



QUEENSLAND PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVORS OF TORTURE AND TRAUMA (QPASTT)

SUBMISSION TO QUEENSLAND YOUTH STRATEGY- GENERAL CONSULTATION

November 2022

For further comment or inquiries please contact Stephanie Long (Systemic Advocacy Lead)

stephanielong@qpastt.org.au

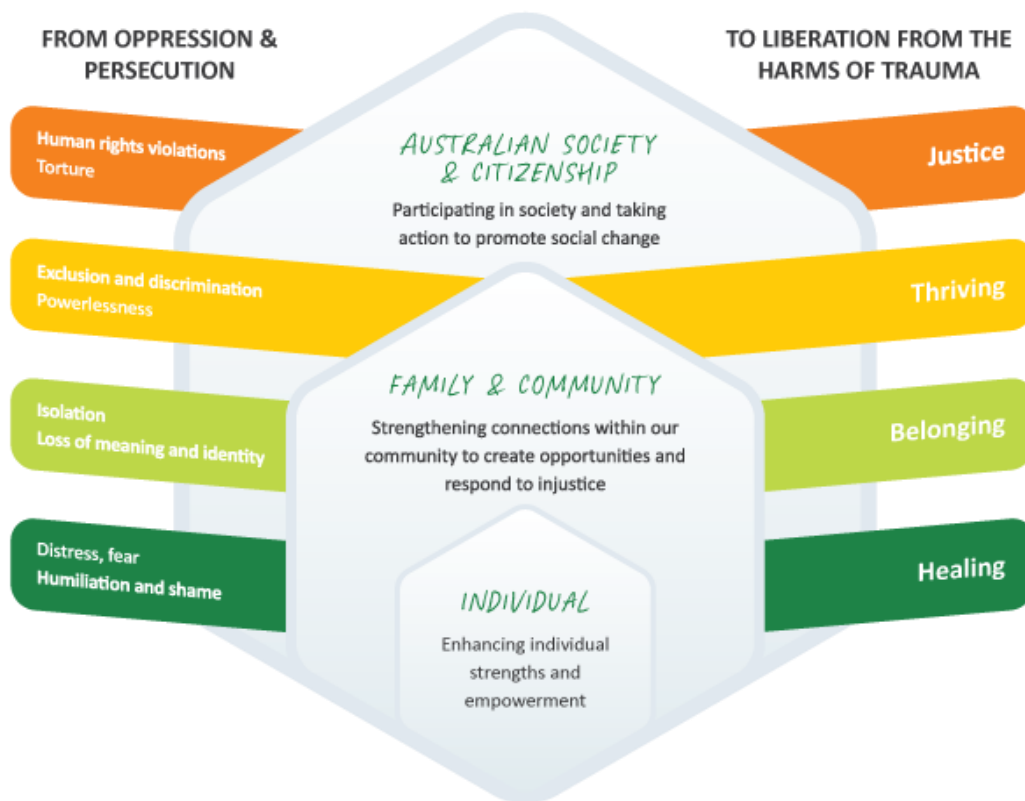
(07) 3391 6677

ABOUT QPASTT

Founded in 1995, QPASTT (Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma) provides specialised, culturally responsive services to promote the health and wellbeing of people in Australia who have sought safety from persecution, torture and war related trauma.

QPASTT is committed to creating a safe, inclusive and equitable environment for people from all genders, sexualities, religions and cultures. Our vision is for people from refugee backgrounds to live lives liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights injustice. Our purpose is to nurture meaningful futures by assisting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive in our community.

Our refugee trauma recovery framework



QPASTT acknowledges the First Peoples of Australia and their leaders past, present and emerging. We recognise the continuing trauma caused by losses of children, language, lore and land and the impact that this continues to have on psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing. We recognise that since time immemorial, First Peoples have nurtured communities of belonging and thriving and we work in solidarity towards a future of healing and justice.

QPASTT is a non-profit Company Limited by Guarantee and a registered charity with no political or religious affiliations. Our work is funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. We are a state-wide organisation, with offices in Brisbane, Logan, Inala, Cairns, Townsville and Toowoomba and outreach services across Queensland.

QPASTT is a member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), a network of eight specialist rehabilitation agencies that respond to the needs of survivors of torture and trauma who have come to Australia from overseas. There is a FASSTT member agency in each state and territory in Australia.

OUR WORK

In 2021/2022 QPASTT experienced a 37% increase in referrals to our individual and family support services, including counselling, compared to pre-COVID levels. Almost 43% of our clients have been resident in Australia for greater than five years, demonstrating that trauma-recovery services are often sought out by those later in their settlement journey.

In 2021/2022, we supported 7,796 clients from over 85 countries through both individual or family counselling and group work – a 17% increase since 2019. Culture and community-based healing and connectedness is the foundation of our approach to wellbeing. 5,645 people participated in QPASTT social, therapeutic and wellbeing groups, events and activities, co-designed with community members to meet their needs. 2,151 people engaged in over 15,000 counselling sessions, more than 40% of whom were 25 years of age or under, and 218 were people seeking asylum.

In 2021/2022 QPASTT provided professional training to 1,506 people from a range of service providers and from across the community sector to be trauma-informed. QPASTT staff and clients participated in consultations with state and federal bodies on a range of issues, including mental health, education and human rights.

61% of QPASTT 111 staff are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and speak 30 different languages. 29% have lived refugee expertise. All of them are committed to our vision and demonstrate our values every day.



ENGAGING WITH CULTURALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE

As detailed in the summary of our work above, a significant proportion of people we engage with are young people under the age of 25. Across 2019, QPASTT engaged in an extensive consultation process with young people from across South East Queensland. Using our liberation framework and pillars of healing, belonging, thriving and justice, as detailed in the section above, we asked this series of questions:

HEALING

- What is healing for you, your family and your community?
- How can QPASTT help young people and their families to heal?

BELONGING

- Imagine if you woke up one day and Australia was the most welcoming place you had ever been to, a place in which you felt you belonged, what would it look like?
- How would you see people treating each other?
- What would you see and feel?
- What can QPASTT do to make you feel included and welcomed?

THRIVING

- What do you need to be your best self?
- Family and community are an important part of your world. How can QPASTT help your family and community to achieve their potential?

JUSTICE

- As a young person what do you need to feel like you are living in a place that is fair and just? A place that offers everyone what they need to have a good and meaningful life?

Responses to these questions challenged QPASTT to extend inclusivity by changing the way we spoke, we engaged with young people and we genuinely build programs and activities with them rather than for them. Please note that the young people told us the label of “refugee” and of “trauma” was not inviting, welcoming, positive or inspiring for them – rather, it makes them feel permanently defined by their family’s history, separated, damaged and less than the rest of the community. We are sharing their responses in this submission to bring diverse voices to the development of an inclusive Youth Strategy in Queensland. Young people from diverse backgrounds resoundingly want:

1. To be **empowered** and have a strong sense of **identity** – to speak, and to stand for themselves; to have relationships of genuine influence within society that is respectful of family and community. For young people from diverse backgrounds, developing a strong sense of identity is complex.

“IDENTITY – INDIVIDUALS ARE HALF WAY IN ONE CULTURE AND HALF WAY IN ANOTHER AND THIS IS DIFFICULT PARTICULARLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ... THEY ARE TRYING TO BE IN BOTH



CULTURES – TO FIT IN WITH THEIR NEW COUNTRY AND TO STILL FIT IN WITH THEIR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY"

2. To **belong** to family, community, place and culture – free from racism and discrimination; to not be fearful of police; to have human rights met; to feel protected because they intrinsically belong.

"A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE FEELS LOVED AND THAT IT IS THEIR HOME NOW... THEY ARE TREATING YOU EQUALLY NOT BECAUSE OF YOUR COLOUR OR RELIGION"

3. To feel **valued**, to have opportunities and to feel accepted in services and systems – systems and services are able **to learn from** and value young people.

"IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ACCEPTED THEN YOU ARE ABLE TO DO WELL. IF YOU ARE NOT ACCEPTED THEN YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO ACHIEVE OR FULFIL YOUR GOALS"

4. To be **healthy**, experience **wellbeing** in themselves, their families, schools, workplaces and communities.

"IF HEALING IS HAPPENING, I CAN IMAGINE MY FUTURE"

5. To be **safe**.

"FEELING ONE HUNDRED PERCENT SAFE IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT, WALKING OUT AT NIGHT AND NOT BEING SCARED"

6. To be in a **just** society where there is **equity of opportunity**. To be able to thrive in social and economic wellbeing without having to constantly battle for rights.

"SAME OPPORTUNITIES, EQUALITY, SAME FOR EVERYONE IN TERMS OF RELIGION, EDUCATION AND FREEDOM TO CHOOSE, NEED TO KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TO BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ABILITY TO SAY NO"

These clear priorities for young people also indicate what is missing from their lives now. The particular commonality with preliminary findings of the Queensland Youth Strategy are: addressing discrimination, access to safe and responsive services, desire for healthy lives and opportunities to participate in decision making. However overwhelmingly, young people from diverse backgrounds identified that they frequently experience racism and discrimination across their lives, and young women strongly advocated the need to address the pervasive experience and fear of sexual violence. These two issues are addressed further below.



Youth leaders challenging racism and discrimination

Young people from refugee backgrounds face a complex experience when they begin to build a new life, either alone or with family, in Australia. Developmental advantages mean young people are more likely to pick up language skills more quickly than adults in their family. And young people can become immersed in the culture of the “new” community more rapidly through school and social networks. However, there are distinct challenges. Young people are easy targets for racism and xenophobia, and experience a number of structural and system forms of discrimination in a life period when development of identity and self is already difficult. Finding a way to express yourself as a young person regardless of cultural background and life experiences is a challenge, with fewer opportunities for public expression and development of leadership in society. However being seen, being heard and being respected are fundamental components of healing, of knowing that you belong, having the resilience and opportunity to thrive and the capacity to contribute to a just and equitable society.

QPASTT Youth Voice Committee invited two other youth groups (Multicultural Australia’s Future Leaders Advisory Group and ACCESS Community Service’s Multicultural Youth Queensland group) to a series of Youth Leaders Dinners. The Youth Leaders Dinners aimed to elevate the voice of young people in South East Queensland. Youth Leaders Dinners have covered issues of human rights and the role of the Human Rights Commission; advocacy and use of social media platforms; and collaboration across youth leadership initiatives.

A major event resulting from the Youth Leaders Dinner was the Government Roundtable in August 2021. Representatives from Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Home Affairs, Australian Federal Police, and Logan City Council along with the CEOs of QPASTT, Multicultural Australia and ACCESS listened to presentations from youth leaders which addressed issues of racism, exclusion, discrimination, as well as solutions for collaborative action to address inequities.

“RACIAL DISCRIMINATION LEADS TO RACIAL HATE, A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE, WHICH IS A SCOURGE ON OUR SOCIETY, SLOWLY KILLING SOCIETY AND CREATING A DISPARATE EXISTENCE FOR SO MANY. LET’S CHOOSE INSTEAD TO BE PEACE BUILDERS.”

Youth leaders shared the everyday challenge of racism and the complexity of holding on to a cultural identity that is the target of ignorance and rejection in wider society:

WHY I AM BEING PUNISH BECAUSE OF SOMEONE’S MISTAKE? WHY IS IT THAT EVERY TIME I’M BEING PRESENTED IN A MEDIA SEE LIKE I’M A THREAT? MY PARENT WON’T EVEN LET ME OUTSIDE JUST BECAUSE OF THE HATE AND THE NEGATIVES THAT GOES AROUND.

Youth Leaders also expressed their strongest desires to be part of positive change and encouraged all participants of the event to consider what their role would be in this aim for an equitable and just society:

LITTLE CHANGES CAN SOFTEN SOMEONE’S HEART. IT CAN HELP US BE BIGGER CONTRIBUTORS IN THE FUTURE. WE WANT OUR NEW AUSTRALIANS TO BELIEVE IN KINDNESS AND CHANGE. IT IS



NOT ABOUT BECOMING WEALTHY AND HAVING MONEY AT A YOUNG AGE. IT IS ABOUT WHAT WE CAN RETURN TO THE COUNTRY THAT SAVED MOST OF US FROM AN UNTHINKABLE LIFE.

Since this roundtable event, there has been increasing concern amongst young people from diverse background, their families and communities, about the increasing numbers of young people engaged in the justice system and in particular the increasing proportion detained in youth detention. The high proportion of young people from diverse backgrounds in youth detention, is an indictment on systemic failures and exclusion from early childhood. For example, on 17 November 2022, the Courier Mail recently published the top ten primary schools issuing school disciplinary absences, notably correlating with student populations of high cultural diversity. QPASTT and HEAL have previously detailed the collaborative care approach to trauma informed education in a recent submission to the Department of Education (March 2022)¹. We strongly recommend a trauma informed collaborative care approach to education that engages with children in their family and community. This includes the need for wellbeing culture in schools, targeted response to children that need additional support in collaboration with specialist agencies, and well-equipped educators working in a whole of school response to inclusion.

While these issues remain unaddressed, efforts to achieve equity in Queensland will not be realised. Engaging with the community and young people themselves to develop prevention (including trauma informed collaborative care education and early childhood programs), diversion, legal supports and transition programs, is essential. This must be done with deep sensitivity and willingness to recognise and build on strengths and resources within young people and community.

Addressing sexual violence and intergenerational trauma

Sexual violence is not only a common refugee experience, but also a common experience in life in Australia for many women and girls. And yet it is rarely spoken about. Silence fuels shame amongst survivors and perpetuates stigma that continues unchallenged. Only 13% of women in Australia that experience sexual violence report it². Young women from CALD backgrounds, including those with a refugee experience, face a significant number of unique challenges and barriers when it comes to their psychological and social wellbeing and needs. Without appropriate and targeted interventions and support services, this can lead to significant long-term impacts upon their sense of belonging, their ability to heal and their potential to thrive.

In 2019, the QPASTT Youth Enterprise and Innovation Team (YEIT) embarked on a series of deep listening consultations with young people, exploring their ideas about healing and justice. The young women began conversations about their experiences of relationships, how they feel about their bodies and expectations of young women in society. In the safety of the consultation process

¹ See https://qpastt.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/220211-Submission-to-Every-Culturally-and-Linguistically-Diverse-Student-Succeeding-Plan_QPASTT-and-HEAL.pdf

² ABS (2021) Sexual Violence Victimization: Statistics about sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse, including characteristics of victim-survivors, victimisation rates, and police reporting. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/sexual-violence-victimisation>



with YEIT, young women clearly identified they wanted to talk rather than be silent about their experiences and fear of violence.

YEIT organised an online forum 'let's talk about it', where over 21 participants from various African communities joined to discuss issues regarding sexual violence perpetuated in their community and ways to support their voices to be heard. This forum was organised as a response to recent disclosures by young African women of their experiences of sexual violence. Young women highlighted the need to continue to facilitate safe spaces and the role this plays in collective healing and empowering communities:

"WE NEED TO EMPOWER YOUNG WOMEN WITH TOOLS ON HOW TO SPEAK UP IN SCENARIOS WHERE THEY FEEL NUMB AND FROZEN BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO DEFENCES."

They also spoke openly about wanting to learn about support services and ways of accessing supporting and healing. This was achieved through the online forum:

"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SUGGEST TO MY FRIENDS ABOUT WHAT TO DO IF THEY'RE IN THIS SITUATION BUT NOW I KNOW SERVICES."

This forum initiated the first of many conversations between service providers and young women in the hope to find a culturally appropriate approach to talking about sexual violence, connections and fostering a culture of healing. In collaboration with Ethni, a young women's empowerment and leadership initiative based in Greater Brisbane, the project evolved to also include delivery of a peer leadership training which included skilling-up young women to become peer facilitators. The project team of young women worked with Ethni and QPASTT to develop a project plan focussed on continuing conversations about sexual violence, how to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence and the services to support if it has occurred. A series of four workshops were then organised to increase understanding of sexual violence issues and discuss how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence in a trauma informed manner. Following the four workshops, a larger forum was organised to bring together young women and elders from CALD communities. The young women wanted to include their mothers, aunts and women community leaders in recognition that sexual violence against women is an intergenerational issue.

"[WE] NEED TO CREATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES - DAUGHTERS AND PARENTS - DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT YOUNG WOMEN."

Approximately 45 young women participated in the workshops prior to the forum and 42 women participated in the forum. Through the workshops and the forums, women reported that they felt strengthened, empowered and inspired by the resilience of others and their willingness to talk about their experiences. They felt more informed about trauma, how to support themselves and others, and what recovery can look like. There was a strong desire to continue these conversations within community and beyond, in recognition of the pervasive experience of sexual violence.

QPASTT strongly supports the prioritisation of healthy relationships within the Queensland Youth Strategy. Access to culturally safe services that respond to sexual violence, domestic and family violence is essential. By detailing this project, we aim to emphasise how essential it is to take this work to vulnerable and often invisible communities, in deep collaboration with those communities themselves and the organisations they trust. It is essential that we continue to find ways to address the prevalence of violence against women in recognition of the impact this has on community wellbeing and intergenerational trauma recovery. Such endeavours require long term commitment,



as trust with communities and survivors is built over time by developing a reputation for being consistent, respectful, and transparent.

Young Peoples' desire to be decision makers and influencers

Following from the success and interest in the Youth Voice program in Brisbane, our Townsville based team initiated the Youth Voice Committee (YVC) pilot. At its inception, the team captured the aspirations of young people to positively contribute to a just and equitable society. When asked what they wished to achieve from this group, young people responded with the following comments:

I want to make a positive impact in the community. I want to do something about social justice issues and learn a lot from the opportunity.

I want to make an impact even if it is tiny and little. I want to get my message across.

This is the first time I have been part of an activist group. I want to get a better understanding of how to address social issues. I want to become a better activist.

I want to help other people become aware and get other people to confidently speak up about the issue.

I want to encourage everyone to the point that people share issues, know and understand what everyone else is feeling. Understand that issues are not just faced by one person alone and we can find solutions together.

I want the experience of working in a group that is dedicated to better themselves. I also want that feeling of helping other people.

I am keen to work with everyone in the group and do a few small things right in the beginning. Then maybe we can think of replicating our success throughout Townsville.

The YVC pilot was intentionally designed as a leadership development program. The program included knowledge development by learning about human rights, discrimination and how to use systems of complaint; and skills development of group formation, incidental counselling and mental health first aid. The YVC group discussed several issues they were passionate about and iteratively worked on key issues they wanted to focus on. They implemented a survey to understand issues that other young people faced in their communities. Using insights from the survey, the group refined the problem statement and decided to focus on two main issues – discrimination and mental health.

The YVC also co-designed the pilot evaluation which produced extremely helpful recommendations for further improvement to the project to maximize effectiveness and inclusion. The pilot and the continuation of the YVC demonstrates the willingness of young people to engage in the responsibilities of decision making, governance and creating a more just society, in a context that is responsive to their needs and aspirations.



Summary and recommendations

The scope of the aspirations of the Queensland Youth Strategy is broad and ambitious. For the strategy to be genuinely inclusive, a commitment to addressing systemic barriers, discrimination, recognition of the diverse identities and needs of young people to equitably participate in representation and implementation of the strategy is imperative. This means:

- Going to the places where young people from diverse backgrounds live, and being willing to engage with the whole community,
- Being willing to spend time building relationships and trust amongst and with diverse young people, and
- Being conscious of who is not present and who is not participating, and if this indicates barriers of exclusion.

Young people from diverse backgrounds are clear:

They want to be heard.

They want to participate.

They want to feel safe and feel they belong in Queensland.

There are multiple actions possible to achieve this, however it is fundamental to address discrimination and racism, and challenge systems of exclusion to enable this to occur.

