

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS WITH POLICE



the good starts
STUDY FOR REFUGEE YOUTH

This broadsheet looks at the relationships between refugee young people and police during the first two years of settlement. The information is derived from 88 participants from the Good Starts Study for Refugee Youth¹. These participants were aged 12 to 20 in their second year in the study and 85% of were born in African countries, reflecting Australia's refugee migration profile at that time.

Relationships with police are an important social resource for refugee youth in facilitating positive connections with their host community. For refugee communities, and youth in particular, forming positive relationships with authority figures can be a challenge, when authority may have been feared and mistrusted in the premigration context.

Overall, refugee youth described positive relationships with police in Australia. This emphasises the importance of building further on these early positive attitudes and experiences over the resettlement period. It highlights the importance of building bridges between police and refugee youth in the first few years in Australia.

¹ See 'Demographics for Broadsheets #1 - #5'
www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/refugee_youth.html#broadsheets

What contact do refugee youth have with police?

Close to 40% of the young people had some direct contact with the police by the end of their second year in Australia and more boys than girls had contact with police:

- In the first year of settlement 12 % of the refugee youth reported being stopped and questioned by police.
- By the second year of settlement 37% of young people reported ever being stopped by police.
- 49% of boys reported that they had been stopped and questioned by police in either year 1 or year 2
- 22% of girls reported that they had been stopped and questioned by police in either year 1 or year 2.

What are the attitudes of refugee youth towards police?

- Refugee youth reported that they trust the police in both year one and year two of settlement (with average scores between 3.1 and 3.5 for both boys and girls for both years, where 1 is low and 4 is a high level of trust).
- Refugee youth also reported that they believe that the police trust them (with averages between 2.8 and 3.3 for boys and girls in both years, where 1 is low and 4 is a high level of trust).
- 13% of refugee youth reported that they had experienced discrimination by the police since arriving in Australia.

LESSONS and INSIGHTS

By the end of their second year in Australia, nearly half the boys and a quarter of the girls have had some contact with the police. More of this contact is reported in the second year.

Although the young people have high levels of trust in the police and believe that the police trust them, they also believe that the police trust them less than they trust the police. A small percentage of refugee young people have experienced discrimination by the police in their first two years in Australia.

These findings lend evidence to support police/community/youth partnerships in order to increase cross-cultural understandings, especially in the early years of resettlement. Building partnerships is important for promoting positive attitudes to authority figures and for engaging refugee youth early on, in civic participation with the broader community. For example, VicHealth funds Kar Kulture, a project bringing together refugee young people, the South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre, Victoria Police and Mission Australia.

It is important for police to be aware that refugee youth have high levels of trust in the police and this remains high in the second year of settlement. Indeed some young refugees see police as role models for what they would like to be in their own futures. This trust provides opportunities for strengthening community policing in a positive and productive context.

Cultural awareness training including refugee youth-specific information is an important part of police training and should form an ongoing part of police workforce development. ■■

Refugee youth SPEAK ABOUT POLICE

Valuing and forming relationships with police

Actually, like you know, not all of them are bad and a lot of them are good.

(Sudanese male 22 years old)

Some people think that they're [police] doing wrong but they're doing the right thing, you know... But to me I can't say they did wrong to me cause they're [police] the one who is looking after me.

(Sudanese male 20 years old)

I ask police "Can I ask you a question?" He says "You're welcome [to ask]"...He says "Don't worry"... He gives me a card, he's writing his phone number down... He says "It's here, you have any problem call me."

(Sudanese male 18 years old)



Feeling discriminated by police

A police car pulls over and they're like "Are you guys a gang or something?" "No we're just friends, we're walking"... Just a group of kids walking together doesn't mean they're a gang!

(Ethiopian male 15 years old)

[The police] judge you before they get to know you... They just see you walking and they come... looking for ID. And the kids start refusing because they don't see them doing that to other people.

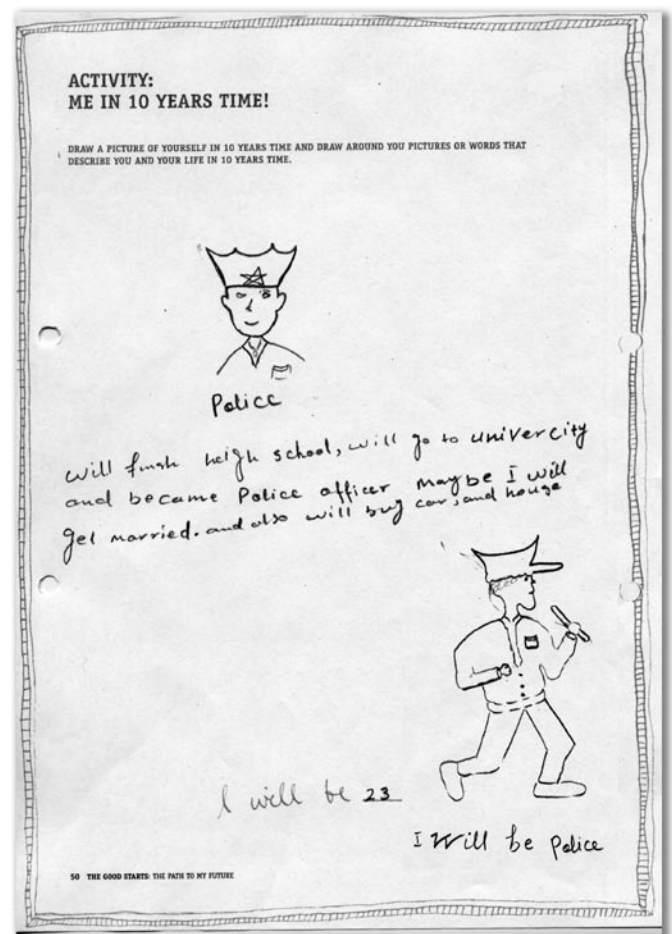
(Sudanese male 22 years old)

Even the police, they don't do nothing [about fighting at parties]. Police don't come to Sudanese parties... If you call them sometimes... they don't come early... I don't know what's wrong with the police.

(Sudanese female 17 years old)

My big brother was having trouble with my parents at home, and I called the police and I was talking to them fine... They ask me "Where you from?"; I said "I'm from Africa" and I explain to them what was the problem. They told me "Alright, wait up". I hang up the phone, they come four hours later.

(Sudanese male 17 years old)



ABOUT THE STUDY

The Good Starts Study is a five year study following a group of 120 refugee young people, to identify the social determinants of wellbeing and to inform policy and practice about how to support good settlement outcomes for refugee youth. The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to gather information about settlement and wellbeing². The young people in the study were born in Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Liberia, Uganda, Burundi, Iran, Iraq, Burma, Croatia and Bosnia. They were between 11 to 19 years of age when they began the study and had recently-arrived in Australia.

For more information about the study see:

www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/refugee_youth.html

² Gifford, S. et al. (2007). Meaning or Measurement? Researching the social contexts of health and settlement among newly arrived refugee youth in Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, September.

Resources relating to refugee youths and police

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues- Police and Justice
<http://www.cmyi.net.au/PoliceandJustice#Resources>

Australasian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau- Multicultural Liaison Officers. <http://www.apmab.gov.au/mlo/>

Victoria Police- Multicultural Advisory Services
http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=290