

## Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) Submission to Youth Justice Reform Select Committee

January 2024

The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Queensland Government's Youth Justice Reform Select Committee's review of the youth justice system and support for victims of crime. Aligned with QPASTT's specialist expertise in refugee related trauma recovery and settlement this submission focuses on the ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and will address the following terms of the Inquiry:

- 2a. Prevention of entry and diversion of youth offenders from justice system with specific consideration of risk and protective factors that reduce crime
- 2b. Effective ways to stop recidivism and protect community from offending and the opportunity for community controlled organisations with specific reference to the role of First Nations people to provide support solutions and services.
- 2c. (iii) evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs

To prepare this submission consultations were completed with refugee community leaders in Brisbane and Toowoomba including the Arise Women Support Association and the Queensland African Communities Council (QACC). Recent consultations with youth leadership and advocacy group Youth Voice, and with community leaders from Greater Brisbane, Toowoomba, Cairns and Townsville have also informed this submission. Additionally, this submission also reflects the professional expertise of front line QPASTT staff who have decades of experience in working with young people from refugee background.

Due to the collectivist nature of most refugee communities, the experience of children and young people not only impacts their family but impacts the whole community. Conversely, there is broad collective responsibility for the wellbeing of children and young people. All families come to Australia with a clear purpose, which is to establish a good life for their children. As a result, there is enormous potential to improve the strengthen the network of support if services and government can effectively partner with refugee communities.

Our recommendations focus on the untapped opportunity to partner with ethnic communities in the design and delivery of prevention, early intervention and reintegration programs. Our experience is that local communities are well placed to understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable families. We assert that ethnic communities can be powerful allies in transforming the outcomes for youth in our society if they are empowered with equitable access to platforms and resources to share needs and solutions. Successful models of partnership that have been explored with First Nations communities will likely offer positive benefits for cultural communities, particularly those which share collectivist values and support structures.

## About QPASTT

QPASTT has been providing trauma recovery services for people of refugee background for over 27 years. For the past 19 years we have delivered family focussed group and counselling interventions within the suite of services we offer. During this time, we have built practice expertise on recovery from trauma and torture that is the result of state based, institutional, or ethnic persecution. We continue to evolve our knowledge and skills through partnership with refugee communities, with the commitment to continuously improve our cultural safety practices and service delivery model.

QPASTT is the Queensland member of the national Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT). Proportionally, Queensland welcomes a high number of younger people to our state through the national humanitarian program. This is reflected in our client data as below for the year 2022-2023:

- QPASTT supported 2,409 people through counselling and 5,966 through group programs, from 86 countries of origin.
- 45% of our clients required greater than six-months intervention, signifying the complexity of refugee-trauma recovery and the impact of social and economic stressors on wellbeing.
- 44% of our clients are children and young people aged under 25 years.
- Clients under 18 years of age:
  - 73% report experiencing severe or moderate traumatic stress symptoms
  - 69% report severe or moderate family difficulties
  - 68% report interpersonal difficulties
  - 68% report severe or moderate anxiety symptoms
  - 38% report severe or moderate social isolation
  - 12% report suicide ideation

In the 2022-2023 year, there was a 90% increase in the time spent responding to community and stakeholder requests on the QPASTT Support Line - an advice and support service that operates during business hours.

QPASTT acknowledges that many people from refugee background flourish in Australia, building rich and rewarding lives. However, this is not the case for everyone. The failure to halt the perpetuation of intergenerational trauma and systemic disadvantage continues to impact many families, children and young people. This is the focus of our concern in this submission.



## Understanding the Refugee Experience

Children, young people and families from refugee background have distinct survival experiences that can cause ongoing negative impacts on individual life trajectories. The experiences detailed below can come into play from the moment that the family enters Australia and act to exacerbate the stressors on family functioning, and limit thriving. As such it is important contextual knowledge considering the growing proportion of young people from refugee background in the youth justice system. Common refugee experiences include:

- Exposure from a young age to violence, intentional harm, deprivation and fear of danger including witnessing harm or death to primary carers – in many circumstances every family member has trauma memories engraved in their hearts and minds, and trauma symptoms in their body. Separation from significant extended family members can cause ongoing distress and grief.
- The family unit is likely to be skilled at navigating collectivist cultural and social systems that are vastly different to that of Australia. Families often arrive without those cultural social systems as well as limited English language skills and systems literacy to navigate complex finance, health, education and employment systems in Australia. Time limited support is provided by settlement services for the first 6 months after arrival, unless the family meets criteria for complex settlement support which can be extended for 18 months after arrival. However, the learning and community support needs remain.
- Many families and individuals experience racism and discrimination in Australia as repeated micro-aggressions and at times overt abuse and exclusion<sup>1</sup>. After multiple rejections or misunderstandings parents lose capacity to repeatedly attempt to access services, particularly if they are single parents and/or have a large number of children.
- Overseas qualifications and employment experience of adults is frequently not recognised, and they are forced to take low paid menial jobs. Additionally, workplace exploitation of workers from migrant backgrounds is increasingly recognised as being widespread in Australia<sup>2</sup>. This gives limited possibility to move out of poverty and parents often work long and extended hours reducing their availability for their children<sup>3</sup>.
- Intergenerational conflict within households can escalate as children and young people learn skills to negotiate mainstream culture, motivated by common developmental desire to “fit in”. Parents struggle to understand new expectations of family relationships and parenting, and household decision making, while maintaining cultural identity and connection.
- Education, employment and health systems prioritise individualism and frequently do not adapt to the needs of a family unit that is much more strongly embedded in collectivist cultures. This is particularly impactful when extended family obligations are not recognised.

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<sup>1</sup> MYAN (2022) [Multicultural Youth Perspective on Racism and the Draft Anti-Racism Framework](#). Ubuntu Project (2022) [Racism in Schools: African Australian Students Speak Up](#).

<sup>2</sup> Migrant Workers Centre (2023) [Insecure by Design: Australia’s migration system and migrant workers’ job market experience](#).

<sup>3</sup> SCOA (2019) [Recognising Overseas Skills and Qualifications](#).



All of this occurs within a global context: The world is becoming more dangerous with a rise in extremist thinking and flares in political and ethnic conflict. Those that settle in Australia via humanitarian pathways are a minority of those forcibly displaced or at intractable risk of harm. Parents and older siblings are frequently in contact with family members remaining in dangerous situations, with constant exposure to dangers of life in their “home country”, fear for the safety of loved ones, and grief over those who have died. Adults live with their hearts and minds in two places at once, with a moral obligation to protect and provide for extended family members with minimal resources to do so. This can create substantial stress and ongoing trauma within households, significantly impacting parents’ emotional and cognitive capacity to manage acculturation stressors of life in Australia without assistance.

Over the past decades, QPASTT has observed a trend of young people from refugee background with a history of school exclusion and complex family relationships, entering the youth justice system and then progressing to adult corrections. This is detailed in the infographic below and indicates two focal points of prevention: trauma informed, culturally safe education and supporting family functioning.



# Risk of Intergenerational Trauma on Young People from Refugee Backgrounds (three common pathways)

## ARRIVAL TO AUSTRALIA

- Children born overseas or born in Australia after family arrives
- Often in large family with a number of siblings, extended family in country of origin, third country or refugee camp
- Exposure to violence, conflict and camp trauma either directly or intergenerational trauma in family



## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

- Large families, frequently single adult headed households
- DFV and AOD misuse can be common
- Living in poverty, in low socio-economic areas with limited services and poor housing
- Continuing trauma: Moral obligation to protect/provide for extended family remaining without means or power to support
- Mistrustful of police, school, legal system, child safety - causing tension, conflict and distress in family functioning

## PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Low EALD support, quickly transitioned to large mainstream classrooms
- School limited engagement with families, no interpreters to speak with parents
- Trauma presentation in classroom from multiple students
- Exclusion and expulsion due to "behavioural problems"
- Graduate primary school low levels of literacy or functionally illiterate
- Children seeking love, belonging, attention



children presenting with depression, anxiety, self harm and suicide ideation

child safety concerns, violence high mental health/trauma stigma, low trust in QPASTT, parenting challenges



young people bored, sick of poverty, no future prospects, mistrustful of systems and service

## HIGH SCHOOL

- Exclusion, expulsion and moving between schools
- Unaware of or stigma/resistant to flexible education options
- Very bright but functionally illiterate and failing academically
- No whole of family engagement, high level of family/community suspicion of authorities and services from years of exclusion
- No education or decent employment prospects after school

## YOUTH CRIME

- Groomed into complex organised crime networks
- Well paid, illegal/criminal work enticing to have access to money or resources not otherwise be possible.
- Experienced racial profiling from police/justice authorities - further reinforces sense of exclusion
- From youth detention, frequently engage in further criminal activity - no effective transition pathways
- Limited access to effective court support/legal assistance



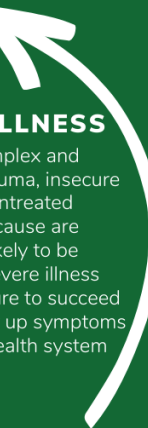
## SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

- Exclusion, low self worth, complex and intrusive intergenerational trauma, insecure attachment undetected and untreated
- In girls and young women because are "quiet and compliant" more likely to be unnoticed until chronic and severe illness
- Family and community pressure to succeed causes young people to cover up symptoms
- Highly avoidance of mental health system
- High suicide risk

## ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

- Self medicating to cope with trauma and life stressors
- Maladaptive coping strategy that impacts on functioning: mental health, study and employment prospects, relational health
- High suicide risk
- Risk of engagement in justice system

once charged with adult criminal offence - risk of indefinite detention or deportation



## Responding to Terms of Reference

### 2a. Prevention of entry and diversion of youth offenders from justice system with specific consideration of risk and protective factors that reduce crime

As detailed above, there are two significant systems in children and young people's lives: families and school. When either or both are not functioning well – that is, able to attend to the unique developmental and wellbeing needs of children and young people – there is significant risk of adverse health, economic and social outcomes. This can perpetuate intergenerational trauma, cycles of poverty and marginalisation, as without attachment to primary carers, stable and safe home environment, and education that enables growth and development, children cannot thrive. And in this vacuum, opportunistic purveyors of anti-social criminal activity offer delusions of inclusion, belonging and the only possibility of a life free from poverty.

Community members and frontline workers advise that education and family support systems are failing for those who are at risk, and preventative government interventions are ineffective or absent. Therefore, prevention strategies should be focussed on (i) improving trauma informed, culturally safe education experiences and (ii) building stronger family.

#### (i) Improving trauma informed, culturally safe education experiences

The Department of Education Queensland Equity and Excellence strategy has three pillars of focus: educational achievement; wellbeing and engagement; culture and inclusion<sup>4</sup>. QPASTT welcomes the combined focus on academic outcomes, wellbeing and inclusion, as children and young people learn best when they feel well, they belong and they are physically and psychosocially safe. However, there are no specific performance measures related to wellbeing and no regard for the specific needs of students from refugee background and their families in the strategy<sup>5</sup>. There is no dedicated action plan or strategy to address the needs of students of refugee background despite significant work to a revised Education CALD Strategy in 2022. Without dedicated resources and partnership with refugee led organisations and specialist services as exists in New South Wales and Victoria<sup>6</sup>, the unique engagement, wellbeing and educational needs of families from refugee background are unlikely to be realised.

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<sup>4</sup> Released March 2023. See <https://education.qld.gov.au/initiatives-and-strategies/strategies-and-programs/equity-and-excellence>

<sup>5</sup> Children and young people from refugee background are recognised by the Productivity Commission (2022) as at high risk of experiencing education disadvantage. See Productivity Commission (2022) *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*. Study report December 2022.

<sup>6</sup> See Foundation House [Schools in for Refugees](#) and [Early Years](#) programs in Victoria or the [STARTTS Schools Program](#) in New South Wales as examples of wholistic trauma informed education support.

In Queensland, the lack of strategy for students from refugee background is compounded by the Inclusive Education Policy that was implemented in 2020. This saw dissolution of dedicated English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) Units within most schools with high refugee populations, and has resulted in a loss of specialised teaching support tailored to the needs of refugee background students. Limited EAL/D support has reduced an overall capability in understanding and meeting the learning and wellbeing needs for students from refugee backgrounds and their families in schools. Schools need an embedded approach to inclusion addressing the language, learning development and adjustment to new education system impacts with families.

There is a disturbing trend of young people from refugee background (including those born in Australia), who after years of schooling in Australia remain illiterate, with limited employment or education opportunities. Schools are not sufficiently meeting the language and inclusion needs for these students and they report persistent exclusion, discrimination and racism<sup>7</sup>. This communicates overt and subtle messages that they are not welcome, do not belong, their needs are not important or recognised, and they do not have the potential to learn and thrive<sup>8</sup>.

There is significant need for consistent proactive inclusion of families from refugee background into the school community so they can collaborate in the shared responsibility of their children's learning. Parents report they are consistently underinformed by schools: Schools rarely provide information about student/parent meetings, school-based events or announcements in non-digital formats or in languages other than English. Interpreters are not offered for meetings with school staff which makes interactions ineffective. This is more acute in high schools where the expectation is that parents and guardians proactively engage with the school independently.

To address these deficits, schools need to build capacity to effectively engage with students, parents, guardians and wider cultural community, creating genuine welcome and invitation for families to collaborate in their children's education<sup>9</sup>. In practical terms this means:

- reinstating or creating on campus bi-cultural liaison roles and specialised teaching support roles
- targeting students and their parents/guardians at risk of disengagement with bi-cultural system navigation support and consultation
- offering school based and after hours support at times that suit families' multiple commitments
- offering communication in multiple languages and formats, and using interpreters as required for all interactions with parents and caregivers<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MYAN (2022) [Multicultural Youth Perspective on Racism and the Draft Anti-Racism Framework](#). Ubuntu Project (2022) [Racism in Schools: African Australian Students Speak Up](#).

<sup>8</sup> QPASTT staff report that almost all clients who have interacted with youth justice system have been expelled from at least one school.

<sup>9</sup> See the documented benefits of schools proactively engaging with families in Hammond et al (2018) *Classrooms of Possibility: Working with students from refugee backgrounds in mainstream classes*. UTS.

<sup>10</sup> The advice to parents of EAL/D students is communicated on the Department of Education website in English with a broken audio link. see <https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning-at-home/advice-to-parents/eald>

- training for classroom staff to recognise when a student is struggling with trauma symptoms, and provide collaboration pathways for specialist services to support students and give practical guidance for teachers to create trauma safe classrooms.

At their best, schools are places of belonging, where children and young people can obtain skills to engage with society and navigate adult systems while also developing sense of identity and place. When schools exclude young people, their prospects are extremely bleak and criminal activity may seem the only way out of poverty <sup>11</sup>.

## **(ii) Building strong families**

QPASTT believes that family is a key context for healing and is identified by clients as a key protective factor, but potentially can also be a barrier to healing when at times parents are also struggling against barriers for participation and elevation from poverty. At times of stress, conflict and harm can occur. Family relationships, patterns, and health are impacted by trauma and grief, and can be a site for the transmission of trauma. Issues of gambling and financial mismanagement, domestic and family violence, parenting, sexual and reproductive health, mental illness and disability can be highly stigmatised topics. Mainstream services often do not effectively engage with refugee community members, due to a lack of trauma awareness and cultural safety, or failure to effectively communicate through use of interpreters. As children and young people master language more quickly, the authority of parents is frequently undermined when services find communicating with them “too difficult”. This fuels intergenerational tension and conflict which increases risk factors. Families can be reluctant to seek assistance from mainstream services, and when they do, can quickly become fatigued by being misunderstood, and by experiencing communication and language breakdowns, time and financial costs.

Due to repeated experiences of culturally incompetent services compounding shame/stigma, it is not uncommon for the issues and challenges families are facing to be at crisis point before they are willing to seek assistance. When there is sufficient trust established to broker referral to Intensive Family Support services, such services are frequently at capacity and not accepting new referrals. At points of acute distress or with severe mental health presentations, QPASTT staff have also attempted to refer children and young people to Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS). At this point a number of referrals in South East Queensland and regional locations have been declined the child or young person is diagnosed with oppositional defiance disorder, reactive attachment disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with CYMHS practitioners deeming these as behavioural or parenting issues rather than mental health issues. This is despite such disorders recognised within the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) which is used as an international reference point for mental health conditions<sup>12</sup>. This renders many children and young people (and their families) with severe mental health presentations without clinical service options and is a service gap that must be addressed.

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<sup>11</sup> See also Sheperd et al (2018) Pathways to offending for young Sudanese Australians. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* Vol 51(4) 481-501.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>



Community members report that police rarely use interpreters when communicating with guardians of young people from refugee background. Additionally, people from refugee background may have previously had harmful experiences of police, immigration, or law enforcement in their country of origin or countries of transit. Interactions with police can be regarded with suspicion through fear that this may trigger removal of children, visa or residency cancellation, or risk of deportation. This cumulates in parents from refugee background frequently being uninformed about the legal offences their children are charged with, legal proceedings or how to respond. Parents have then reached out to community leaders to assist them to locate their child (who has been detained), the parent only realising something has occurred when their child does not return home. This indicates an absence of engagement with family in early intervention, rehabilitation and postvention strategies.

Proactive wrap around family support and capacity building services that are embedded in communities or designed and delivered in partnership with communities can enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors of intergenerational family conflict and inaccessible service support. Community initiative can provide additional support for families to relieve the pressure to provide all the social and emotional needs for children and young people. These initiatives require access to social infrastructure. There is particular benefit of community led pro-social and sporting activities, however long standing barriers to accessing sports fields to play soccer or basketball remain. Without income to access sports via Clubs or organised programs, young people often can't access sport which has social status as well as strong wellbeing benefits. Groups such as the African Lions Soccer group in Toowoomba are challenged to access fields with lights on weekends and after hours yet are providing a valuable social diversion for young people in the region.

QPASTT has a number of programs aimed at increasing strengths of families including:

- Building Stronger Families program which comprises cultural strengths-based, lived expertise family focussed workshops, delivered to ethnic specific communities.
- Communities Healing to Thrive program facilitates conversations on trauma and mental wellbeing and is designed and co-delivered with community members themselves to reduce stigma and encourage collective healing.

Programs such as these recognise the cultural strengths and values, and further build capacity of families to be sites of nurturing and healing. To be most effective, partnership with community members in the design and delivery of interventions is ideal. This takes trust and time to build the necessary relationships – resources that are often not recognised or accounted for in short term project funding. Additionally, program criteria must prioritise the needs of community, as identified by community.



## **2b. Effective ways to stop recidivism and protect community from offending and the opportunity for community controlled organisations with specific reference to the role of First Nations people to provide support solutions and services.**

The cultural-political history of First Nations peoples and people from refugee background are distinctly different. However, there are shared characteristics of living within two cultural paradigms, history of intentional harm, surviving systemic racism and frequently experience of racial profiling<sup>13</sup>. Following lessons learnt from First Nations initiatives, cultural support of young people from refugee background should be a fundamental component in early intervention and of rehabilitation. This should include initiatives such as court based cultural elders and advisors, wrap around community based supports for families, cultural conferences/restorative practices, and pro-social programs led by cultural leaders and community members to role model culturally aware problem solving behaviours. The lack of culturally safe and trauma informed pro-social support and relationships perpetuates the vacuum where anti-social identity and behaviour can proliferate.

Anecdotal evidence indicates the most prevalent criminal activity amongst young people from refugee background is drug running, theft/fraud or handling stolen goods. QPASTT and QACC staff reported the following:

- Dealers and criminal leads wait for the young person to be released from youth detention and threaten to harm family members if young people do not continue to work for them
- Police fail to protect young people who are willing to disclose the identity of dealers or criminal leads within the community; instead, police request more evidence without any protection offered to the young people or their families
- Young people are acutely aware of the risk of family members becoming known by criminal networks, so they withhold information from family members and have been known choose to move interstate to get away from this risk of violent retribution
- However, when some members of the community have advocated directly to a responsive local Member of Parliament, protective action is quickly put in place which demonstrates that the resources are there but not offered until forced to do so.

Once engagement in the youth justice system commences, frequently young people and their families do not have the knowledge to navigate these systems and are unaware of support services available. When young people and their families do not proactively engage with the justice system this is interpreted as a lack of interest or care rather than indication of unresolved barriers to engagement such as communication breakdown, lack of accessible information and no systems navigation support. Initiatives to address legal awareness within refugee background communities have been piecemeal and temporary:

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<sup>13</sup> Young people from African, Middle Eastern and Asian backgrounds describe being pulled up by police on the street on a weekly basis. Racial profiling is similarly documented in the 2022 [End of Mission Statement](#) by United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

- In 2016-17, QPASTT was able to collaborate with the Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC) and QACC on a community legal education project that utilised law students and graduate lawyers to run a series of consultations to create education resources and workshops aimed at increasing young people from African backgrounds knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities. The resources were designed based on young people's current experiences and interactions with law enforcement to ensure topics had real life applicability.
- In 2021, QPASTT ran a pilot project providing tailored practical education sessions on legal and youth justice systems, as well as individual case management support for young people and their families, assisting them to connect with duty lawyers, gain pre-court advice, and prepare supporting materials for court. To demonstrate the failure of justice systems to adequately engage with families, on more than one occasion, the QPASTT program worker reconnected young people with their parent, after their parent was unable to locate them within the justice system. This program was meaningful and successful in responding to a very basic justice navigation need, however could not continue due to lack of funds.

QPASTT staff work with young adults who have transitioned through youth justice and into adult corrections. These clients consistently express that as young people they felt lost, unable to find their way and as teenagers they were trying to get through every day without the guidance which would have allowed them to consider the long term consequences of actions. None of these clients can identify any interventions offered to them that would have redirected them to a pro-social life path, or meaningful rehabilitation programs while in the youth justice system. They are young adults who have uncertain future prospects - they continue to struggle with addictions that proliferated while in immigration detention, they have limited experience of employment, and rudimentary literacy skills. This is a tragedy for the refugee community who have fled to Australia seeking a life free from persecution. These young adults recommended supported education and vocational training programs as essential components of recidivism prevention, as well as support for reintegration to community and family networks.

## 2c. (iii) evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs

### Whole of School Engagement

Multi-layered culturally safe and trauma informed education programs such as New South Wales based STARTTS in Schools have demonstrated increased family engagement in school life, academic performance and wellbeing for students, and teaching staff confidence and satisfaction<sup>14</sup>. The program evaluation documents that 87% of teachers reported academic improvement of students who engaged in STARTTS programs. Additionally, students

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<sup>14</sup> STARTTS (2021) [STARTTS in Schools Evaluation Report](#).

themselves indicated that their wellbeing (mood, stress level, sleep) and confidence improved as a result of participating in STARTTs schools based programs.

The Victorian project Refugee Education Support Program (“Schools in for Refugees” and “Early Years” programs) have been found to increase engagement between staff, community and family, contributing to stronger learning environments for students; build teacher skills and awareness and provide practical benefit on day-to-day school life<sup>15</sup>.

Learning from the success of Victorian and New South Wales programs, Queensland would greatly benefit from implementing similar programs. Based on interstate evidence, a dedicated education program tailored to meet the needs of students from refugee background and their families is an early intervention and prevention program that addressed educational inequities would reduce education exclusion and subsequent risk of engagement in youth justice system in Queensland. QPASTT proposes that such an education program should include the element of a whole of school environment, trauma aware education approach detailed in the infographic here.

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<sup>15</sup> Nous group (2015) [Refugee Education Support Program: Evaluation Report](#). December 2015

*QPASTT Trauma Aware Education Approach  
(2023)*



## Place-based community partnerships



QPASTT acknowledges the African Village Model (left) created by the Queensland African Communities Council. The model is depicted here and identifies four interconnected loci of responsibility for the care and wellbeing of a child: family, community, services and government. Based on the concept *it takes a village to raise a child*", all four have a clear role to play in young people's inclusion, wellbeing and thriving future in Queensland. QACC believes that this can be realised through genuine partnership between ethno-specific communities, services and government.

*QACC African Village Model 2023*

African Youth Support Council (AYSC) is a service arm of QACC. AYSC was established over 3 years ago and has been scaling up the scope of work with young people from African backgrounds, from the establishment of Africa Youth Drop-In Centres, school-based programs to Youth Mentoring support for young people in Brisbane Youth Detention Centre (BYDC) and West Moreton Youth Detention Centre (WMYDC)<sup>16</sup>. The approach undertaken with young people in detention centres is to encourage connection and pro-social collectivist values between individuals to keep each other responsible and accountable, and to assist each other to co-regulate their behaviour to positively manage distress. In essence, AYSC is enacting the components of the African Village Model by

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.qacc.com.au/african-youth-support-council/>

brokering relationships with detention staff, building relationships and organising activities for young people, liaising with families and building transition plans as best they can to support young people when they are released from detention. Independent evaluation of AYSC's program demonstrates its positive impact<sup>17</sup>.

In the context of limited access to culturally safe trauma recovery or mental health services within youth detention for young people from refugee background, this program could be readily expanded, particularly to support the transition of young people from detention back into the community and build more effective networks of support and opportunity for the young person's continued rehabilitation in collaboration with families, community and local services. Given the successful impact of the AYSC program, similar initiatives could be expended across Queensland and encouraged from Middle Eastern and Asian community organisations to ensure that young people from diverse cultural backgrounds are similarly supported.

Lived-expertise refugee led programs, such the work of the ARISE Women Support Association<sup>18</sup> can be more effective as experienced community members understand the initial excitement on arrival and have experienced the range of settlement challenges that people face. They are well placed to provide guidance and advice with support of services and facilitate interactions with systems and services. By coming together as women building social connection with each other and learning together they also have the benefit of the collective encouragement that comes from being together. This also builds the experience and capacity within communities themselves rather than increasing and maintaining dependence on external services. Community leaders and active members have mobilised community supports for young people in detention or prison, overcoming stigma and barriers of access to visit with young people in the youth justice system. ARISE Women Support Association are determined to provide support and connection for youth at risk and support their reintegration with family and community. Similar initiatives are the ambition of the newly formed Darling Downs African Communities Council, with the adjunct aim of sharing settlement experience between African and Middle Eastern community members in the Darling Downs region.

Multicultural Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) are an invaluable resource to the police force at large, the court/justice system and community members themselves. Within the constraints of their capacity, they are able to broker relationships between community members and the police force, build understanding in the community about the justice system including court, prison system and legal supports. PLOs are also a useful resource to assist community members in navigating police processes. It would be beneficial to assess expansion of the Multicultural PLO team across the state.

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<sup>17</sup> Correa-Velez, I and Coulibaly, S. (2022) *AYSC Youth Mentoring and Family Support Programs: First Year Evaluation Report*. Queensland University of Technology. Available from the Queensland African Communities Council (QACC).

<sup>18</sup> See [Arise Womens Support Association](#) website for further details



## Additional Key Factor: Meaningful diversity data

Available data of young people engaged in the youth justice system does not adequately identify diversity and is limited to gender, age and First Nations identifiers<sup>19</sup>. This is despite the requirement within the Queensland Government's *Multicultural Action Plan* (Key Action 4) to "collect, analyse, and use cultural diversity data to improve service delivery and better meet customer needs."<sup>20</sup> Eighteen (18) agencies have signed up to this key action including the now Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training. However, Youth Justice has no initiatives in response to this key action.

Anecdotal reports provided by refugee community members and leaders is that there is a disproportionately high and growing representation of young people from refugee background in the youth justice system. It is essential that justice systems collect accurate data on the ethnic identity of young people, including those born in Australia to recently arrived refugee background parents. In Queensland, there is a pervasive and deeply unhelpful lack of understanding of ethnic identity, which is leading to an unrecognised increase in representation of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds in youth detention. Accurate data with reliable analysis of types of offending, family and community circumstances and pathways to offending will help families and communities as well as services to understand and coordinate support and responses in partnership. It would inform tailored prevention, early intervention and transition approaches and strategies.

QPASTT would recommend a five factor minimum data set to accurately identify ethnic diversity:

1. Country of Birth
2. Interpreter required
3. Language spoken
4. Cultural background/ethnicity
5. Date of arrival in Australia

Use of all five factors would enable further understanding of cultural identity and understanding that refugee related trauma and experience may be a presenting factor of disadvantage and support need. Comprehensive cultural data collection would provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of the diversity within the CALD population of Queensland. The five factor data set has been strongly advocated within health data collection<sup>21</sup>. A near

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<sup>19</sup> See Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) [Youth Justice in Australia 2021-22](#).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/multicultural-affairs/policy-governance/policy-plan>

<sup>21</sup> Kay, M. (2021) *Measurement is the key to delivering culturally responsive care*. Medical journal of Australia 215 (9).



identical data set (period of residence in Australia rather than date of arrival in Australia) has been assessed by the Australian Institute of Health Welfare across health data collections<sup>22</sup>.

QPASTT recognises that accurate and comprehensive data collection is a significant investment in infrastructure, collection training and implementation. However, diversity data is a critical component in understanding needs and trends, and in designing cost-effective responses. Without accurate data, systems remain blind to unique needs and are unable to report meaningful outcomes.

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) [Supplementary tables for Australia's Health 2018: Table C5.3.4 CALD measure in AIHW health data collections](#). See also extensive discussion in FECCA (2021) [If we don't count it... It doesn't count! Towards Consistent National Data Collection and Reporting on Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity](#).

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

QPASTT believes that preventative actions are required to address the drivers of youth crime, particularly systems of support and culturally led resourcing for families and transforming education in Queensland to be culturally safe, trauma informed and responsive to needs of refugee background students (see appendix one). QPASTT believes culturally informed early intervention action within the justice system is essential. Furthermore, addressing systemic barriers to equity and cohesion are fundamental building a Queensland that can realise the thriving potential of our population.

### Respond to root causes of youth crime – trauma inducing education and complex family conflict/instability:

1. Collection and reporting of robust data to ensure that programs can be informed by need – consistent with Queensland Multicultural Action Plan
2. Support community led case management, prevention, early intervention, diversion and transition programs
3. Resource place based, targeted initiatives to address and resolve intergenerational conflict within refugee background families
4. Adequate resourcing of effective culturally safe and trauma informed family support programs
5. Proactive resourcing of 3 levels of nested engagement for (i) children and young people, (ii) their families (iii) faith/cultural community
6. Fundamental provision of cultural supports for all young people from diverse backgrounds engaged in the youth justice system
7. Multilayered culturally safe and trauma informed education policy, including collaboration with refugee led organisations/cultural community and specialist services to prevent school disengagement
8. Increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years and provide wrap around resources for youth services, with a priority for services that engage in genuine collaborative partnerships with community/refugee led organisations.

### Proactively address systemic barriers to social cohesion:

1. Resource and mandate the use of interpreters at all stages of education, social service provision and justice systems
2. Anti-racism and cultural safety training for all staff within the education and justice systems
3. Provide culturally safe opportunities for families and communities to co-collaborate in the care and support of children and young people – pivot from a shame, fear and punishment approach that fuels disconnection and exclusion
4. Resource settlement support responding to needs at key life milestones, and particularly focussed on family members that may not be able to fully participate in initial arrival orientation programs, or who encounter new issues after a length of time in Australia
5. Resource long term community legal education and bi-cultural legal system navigation, tailored to the needs and experiences of refugee background communities.

## APPENDIX ONE

# Opportunity for Intergenerational Healing and Thriving of Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

## ARRIVAL TO AUSTRALIA

The physical, mental, emotional, and material stressors of forced displacement, refugee status recognition and transit to Australia has a significant impact on wellbeing:

- 23% of client have experienced torture; 76% experience trauma
- young people statistically significant higher levels of psychological distress



## PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Enhanced access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to support transition to school.
- Trauma informed classrooms to support children communication, social skill, cognitive and sensory development.
- Early intervention access to group and individual play and expressive therapy programs in school (QACC, QPASTT and HEAL)
- Culturally informed engagement between schools, communities and families
- EALD support to recover from interrupted schooling and adjustment to Australian education



schools are environment to address racism, bullying, foster safe and respectful relationships

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

- Transition programs to vocational and education pathways such as Ucan2 (youth AMEP program)
- Opportunities and support for emerging community leaders to address issues of priority
- Young people inform social service and program development for future generations



young peoples' healing and belonging fuels thriving of the wider community

Proactive culturally safe service response to indicators of vulnerability: cycles of crisis, reliance on emergency services.



## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Opportunity for early intervention to address high prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences:

- Collective, wrap around family and community support in collaboration between settlement, trauma recovery, allied health and education providers, using the systems and strengths already existing in community
- Community co-created early intervention and prevention family systems work to encourage relational and attachment skills of parents
- Safe and secure housing, adult education and employment opportunities, understanding of rights and responsibilities and confidence to self-advocate

## HIGH SCHOOL

- Trauma informed training and development of classroom staff - evidence based resource hubs and supports
- External services collaborate with schools to create a wellbeing culture on school campus (QACC, QPASTT etc)
- Continued access to group and individual expressive therapy programs (QPASTT and HEAL)
- Bi-cultural supports and liaison officers within schools to build partnership between school and family
- Flexible learning models to offer differentiated teaching and learning strategies
- Wrap around after hours school supports such as homework clubs, mentoring, school holiday programs to support learning and engagement.



vocational learning opportunities as well as supported academic pathways

## INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALING

Possibility of breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma through safe respectful relationships

Opportunities and capacity to name, challenge and dismantle systemic disadvantage

