

REFUGEE YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK OF SA (RYINSA)

REFUGEE YOUTH HOUSING POLICY

Background

Young new arrivals from refugee backgrounds are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in society. Some have been child soldiers, some have witnessed or experienced torture and trauma, some have received very little or no formal education, many have lost or become separated from their usual sources of support, including family, friends and familiar networks and some have spent years in refugee camps or immigration detention centres. These young people generally arrive in Australia with no money or worldly goods, with poor English language skills and with no understanding of Australian culture and systems.

Adjusting to life in a new country can be very difficult for any migrant but it can be particularly difficult for refugees who have been subject to forced migration. Refugee young people in the initial stages of resettlement have to contend with many difficult issues including learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture and systems, coping with pre and post migration experiences of loss, trauma and disruption, making new friends and for many, helping parents cope with the resettlement process.

It is widely recognised both nationally and internationally that obtaining appropriate, affordable and secure housing is critical to effective resettlement. However, unemployment, low and fixed incomes and racism on the part of landlords, real estate agents, neighbours and the general community is preventing many young refugees from securing satisfactory housing.

Policy Position

In accordance with its commitment to social justice, the Refugee Youth Issues Network of SA (RYINSA) believes that young refugees have the right to:

- equal access to appropriate, affordable and secure housing
- equal access to quality housing information, programs and services
- protection from racism and discrimination in the housing market and general community
- participate in housing policy and service planning decisions that affect them

RYINSA is strongly committed to promoting, advancing and advocating for these housing rights.

Current Challenges

Young refugees and their families experience a number of barriers that prevent their equitable access to housing:

- Language difficulties and cultural barriers resulting in an ability to understand and navigate the housing system, for example, lease agreements, procedures for terminating a tenancy and so on.
- Lack of financial resources to cover bonds, furniture and other household items, high rents and increases in rent
- No rental history in Australia and lack of appropriate references
- General shortage of private rental low-cost housing
- General shortage of public rental housing
- Racism and discrimination on the part of real estate agents and landlords, resulting in young people being denied their preferences and being forced to accept unsatisfactory housing
- Lack of appropriate housing for those belonging to larger families
- Frequent moving, generally as a result of inappropriate, unaffordable or insecure housing and racism in the neighbourhood and general community
- Homelessness as a result of family break-down, inability to pay high rents and lack of access to support services
- Lack of access to support beyond their first housing experience, resulting in an inability to improve the quality of their housing

Key Priorities

RYINSA's key priorities are to advocate for:

- Refugee youth-specific orientation programs that equip young people with the knowledge and skills to access housing information and support and effectively navigate the housing system
- An increase in housing information and support for young refugees during the first three years of settlement
- Greater refugee youth access to public rental housing
- Refugee youth-specific early intervention strategies to support young people who are at risk of becoming homeless
- Community education campaigns and strategies to reduce racism and discrimination in the housing market and improve housing outcomes for young refugees

