start program.²²

The Best Start program aims to improve outcomes for children aged 0 to 8 years through collaborative, place-based work in 30 communities across Victoria, with the focus of applying clear, measurable and evidence-based strategies to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing various vulnerabilities. 'Vulnerability' is defined to include newly arrived migrants and refugees.²³ The partnerships governing the delivery of the program are required to use data about the composition and needs of people in their locality to determine who will be targeted, and to regularly report on how they are progressing. Their reports are not published.

Without good data, both services and government lack a critical tool to determine whether there are needs that are not adequately being addressed and whether remedial action is effective.

Proposed recommendations:

We believe the Inquiry should examine the issue of what data should be collected and reported. In particular, we propose that the Inquiry should:

- request the Department of Education and Training provide to the Inquiry data pertaining to the participation of CALD children generally and children of refugee backgrounds in particular, in State-funded early childhood services;
- request the Department of Education and Training brief the Inquiry about current requirements for services to collect and report data on the participation of children and families of CALD background in general and refugee background in particular in State funded early childhood services; and
- recommend that the Victorian Government require early childhood services to collect data on the engagement of children and families of CALD background people in general and those of refugee backgrounds in particular, and regularly publish the data.

Barriers to and facilitators of early childhood engagement of children and families of refugee backgrounds

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care services stipulates that "collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children and that community partnerships that are based on

²² Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, "Best Start", accessed October 2019 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/beststart.aspx>

²³ Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Best Start Policy and Guidelines* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Training, 2016), <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/2016BestStartGuidelines.pdf>

active communication, consultation and collaboration are also essential."²⁴ Establishing such collaborative relationships with families and communities of refugee backgrounds requires services and governments at all levels to understand barriers to and facilitators of their engagement.

The following section describes some of the barriers that families of refugee backgrounds experience when accessing early childhood services, and provides some good practice examples and recommendations to promote their engagement. These concern:

- Whether families of refugee backgrounds know about the presence and potential benefits of early years services;
- How easy or difficult it is for families to access services;
- The cost of accessing services.
- Whether services are aware of and responsive to the implications of engaging with families of diverse cultures and possibly traumatic experiences.

A number of these barriers are experienced by children and families from CALD backgrounds more broadly.

Knowledge of early years services and how to access them

Knowledge

As is the case with people who have migrated to Australia generally, people of refugee backgrounds may be unfamiliar with the existence and relevance of, and their eligibility for, early childhood services in Victoria. For example, the work of Foundation House with newly arrived Chin families identified that most families were 'unfamiliar with the concept of early childhood services generally' as these types of services were not provided in Burma.²⁵ Communities also report confusion regarding costs and eligibility for fee subsidies – for family day care, kindergarten, long day care, three-year-old kindergarten, and supported playgroups.

Parents of refugee backgrounds access a range of sources of information relating to early years services. These may include other parents in the community, including through informal networks or through social media, for example, 'Arabic Women in Melbourne' Facebook group. Informal networks that are used for information sharing may lack the capacity to check the accuracy of the information resulting in incorrect information being circulated within communities.

Foundation House staff report that information about early childhood services is sometimes advertised with flyers and websites in English, and where translated

²⁴ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2018), <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Guide-to-the-NQF.pdf>

²⁵ Foundation House, *The Early Childhood Access and Participation Project: Talking with Chin Families from Burma about Early Childhood Services* (Melbourne: Foundation House, 2016), http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECAP_PROJECT_GUIDE_2016.pdf

information is available it may be based on Google translator, impacting on the quality of translations and the quality of information.

The Victorian government has developed translated information for parents about early childhood services including kindergarten and eligibility for free or low cost kindergarten²⁶, but the languages do not include a number of those used by newly arrived refugee background communities. For example, the *Free or low-cost kindergarten – kindergarten fee subsidy* brochure is only available in one out of the top ten languages spoken by people who have arrived in Victoria under the refugee and humanitarian program in the past financial year²⁷.

Community members in Foundation House early years advisory groups report that people of refugee backgrounds may not know to ask for an interpreter, may be provided an interpreter who does not speak their preferred language, and may not recognise the meaning of the ‘interpreter symbol’.

Access

Barriers to engagement may also arise at the point of access and navigation of early childhood services. Particular issues identified by community advisory groups with which Foundation House works include:

- accessibility of specialised services such as MCHLine, the Maternal and Child Health Service mobile application and Parentline which all require a degree of English and computer literacy; and
- challenges navigating complex booking and registration systems including the Maternal and Child Health Service appointment booking system and the LGA central registration system for kindergarten, which varies between local governments.

Proposed measures to improve knowledge and accessibility

We propose that the Inquiry consider a number of actions by the Victorian and local governments that would improve the knowledge of people of refugee backgrounds about early childhood services, and how to access those services.

- (i) *Improved availability of translated information*

²⁶ See for example: “All about Kindergarten”, Health Translations, reviewed 2019, http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentDetail?open&s=All_about_Kindergarten; “Free or low-cost kindergarten – kindergarten fee subsidy”, Health Translations, updated 2018, http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentDetail?Open&s=Free_or_low-cost_kindergarten_-_kindergarten_fee_subsidy

²⁷ Data from the settlement database indicates that the top ten languages spoken by people arriving in Victorian under the humanitarian program in the last financial year were Arabic, Swahili, Burmese, Chin Haka, Karen S’gaw, Karen, Dari, Hazaragi, Oromo, Chin; the *Free or low-cost kindergarten – kindergarten fee subsidy* brochure is translated into Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Greek, Hindi, Punjabi, Sinhalese, Somali, Tamil, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

There is clearly a need for information to be provided in a wider range of languages and the material that is produced to have regard to the particular languages and levels of literacy that users of the languages have.

Proposed recommendation:

The Victorian Government and local governments produce information about early years services in languages spoken by refugee background communities and monitor how well it is reaching the audiences.

(ii) Employment of bicultural workers

“If I did not meet [bicultural worker], I still might have not been connected. I did not know what the council was or how it could help me until I met her” (Whittlesea Community Advisors Group 2018/19 Community Advisor describing meeting a bicultural worker employed by the Hume City Council in a pop-up shop located in the Hume shopping centre²⁸)

Foundation House community advisors identify bicultural workers employed to work with particular communities as an important source of information relating to early years and other services. Due to the skills they possess in language and culture, and their understandings of how concepts such as early childhood education and care are regarded in the communities in which they work, bicultural workers employed in local councils are well placed to support children and families to access early childhood services.

Proposed recommendation:

Local councils in areas of high refugee settlement employ and train bicultural workers to support communities to engage with early childhood services provided in their region.

(iii) Access to interpreters

The Victorian Department of Education and Training provides funded access to interpreters and translators for all early years services that it funds. This includes maternal and child health services and kindergarten programs. However, some services, such as standalone Commonwealth-funded long day care do not have access to funding to engage interpreters.

Proposed recommendation:

The Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth government to provide access to funded interpreting for all Commonwealth-funded early childhood services.

²⁸ Whittlesea Community Advisors Group 2018/19; this group was facilitated by a partnership between Foundation House, Whittlesea Community Connections and City of Whittlesea Maternal & Child Health.

The need for trauma informed, culturally competent services

Given the diverse origins and experiences of the Victorian population, it is critical that early childhood services are culturally competent and trauma-informed.

Cultural competency can be defined as “a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals; enabling that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross cultural situations.”²⁹

Trauma-informed care is “a framework for human service delivery that is based on knowledge and understanding of how trauma affects people’s lives, their service needs and service usage.”³⁰ A service that is trauma-informed “realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognises the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist retraumatisation.”³¹ Trauma-informed care is important when working with children and families of refugee backgrounds, as well as children and families who may have had other types of traumatic experiences, such as survivors of sexual abuse and/or family violence.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework recognises the need for early childhood services to be responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity of children and families, and recognises that experiences of trauma may pose additional barriers to engaging with services.³²

The refugee experience and associated exposure to traumatic events can impact on families and children in a number of ways. Effects on families may include shifting of roles and relationships within families and reduced capacity of parents to provide a nurturing environment for children.³³ Where exposure to torture and other traumatic

²⁹ Terry Cross, , Towards a culturally competent system of care, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Child Development Centre, 1989), <https://spu.edu/~media/academics/school-of-education/Cultural%20Diversity/Towards%20a%20Culturally%20Competent%20System%20of%20Care%20Abridged.ashx>

³⁰ Child Family Community Australia, “Trauma-informed care in child/family welfare services,” Australian Institute of Family Studies, accessed 18 October 2019,

<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/trauma-informed-care-child-family-welfare-services/export>

³¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*, (Rockville: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

³² Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, (Melbourne: Department of Education and Training, 2016), <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf>

³³ Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*, (Parkville: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 1998), https://www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Rebuilding_Shattered_Lives_Complete.pdf; Foundation House, *Schools in for Refugees: A whole-school approach to supporting students and families of refugee background (2nd Edition)*, (Brunswick: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2016),

events has been at the hands of governments in their countries of origin, individuals and families who have encountered such treatment may approach government programs and services in Australia with reluctance, mistrust, and fear^{34 35}.

The impact of trauma on children may have various manifestations including attachment issues, cognitive functioning and behavioural and learning difficulties,³⁶ and this must be taken into account to avoid misdiagnosis of learning disorders, and to ensure appropriate grade placements when children transition to schooling.³⁷

We commend the Victorian government's investment in professional learning for people working in early childhood, including kindergarten teachers, maternal and child health nurses, which is provided by Foundation House among others, as described below.

http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Schools_In_for_Refugees_2nd_Edn_Update_Chap1-11_2016.pdf

³⁴ Foundation House, *The Early Childhood Access and Participation Project: Talking with Chin Families from Burma about Early Childhood Services* (Melbourne: Foundation House, 2016),

http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECAP_PROJECT_GUIDE_2016.pdf

³⁵ Whittlesea Community Advisors Group 2018/19

³⁶ Georgia Paxton and Karen Kiang, *Child and Adolescent Health: A resource of the Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide*, (Melbourne: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2018),

<http://refugeehealthguide.org.au/child-and-adolescent-health-booklet/>

³⁷ Kaplan, I., Stolk, Y., Valibhoy, M., Tucker, A., & Baker, J. (2016). Cognitive assessment of refugee children: Effects of trauma and new language acquisition. *Transcultural Psychiatry*. doi: 10.1177/1363461515612933

Foundation House professional learning for people working in early childhood education and care

The Foundation House Early Years Program provides a range of opportunities for early years professionals to develop skills and knowledge in working with children, families and communities who are survivors of torture and trauma of refugee backgrounds, including those seeking asylum.

The Foundation House Early Years professional learning for teachers, educators and early years professionals, include:

- Understanding the refugee and asylum seeker experience and the impact of trauma on development, learning and wellbeing
- Developing family centred practices within a whole-of-agency approach to support children, in partnership with families of refugee backgrounds
- The role of early years professionals in supporting recovery from trauma
- Strategies and practices to support recovery from trauma for individual children and families
- Reflective practices

Since January 2016 Foundation House has delivered tailored training sessions for more than 2879 Victorian early years professionals, including teachers, educators, bicultural educators, maternal & child health nurses, refugee health nurses, coordinators, family day care staff, case managers, family violence workers, family liaison workers and Community Hub coordinators. 98% of attendees who participated in the training rated the workshop as good or excellent in post-training evaluations.

To ensure that people working in early childhood education and care continue to develop the skills to provide culturally competent and trauma informed care to children of refugee backgrounds, it is important that the Victorian government continues to fund programs which support this.

Given the Commonwealth government's commitment to increasing rural and regional settlement of humanitarian entrants, the Victorian Government should examine the resource implications of funding professional development for staff located in regional and rural areas, where there may be relatively small but increasing numbers of people settling from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Proposed recommendation:

The Victorian Government should:

- continue to fund professional development for early years services staff focusing on cultural competency and trauma informed care;
- consider the particular resource implications of funding professional development for staff located in rural and regional areas.

Ensuring access to early childhood services is affordable

Early Start Kindergarten provides free or low cost kindergarten to three year olds who meet particular vulnerability criteria. Currently, Early Start Kindergarten is available to children who are known to Child Protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.³⁸

We commend the Victorian Government’s decision to fund universal access to three year old kindergarten for children across Victoria during the coming decade.³⁹ Given the benefits of quality early childhood education, in particular for children experiencing disadvantage, there is a strong case for expanding the eligibility criteria for Early Start Kinder to include children of refugee backgrounds. During the early years of settlement in particular, families who arrived under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program are likely to experience significant economic and health challenges.^{40 41} Families seeking asylum also face a range of considerable difficulties including uncertainty regarding their future in Australia and limited access to income and employment support.⁴²

Proposed recommendation:

Until universal three-year-old kindergarten is fully rolled out across Victoria, the state government should expand the eligibility criteria for state-funded Early Start Kindergarten to include children of refugee backgrounds (including asylum seekers).

³⁸ Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, *What is Early Start Kindergarten?*, (Melbourne: Department of Education and Training, 2018), <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/comms/whatisearlystartkinder.pdf>

³⁹ “Kindergarten for three-year-old children,” Victorian Department of Education and Training, accessed October 2019, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

⁴⁰ National Centre for Longitudinal Data, *Financial Hardship in Australia*, (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2014), https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2015/data-highlight-no-1-2014-financial-hardship_0.pdf

⁴¹ John De Maio, Liliya Gatina-Bhote, Pilar Rioseco and Ben Edwards, *Building a New Life in Australia Research Summary: Risk of psychological distress among recently arrived humanitarian migrants*, (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017), <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/bnla-researchsummary-mentalhealth-oct17.pdf>

⁴² Refugee Council of Australia, *An unnecessary penalty: Economic impacts of changes to the Status Resolution Support Services*, (Refugee Council of Australia, 2018), <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/srss-economic-penalty/>

Appendix 1: About Foundation House

Foundation House was established in 1987 to assist survivors of torture and other traumatic events, of refugee backgrounds, who had settled in Victoria.

Our work is guided by an understanding that recovery and wellbeing are affected by a complex interplay of pre-arrival experiences and the risk and protective factors encountered by people of refugee backgrounds in Australia.

For that reason, we have adopted an integrated model of work that involves:

- providing services to clients in the form of counselling, advocacy, family support, group work, psycho-education, and complementary therapies;
- working with client communities to improve their capacity to access the services they need and to enable them to support recovery;
- offering professional and organisational development, consultancy and resources to assist health, education, employment and other community service providers, to enhance the responsiveness of their services to the needs of people of refugee backgrounds;
- working with the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to ensure that policies and programs have proper regard to the needs of people of refugee backgrounds; and
- conducting and contributing to research about the needs of people of refugee backgrounds and the best possible ways of meeting those needs.

Appendix 2: About the work of Foundation House in the Early Years sector with community advisory groups

The Foundation House Community Advisory group model facilitates dialogue between 8 to 12 community advisors who meet over an eighteen month process with representatives from 4 to 6 service agencies.

Early Childhood Access and Participation Project

An example of a Foundation House project which both addressed a community's concerns on health and education and supported recovery from trauma was the 2011 Early Childhood Access and Participation (ECAP) project working with new arrivals from the Chin community in the western suburb of Brimbank.

A significant number of young children were not being enrolled in kindergarten and mothers and babies were failing to regularly attend maternal and child health services. A group of Chin parents was established. They talked about their traditional ways of rearing children as opposed to rearing small children in their new settlement country. They discussed health services in Burma and refugee camps which acknowledged the deprivation inherent in their journey and their traumatic experiences. The group was provided with information about early childhood practices and health services in Australia and was able to identify barriers to accessing services. An extensive facilitated dialogue with early childhood service providers resulted in the combined group setting goals and working together to dismantle those barriers for the Chin community including the production of Chin interpreted maternal and child health resources.

As a direct result of this work, in 2016 East Sunshine Kindergarten was awarded the Early Years Award for "Improving access and participation in early learning". For more information about the Early Childhood Access and Participation project [read the full report here](#).

Craigieburn Parent Advisory Group

In 2018 this model was replicated in the Craigieburn Parent Advisory Group facilitated by a partnership between Foundation House and Hume Best Start Program with parents from the local Assyrian Chaldean community. The Advisors identified ten barriers that they felt limited access to early years services and then participated in a dialogue with service providers over twelve months to offer advice to address these barriers. The advice included increased use of interpreters, the development of appropriate sources of information to advise new communities of early years services, and appropriate practices to increase participation in parenting education.

2018 – 2019 Whittlesea Early Years Community Advisory Group

Recently, the 2018 - 2019 Whittlesea Early Years Community Advisory Group project completed 18 months of meeting. The group was facilitated by a partnership between Foundation House, Whittlesea Community Connections and City of Whittlesea Enhanced Maternal & Child Health program. The group of ten Arabic speaking Parent Advisors worked in dialogue with agencies to suggest strategies to address barriers to inclusion. Agencies who participated in the dialogue included Orange Door, the Maternal and Child Health Service, MCH Line, Parentline, Whittlesea Council, Settlement Services, DET, Northern Health, DPV Health and Parentzone. The advice resulting from this project is currently being documented in a series of Tip Sheets that will be available to all early years services.

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