Listening to the wisdom of parents of refugee background

August 2017
When I was at school……..

1. My schooling wasn’t disrupted
2. I was literate and numerate in my first language
3. I learnt in my first language
4. I didn’t have to worry about loved ones lost or separated from me in other countries
5. I hadn’t experienced war related violence, loss, fear and associated trauma
6. I knew that I could stay in Australia
7. I could understand what was expected of me in the classroom
8. I could speak my first language when I needed to
9. My teachers called me by my name and quickly learnt to pronounce it
10. The resources used in class often reflected the experiences of my family, culture and ancestry
11. The school could offer me a career pathway to match my skills and education

adapted from White Privilege/Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack
Workshop Goals

In the context of working with parents/carers of refugee backgrounds

TO:

• Revisit the refugee experience

• Explore parent/carer engagement and how it promotes recovery from trauma

• Discuss opportunities and challenges in engaging parents/carers

• Share resources and strategies for successful partnerships with parents/carers, within a whole school approach
Foundation House - Our Mission

To advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people from refugee backgrounds who have experienced torture or other traumatic events
How Foundation House works with schools

• Counseling for children, young people, individuals and families
• Professional and organisational development
• Secondary consultation
• Schools support program
• Refugee Education Support Program (RESP)
• Resources for teachers
• Early Years Program

http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/schools-support-program-resources/
Why focus on families?

- Improved school readiness
- Higher retention & graduation rates
- Better social & relational skills
- Enhanced cognitive development & academic achievement
- Higher motivation & greater ability to self-regulate behaviour

 Family School & Community Partnerships Bureau (2011)
‘Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children’.

(Article 26.3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)
Definitions

A refugee is a person who

“owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…”

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

An asylum seeker is a person who

has applied for refugee protection and is awaiting a decision.
Facts at a glance: the global picture

Over **50 million** people of concern to the UNHCR

- 51% of all refugees are **children** (<18yrs)
- Over **86%** of the world refugees are hosted by developing countries
- On average **42,500** people are displaced per day globally
Ongoing resettlement issues

Finances
- Repaying loans, housing, furniture, school fees, clothing

New Systems
- Centrelink, Medicare, school, supermarkets

New Culture
- Gender, family roles, language, new freedoms for teenagers

Separation
- Continuing separation from family members

ONGOING TRAUMA REACTION
Resettlement

Arrival

- Education
- Income Support
- Food/Shelter
- Safety

Difficulties Learning the Language

Ongoing Welfare Dependency

Limited Interaction/Participation in Mainstream Contexts

Lack of Employment Opportunities

Marginalisation

Increased Language Competence

Participation

Employment

Integration

Post Arrival
Four Key Beliefs

- All parents have dreams for their children & want the best for them
- All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning
- Parents & school staff should be equal partners
- School leaders are responsible for building partnerships between home and school

Karen Mapp & Anne Henderson (2010)

Un schooled does not mean uneducated

Maggie Farrer
The Definition

“Parent engagement is a two-way collaboration between families and schools based on good communication, trusting relationships and respectful partnerships, with the goal of enhancing children’s education”

REAL advisory groups 2014-15
A continuum of engagement

Restrict  Contact  Involve  Engage  Partner
An information session for parents of new students is advertised in the on-line newsletter, but not translated.

Parents are asked to RSVP to the session via email.

Parents are asked to leave young children at home.
A follow up session is held to cater for some of the specific concerns of new arrival families, run by the Multicultural Education Aide.

As part of the session parents are buddied up with parents who have already have children at the school.

Some of these experienced parents actually present sections of the information to the new parents.
Five schools in the project

Parents Advisors from Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Burma (both Chin and Karen ethnic groups)
Relationships to Enhance Accessible Learning

Structure

Parent Community

Advisory Group

School Team

School Leadership

Welfare Coordinator

Multicultural Education Aide

Other School Reps

Implementation

Foundation House Facilitation
SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES IN PARTNERSHIP

A Desktop Guide to Engaging Families from Refugee Backgrounds in their Children’s Learning

Available for free download from Foundation House website
Desktop Guide Topics

- Interpreting & Translating
- MEA role
- Transitions
- Parent Teacher Interviews
- Helping Children at Home
- Helping in the classroom
- School tours/Learning Walks
- Careers planning
- Students
- Governance
“English is a very hard language. You may understand some of it but not all the terminology. It is very important to have an interpreter for a parent/teacher interview because the teacher talks about the progress of your child. It is important to understand every word.

It is important to have an interpreter…to understand every word.”

“Sometimes our children are irresponsible and parents do not know what is happening at school or school doesn’t know what’s happening at home. It makes children more responsible if they know parents and schools are speaking to each other.”
“I will go back to School Council again as long as an interpreter is available. It is very important that the school hears parents’ opinions. Unlike in my country, parents’ opinions can be effective in schools.”

Careers information is new for people from my country...there was no such thing there.
“The Multicultural Education Aide is a bridge between parents and school. The community feel they can’t approach a teacher directly, but will do so via the MEA.” It means the MEA role is very important for the school”

Teacher

“We’ve used bi-lingual students to provide information to parents, but they have insufficient knowledge to explain the issues around careers and subject choices to their parents.”
Resources

- Life Skills / Health / Personal Development (Secondary - New Arrivals)
- Pastoral Care / Transition Student Wellbeing (Middle Years – whole class)
- SOSE or an Integrated Curriculum Unit (Middle Years – whole class)
- Small group program (Primary – small group)
- School Strategic Planning (with Audit Tool)
- Parent / carer Engagement Strategy
A parent’s experience at your school…

1. I feel like a ‘partner’ with my children’s school
2. I am familiar with the education system & career pathways in Victoria
3. I can communicate with my children’s teacher & the admin staff in my first language
4. I can read and understand the notices that come home from school
5. I understand the teaching pedagogy used in my child’s classroom
6. I am confident to contact the school if I am concerned about my child
7. School staff know my name and pronounce it correctly
8. I know where to go and who to talk to if I have questions about how my child is going at school
9. I know some of the other parents at school and feel confident to speak to them
10. I have a strong community network to whom I can turn for support
11. There are opportunities for me linked to the school

Adapted from White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack
More information?

• **Refugee health Network** [www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au)

• **Free resources, training and referral at Foundation House** [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

• **Australian Childhood Foundation**

• **Calmer Classrooms**

• **Refugee Health Program** (nurses & allied health)