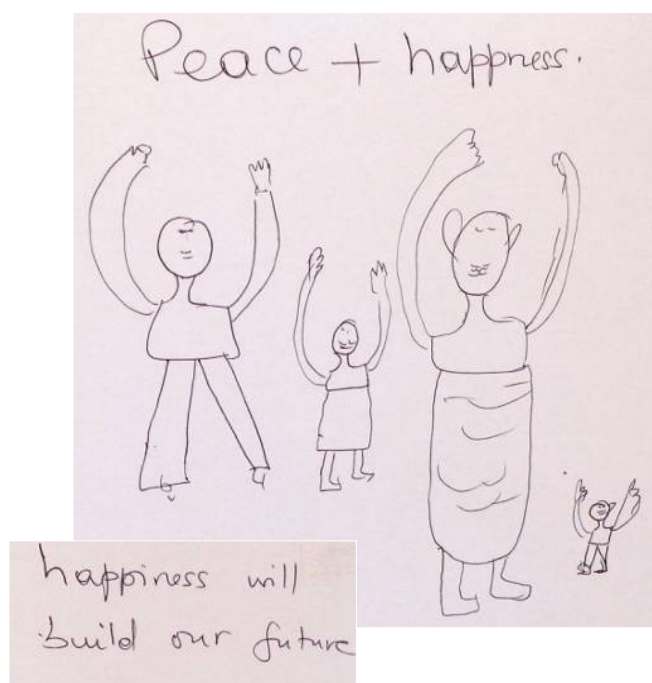




Centre for
Refugee Research

ACCES
— services inc.

African women talking: “We want the best thing for our family”



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In partnership with
Staff and clients of Assisting Collaborative Community Employment Support
(ACCES) Services Inc, Logan, Queensland



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ACCES Services Inc (Assisting, Collaborative, Community, Employment, Support Services Inc) is a community based, not for profit organisation based in Logan City, Queensland. ACCES Services Inc was established 25 years ago. ACCES is committed to fostering community development, settlement and employment initiatives and to providing personal support programs to address the needs of disadvantaged community groups including migrants, refugees, humanitarian entrants and temporary protection visa holders. ACCES operates the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), a settlement support program funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to ensure that newly arriving refugee and humanitarian clients are resettled and supported to rebuild their lives in Australia and can become fully active and participating members of the Australian community.

Other ACCES services include: projects funded by DIAC's Settlement Grants and Complex Case Support programs; a range of job assistance programs; youth projects; a refugee trauma counselling service; a multicultural access project; and family counselling programs.

(Adapted from www.accessservicesinc.org.au)



The Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) is an interdisciplinary research centre at UNSW. CRR focuses on international refugee flows, internally displaced people, forced migration and resettlement issues. It conducts research, education and advocacy programs, partnering with community based refugee organisations, in relation to the:

- Nexus between refugee circumstances overseas and the resettlement experience in developed countries
- Identification of and response to the most vulnerable refugees, in particular women and girls at risk.

CRR adopts a human rights framework and engages principles of social justice and community development in all its work.

(www.crr.unsw.edu.au)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In October 2009, the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR), in partnership Assisting Collaborative Community Employment Support (ACCES) Services Inc, conducted interviews and a community consultation in Logan, Queensland. They worked with women from African and refugee backgrounds, to learn about their family experiences before and since resettlement in Australia, and canvas their ideas for achieving better communication and understanding between refugee families and service providers in the area of family. ACCES and the women had observed that in many cases refugee women and families are bewildered and disempowered in their dealings with family and child protection agencies. They noted that some families felt African communities are targeted by child protection agencies for attention, and that preconceived notions relating to their refugee and/or African backgrounds influenced service provider actions and decisions.

In the consultation, the women engaged in an interactive process where they used 'storyboarding' to analyse and discuss their experiences and concerns about parenting issues. Individual interviews were also held with a small number of women. While the focus of the consultation and this report is on relationships between parents, children and child protection services rather than broader family and resettlement issues, it is critical to consider such issues in a broad and holistic context, as an understanding of the holistic context can contribute to culturally competent intervention and interaction with refugee families.

Refugee life

Before arriving in Australia, refugees have experienced persecution, violence and hardship that most Australians cannot imagine. The women shared stories of their flight, refugee life and eventual journey to Australia. Their stories highlight the hardship, loss and pain of refugee life, but also the strength and resilience they showed in their survival.

We didn't know that the war is coming. Just start like that, people running.

We ran away from our country just to save our own lives.

In the refugee camp, it was very, very hard. Life was very terrible. Living in grasses.

[In the camp] it is just dust and blood. And there is no way...people sleep at night.

Sometime you might be surviving in a way that you don't know whether you are still alive or not.

The women described their particular risks and experiences of repeated acts of severe violence including brutal rapes. They reported how they were in danger not just from

rebels or soldiers, but that with the breakdown of whole social and family systems, violence against women including rape was also endemic in refugee camps and urban settlements. The women also spoke about the longer-term impacts of this horrific sexual violence, including that some women from their communities had borne children of rape. In many cases the women continued to care for these children but were often shamed and ostracized by their community and had little support to assist them in raising their families.

You can expect anything, you can get raped anytime and there were a lot of things. Even sometimes you would hear, next door someone was shot last night, or a lady was abducted; there was a lot of things that you will hear.

The women described how difficult it was to keep together and safe as a refugee family. However, many women spoke about how trying to keep their family safe was a strong driving force for mothers. They went to great lengths to keep their families together and to try to keep them safe. Many end up caring for members of their extended family or even complete strangers in need, even when they have few resources and no safety themselves.

My mum.... has hold of us together and despite all that she went through, losing her children and her husband and even not able to bury them - that was a big thing. But mum held the family together....she tried everything to hold the family together.

Resettlement

Refugees do not leave their countries voluntarily, and are reluctant to accept that they will never be able to go back; but resettlement is often the only chance for safety for themselves and their children. Resettlement to Australia is an opportunity to regain and rebuild shattered lives, but resettlement itself presents many challenges, not least of which is adapting to new social systems and changing family roles and dynamics in their new environment. The women described their happiness at many aspects of resettlement

In Australia...our children are not struggling to go to school... they are not hearing noise of guns, they are not hiding in the bush. Here in Australia everyone has peace.

The women's hopes for resettlement all revolved around hopes for safety and a bright future for their children, and a desire to live a happy life with their family. However they also discussed some of the many challenges of resettlement, including social isolation and dislocation, changing gender roles and expectations, and inadequate or inaccessible settlement support. They described how, while some people settle quickly and are immediately able to embrace the challenges of settlement, others take longer to adjust or recover, or have more to catch up on before they feel they can participate in community life.

Families and resettlement

Through their refugee and settlement experiences, parents from a refugee background have demonstrated great strengths in caring for their children and looking after their families. The women expressed their love and concern for their children and their desire for them to take up the opportunities that education and safety in Australia offer them. They also want their children to grow up as good citizens and see an important role of parenting as guiding their child's moral development.

The women also talked about some differences in the norms and social and family environment in which parenting occurs between African countries and Australia, in particular the lack of shared responsibility for raising children. Many of the women described the challenges they and their children face in being between two cultures and the life they want for their children, and in managing the differences between bringing up children in Africa and in Australia.

To raise the kids here we think is good but it is going to be a culture thing between us and the kids too.

With their past experiences as a refugee, and hopes for the future focussed on the opportunities resettlement has made for their children, some of the women described their disappointment when their children do not see things the same way. Differing social norms and expectations can be challenging for families, with many of the women reporting conflict between children and parents over apparently different moral and social standards or behaviour. They report that for some families this can lead to a breakdown in family discipline and intergenerational conflict.

The women described how some parents feel disappointed to see their child take advantage of their rights in Australia without taking responsibility. They love their children and worry for their future. But they also feel unsupported by a system that they see gives all the rights to children without supporting them as parents in their efforts to help their children learn right from wrong, develop their moral life, understand their responsibilities, and make the most of the opportunities they have in Australia.

Where we came from the life was just down, and the first day we came [to Australia] these people give you fridge, they say this is your house: [the kids think] it means we just get everything from nothing. They get high rights in Australia, the rights they have destroyed them

Parents from Africa and child safety authorities

The women recognised and acknowledged the important role of the police and the Department of Child Safety (DCS) in protecting children exposed to violence or other danger. They recognise the importance of abiding by Australian law and norms and cited examples where intervention by DCS has helped families. Mostly, however, the women described how they feel powerless and frustrated by the child protection system. They believe assumptions and judgements are made about them because of their African or

refugee background, including that they need to be taught how to “parent”. They are saddened and confused by family separation within their communities.

I think it is the perception that, this person is from Africa: oh, he is not good for the kids, he does not love his wife. From the [child protection] services, they think, [that family] don't love their kids and oh yeah, the kids are being abused.

In Africa we all live together and in Australia there is a lot of change, there is separation, kids with child safety and those parents are miserable and not understanding what is going on.

Mothers reported challenges in knowing how to discipline their children in this new environment, isolated from the family and community structures that supported their parenting in their home country. They report that there is fear in the communities about the Department of Child Safety and that some children exploit this fear, disempowering them in their parenting role.

The women feel the authorities listen to children without listening to parents, which enables children to abuse the power this gives them over their parents. They reported that there was no opportunity to talk or solve problems, and that often as parents with poorer English language skills than their children, the police and DCS relied on talking to the children without asking them anything. They feel that families are separated without appropriate recourse to mediation and resolution of problems.

They took the children, go in the car. Parents stare, and mum says, what's wrong? - They didn't tell us. We didn't stay together and solve the problem together. They came and took our children.

Women expressed that there is a view within the communities that the current approach to child safety is damaging their families and communities. They were also concerned that families may not know their rights or who to try to seek help from, or that their responses may be misinterpreted due to language barriers.

These are the big men with power over families so we have nothing else to say. Our kids know their rights as soon as they walk, they call police, they call child safety. They can call anyone; Mum can't speak the language and the child safety pay more attention to the child. There's a good relation with the children and police and child safety, and there's no relationship between us and the police. They pay more attention to our kids and they ignore us, they are going straight and we feel left behind.

Many women feel they have lost control in their families, but that intervention by child safety authorities does not necessarily always lead to good outcomes for the children.

What we tried to show here is the Child Safety officer oppressing the mother, taking the right of the mother so that the children do what they like. It is not actually good for the child.

Child safety found [her] a place to live, a place with where they put children who are not living with their parents. She is pregnant now. She was doing well in class, every

teacher was saying good, intelligent. But now she is pregnant, and living with her boyfriend, and she is only sixteen.

Recommendations from refugee women for improving settlement and family outcomes

Although the participants in the consultations and interviews were clear about the challenges to parenting and family life in Australia, they also shared many ideas about how to improve things for their families in settlement. The ideas and contributions of the women demonstrated thoughtfulness and wisdom, and a strong desire to be engaged in finding and contributing to solutions for issues within their communities. They see this kind of community engagement as a means to achieve mutual understanding between communities and service providers, and to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for refugee families.

The suggestions made by the participants in the consultations and interviews were:

1. For services and communities to implement strategies for two-way learning – acknowledging that “Active integration comes from both sides”.

The women suggested that their communities need more knowledge and understanding about local child protection practices, but that services, including child protection authorities, need more knowledge and understanding of their communities. There was a strong feeling that such understanding is currently lacking. The women saw that such mutual understanding would have mutual benefits, with agencies and community working together to achieve good outcomes.

It is two ways of learning, it is the services, the police, the department of child safety, they need to learn about you and your family, but you also need time to understand things in Australia.

2. For services to provide culturally competent services and opportunities to keep families together – in particular enhancing family unity and resilience through talking and mediation.

A strong picture that emerged during the consultation was the bewilderment of parents when children are removed from their care. There was a sense that more needed to be done to help families, that communication and mediation and support programs are needed to enable families to stay intact.

What we think is, everybody should sit together if there is an issue. Instead of just coming to take the child, expect them to sit with the family and work through the issues instead of just taking the child. We are distressed parents.

3. For services to ensure they talk to the parents as well as the child, including where language or other communication challenges exist.

As the women felt parents do not have much of a voice in the current system, they suggested that opportunities need to be provided for them to be heard and to participate equitably in decisions about their families. This includes ensuring interpreters are available when needed, to right the language and power imbalance resulting from unequal English skills.

You have to try and listen and try to find out what and why this is happening in the situation and you will save a whole lot of money preventing problems by caring because once the problem is there, then you spend money to treat the cause and not the symptoms, you look beyond that.

4. For families and services to have strategies and mechanisms to ensure balance of freedom with discipline, and between rights and responsibilities.

The women are concerned that children see removal by Department of Child Safety as a 'free ride', and that there are no restraints on their behaviour when they are in the care of DCS. The women see a need for balance between freedoms and discipline both when the child is in their care or for a child in the care of the department. They want help in working with their children to establish an equilibrium between rights and responsibilities.

The kid, ... they think, when I go to the Child Safety, it will be better, easy life. ...[But if] when they go there, there are some rules, things will be different.

5. For services to engage the knowledge and resources of refugee communities, including through paid employment.

The women desire to be engaged with services and involved in finding solutions to issues, and they articulated many benefits of such engagement. In some circumstances this engagement may be voluntary, but it is also important that services not exploit the goodwill and sense of community obligation of community members in providing unpaid time to assist their community members, and that opportunities for paid engagement or employment are also sought and supported by services.

If maybe someone from their own community was there to talk about what are the rules, what are the different ways that parents can relate to their children here in Australia: it is good that way because, if you come to me now, and I just came from overseas, I will be scared of you. But if there is someone... from my country, and she knew everything about my culture, then I will have to open my heart and ask her more question about what I know in my culture.

Child Safety ... might train some women to work with them. And also don't let them go alone to teach their own communities. It's good for them to come with them, just to be like a key. You go to the house to open, and you yourself go in. The community will be

the key of going and see the community for child safety people and also some other organizations. That will help a lot, because it will make people understand a lot of things.

6. The need to address broader settlement needs to facilitate overall settlement including family harmony and resilience, including:

- a. Need for more diverse and flexible learning and training opportunities for refugee communities
- b. Need for engagement and training with men about women's rights
- c. The value of support groups, including community-based and community-delivered activities and information to enhance settlement

While the women expressed a strong desire to improve the situations for their families including in their interactions with child safety authorities, there is also a need to see family issues within the overall context of resettlement needs. Several women made suggestions about how broader programs could assist families in learning about services that can help in their settlement, in providing peer or other support, and in meeting broader settlement needs.

One thing is, the services have to be there [to support people where they are settled]. You cannot just spread someone like that whereby they don't have the services. You are just going to create more isolation. [There needs to be] settlement service, proper education, good childcare. There should be centres where people can drop in, organisations [dealing] with housing, a social worker I can go and talk to. There should be active things going around to get everyone out of isolation. People can come and talk and if there's issues, I'm having problems today, I'm having family status issues, this is what we can do it and let's [deal with] it.

Conclusion and recommendations

The consultation and interviews undertaken in this project revealed a great depth of knowledge, experience and ideas amongst the women participants. The women participants acknowledged that many of them face challenges in settling into a new community and rebuilding lives and social networks, including in family relationships. Breakdown of families in resettlement causes great pain and confusion and negatively impacts on, and is impacted by, other aspects of settlement. This project also demonstrated the women's strong desire to maintain intact families and communities and to be actively engaged in finding solutions to challenges facing them; and ACCES Services' willingness to support and facilitate the women and their communities in this aim.

It is acknowledged that the task of child protection agencies is difficult and complex, and the paramount obligation is to protect children from harm. However the women described a view within communities that the current approaches and practices within child safety agencies pays insufficient regard to their needs and rights, and is damaging their families and communities. They report the need for both 'sides' to develop better

understanding and knowledge. The women expressed a strong desire to work together with services and agencies to gain (and contribute to) skills and knowledge that will enable strong and intact families.

It is hoped that this report can be used to further this aim, and it is recommended that it be used as a platform to begin a dialogue that can lead to the mutual learning the women see as necessary for progress.

The women themselves have made additional and important recommendations, as outlined above, and it is hoped that the various services, agencies and communities can work together to engage their resources and implement their suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

Background to this report

In October 2009, at the invitation of Assisting Collaborative Community Employment Support Services Inc (ACCES) in Logan, Queensland, the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR), University of New South Wales (UNSW), conducted interviews and a community consultation with refugee women from African backgrounds living in the local area. ACCES and the refugee women with whom they work were aware of significant challenges being faced by refugee families, including in their interactions with local child protection authorities. They wanted to provide women with an opportunity to talk about their experiences as mothers both before and since resettlement in Australia, and canvas their ideas for achieving better communication and understanding between refugee families and service providers in the area of family.



I think it is the perception that, this person is from Africa: oh, he is not good for the kids, he does not love his wife. Well one of the options is educating them, inviting them let them know us.

We are good families. We want the best thing for our family.

This report shares the stories and ideas of the women who participated in the CRR community consultation and interviews. In the consultation, the women engaged in an interactive process where they used 'storyboarding'¹ to analyse and discuss their

¹ The 'storyboard' technique involves participants in preparing a series of drawings to conduct situational analyses including proposals for action. Working in small groups, participants focus on an issue of concern to their community, and prepare a series of posters that illustrate and analyse the issue. Storyboards are used to explore the nature of an issue, its impact on communities, identification of existing relevant services or service gaps, potential solutions to identified problems including which individuals or groups may be able to assist, and hoped-for outcomes. Storyboarding can and has been used with people of all levels of education, including people who are pre-literate. Storyboarding allows participants to name problems and issues within their communities in a positive and empowering environment. It recognises the skills, knowledge and experience and human rights of participants. The underlying premise is that all

experiences and concerns about parenting issues. Quotes used in this report are from both the consultation and interviews with refugee women in the Logan area.

Brief background to the issues raised in this report

This consultation focused on relationships between parents, children and child protection services rather than broader family and resettlement issues. However in working with refugee families, it is critical to consider such issues in a broad and holistic context. Relationships between refugee parents and children and their consequent interactions with service and protection agencies do not occur in a vacuum. They are influenced by a myriad of factors related to experiences before arrival in Australia, settlement experiences and circumstances, and settlement and life challenges. An understanding of the holistic context can contribute to culturally competent intervention and interaction with refugee families.²

The systems and norms that govern family life in different parts of the world may differ, but the essence of being a parent does not. Refugees do not need to be taught to be parents. As reflected in the following pages, refugee parents love their children as all societies love their children. They want the best for them and hope for a happy and intact family. However settlement in Australia presents challenges, including to family relationships and family life. In some cases support and services may be needed to overcome these challenges.

Yet ACCES and the women observed that in many cases refugee women and families are bewildered and disempowered in their dealings with family and child protection agencies. They noted that some families felt African communities are targeted by child protection agencies for attention, and that preconceived notions relating to their refugee and/or African backgrounds influenced service provider actions and decisions.

ACCES hoped that this consultation would provide an opportunity for women from an African and refugee background to speak out about what is impacting on them and their families, and facilitate channels of communication and understanding. The refugee women and their supporters who participated in the interviews and consultation would like to see this as just the beginning of a process of two way communication, learning and problem solving as they strive towards family unity and happiness.

people have capabilities and capacity to understand and analyse community issues, and identify potential solutions, if the resources are available to support them.

² While it is beyond the scope of this report to set out this broader context, several recent publications provide useful background and recommendations: The Centre for Refugee Research report, *We Have a Voice, Hear Us*, based on consultations with refugees from the Horn of Africa, (at www.crr.unsw.edu.au); Peter Westoby's book *The Sociality of Refugee Healing* (On Diversity Publishing, 2009) ; and the report of the South Australian *Working with Refugee Families Project*, (at <http://www.google.com/search?client=gmail&rls=gm&q=workign%20with%20refugee%20families%20project>).



Notes on the structure and content of the report

The report is divided into several sections, sections that evolved as the women told their stories and common issues emerged. A section on refugee life describes some of their pre-arrival experiences, and is followed by the women's observations on resettlement. The focus then turns to families and parenting, including in resettlement, and their experiences with child safety authorities. The women then offer their ideas for improving settlement and family outcomes. A conclusion and recommendations for next steps complete the report.

This report largely uses the voice of the women participants. As the people with the lived experience of refugee life and the challenges of resettlement, their voice is the most important; and they also have the insight into their community to identify practical solutions. All quotations used in the report are from the verbatim documentation of the interviews and consultation. Many of the participants speak languages other than English as their first language and many also spoke through an interpreter. Their language and expression has not been 'corrected' for this report, other than to edit for

meaning; square brackets indicate where this is the case. All images in the report are from the storyboarding analysis undertaken in the consultation.

The consultation and interviews from which this report is drawn involved only women from African backgrounds, but the experience of ACCES and the Centre for Refugee Research is that the issues and experiences reported here are common across different refugee communities, and across different regions of Australia³.

³ Family conflict and breakdown are current areas of significant concern and interest to the Centre for Refugee Research. They arise as amongst the most pressing and painful for refugee families and communities, in all of our consultations and research in Australia, across regions and across communities. They are issues that services report they are frequently at a loss to address, and which negatively impact on and are impacted by other aspects of settlement.

REFUGEE LIFE



Before arriving in Australia, refugees have experienced persecution, violence and hardship that most Australians cannot imagine. Refugees have lost their country, homes, possessions, neighbours, family members, status and identity. Many have been living in appalling and dangerous refugee camps and urban settlements for up to 20 years, with inadequate food, water, sanitation and health care, and limited or no schooling or employment. Children and young people are often born in refugee camps and have known no other life. People suffer from serious challenges to their cultural heritage and their ability to maintain family and community life.

The flight

We ran away from our country just to save our own lives.

We didn't know that the war is coming. Just start like that, people running. They burn the house. We saw the smoke, you know, saw people running.... take your child, put child here [gestures to shoulder], take another one by hand: running, running; what is happening? Oh ... what am I going to do? Oh what am I going to take? Your mind, you get lost, you just try to pick what you can take.

I was about 17 good years when they came. It was one faithful good morning, a Friday morning you know... When we heard the gunshots and things, we had to escape and follow people heading towards the capital city, which is far away. I have to look after my youngest sister and my sister's son, which was about 2 years old. I had to carry her on my back. Most of our people suffer rape and things like that...they force them to beg to spare their lives you know. I lost my elder brother and my stepbrother during that escape. Seeing someone, even if they're not your family member - for you to see someone killed! And nowhere for you to scream, because if you scream, they will try to kill you.



We just heard the bullets hitting; my dad and brother got shot outside the front of my house. My mum was looking out through the window, I was standing there, I saw too. She signed to me to be quiet.

The journey to try to find safety

We walked for days in the bush;...a lot of neighbours and family and just leaving everything. The days in the bush, I had a classmate, she was next to me. There was a bullet, she just got hit by a bullet and couldn't get it out, it didn't go through the bone and I was the only one with small fingers to put your hand there and pull it. It was the first experience that I had to do that. She was my classmate. I was 12 years old.

No water, and there is no food. Better walk. There are some enemies on the way. We walk; they sometimes attack us at the nighttime. But we been trying, there is nothing that we can do: it is better to go [than to stay]. Some die, some stay alive.

We've been walking, no transport, up to [the neighbouring country]. There was [a refugee camp]. UNHCR been trying to support us, but there were no houses, no food, no water. ...A lot of children been dying because they think of their families. Yeah, and they crying, some got mental illness, crying, calling for mum and dad, and they don't know where they are and die. Some become malnourished because there were no good food, they sick and die.

I go and beg but I had to do it for my survival. So I had to go to [the next country]. When we reach there we don't even know the way to get to UNHCR.

Life as a refugee

In the refugee camp, it was very, very hard. Life was very terrible. Living in grasses. We did not have plastic sheeting to make shelter to live. When it was raining we had to go to hide in other places where they have plastic sheeting.

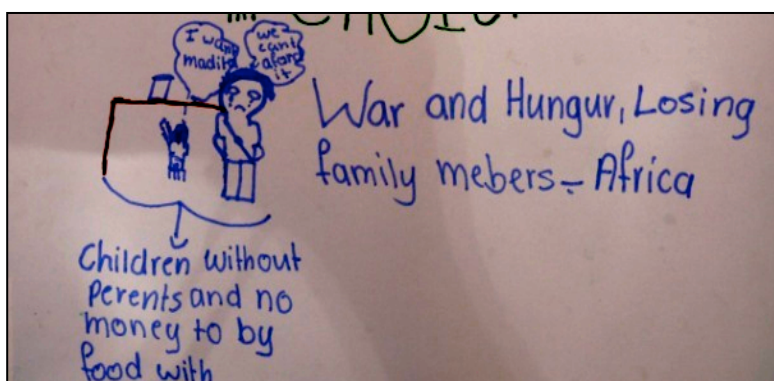
[In the camp] it is just dust and blood. And there is no way...people sleep at night.

[The refugee camp] was a desert; the first time I was in a desert. It was very, very dry, it was very hot, very dusty, no fruits that I was used to, you know, the nice food and all that. The food was, we were given a scope of maize, like a cup. Each family was given a ration card. My mum had all her children in one, and my aunty, everyone.

And in the morning you had to queue, so it's not like someone will come and give the food to you but there's this very long queue of thousands and thousands of desperate people.

Because too many refugees in [the camp] their food is not enough, just a little bit. So life was very difficult. Children not going to school.

There was no nutritious food to eat as a baby or even me as a mum, for me to breast-feed. I breast feed a baby for 14 months because there was nothing else for her to eat.



In Africa the children are ... without a parent, mother and dad died and they are crying and the tears coming out, and they need food and no one looking after them.

So a lot things we went through, rapes and things, you know, threaten your lives, take your stuff... And sometimes we do have to do something, sometimes when you go to places, you have to do things for your survival... just for survival.

Sometime you might be surviving in a way that you don't know whether you are still alive or not.

The risks and challenges for women

The women described their particular risks and experiences of repeated acts of severe violence including brutal rapes.

Rebel doesn't usually kill the women. They can come in your house, they can kill your husband, or your brother, all the men they can be killed. But they can't kill the women. But if there are 20 all of them, they are going to pass to you [all rape you]. The rebel are going to do that, they don't care. And then the kids are just going to seeing what is happening.

Sometimes I say, it was good just to kill all of us. Kill the men and the women all together. Because they were saying: No, we don't want to kill children, the women. Only the men. But they kill your husband and after that you are still suffering. They kill the women in their own way.

And [the rebels] don't care; they said, we are living in a bush, we don't have the wife, if we found a girl we must rape the girl. Because when we felt we want sex we need, we need to do it. So no choice. When they are doing that you can see their face, they look like evil.

They sometimes they come at nighttime when women go to search for firewood, they go and rape them, raping. And also a lot of bad things, they kill people. Because there were no toilets, you go to the bush for toilet, and you might be killed there. You can just find someone on the floor dying.

The women reported how they were in danger not just from rebels or soldiers, and not just in their country of origin or on the journey to a neighbouring country. With the breakdown of whole social and family systems, violence against women including rape and family violence was also endemic in refugee camps.

You can expect anything, you can get raped anytime and there were a lot of things. Even sometimes you would hear, next door someone was shot last night, or a lady was abducted; there was a lot of things that you will hear.

When you are a refugee you don't get nobody to look after you, nobody to look after family. The man fight on women, you are nothing. You're nothing, a dog is better, the man say that you are nothing because you're woman.

They explained that many women give birth to children of rape; they may or may not know who the perpetrator and biological father of the child is, but they will have to care for the child in any case, often shamed and ostracized by their community and with no support.

The men came and took her for ten days, and raped her for ten days and when she came back she realized she was pregnant, but she did not know who the father was because there were so many men who had raped her.

The women described how difficult it was to keep together and safe as a refugee family.



When the children saw people running, they get lost, you know. When you start looking for one child, you think oh, they are going to get my other one! So you find your child later; or maybe not, yeah.

I was separated with my husband because of the war, so in the refugee camp I was myself with 4 children. I didn't know where my husband was.

In one place, ... you know, someone got small food, she prepare that food for the family, but your children they are crying: I want that food, I want that food! But what can you do? That food is small, only for that family. So what can you tell your child?

However, many women spoke about how trying to keep their family safe was a strong driving force for mothers. They went to great lengths to keep their families together and to try to protect them.

My mum is a very, very strong lady and she is the backbone of the family. She has hold of us together and despite all that she went through, losing her children and her husband and even not able to bury them - that was a big thing. But mum held the family together....she tried everything to hold the family together.

Like, I can't talk about it, it's bad: sometimes you can't get lunch, you can't get breakfast, you can't get dinner. The kid is there instead drinking water.anything I can do it, I'll do it ... anything to help the children and get some food.

When I get threatened, I was moving to another camp and my family would always move with me. I was being threatened and my mum was saying it was not safe for you so let's just go somewhere else. So [we] lived in 6 different refugee camps.

Hard situation in camp, and then especially for us living as a single mama it was very difficulty. Because the food was not enough; the house, you know, sometime they give you like a sheet, you make the house yourself. If you don't have land it was very, very hard. Everything you found like, it was like new life. And there we found like it was hard, especially for the kids. I was worried where the kid going to be, how their life going to be, how is going to be their future?

[I said to UNHCR] if you don't like to take me, could you please take my kids. Because I was just worrying about the kids, about how they are going to be in the future.

Many end up caring for members of their extended family or even complete strangers in need, even when they have few resources and no safety themselves.

My mother in law is in a refugee camp [in Africa]. She is sleeping with three orphaned children because their mum and father died. These kids are in her care and we support them. We've been try to send them a form for them to come to Australia...they are in terrible condition because in the camp people are always being attacked. You cannot sleep at night comfortably. If you hear something it might be someone coming to kill you. Life is not good.

Refugees are survivors

Refugees are survivors. They have had to draw on incredible personal resources, strength and resilience during the journey to resettlement and in resettlement. They maintain their humanity and compassion despite the brutality they have survived.

Coming from a life where you had a bed, you know, a house; [in the camp] we just had to sleep on the floor...just on dirt. Yeah, was something very different. I told my mum that [first] morning, this is another life, so, we just have to live.

But the most thing is people help each other. If I got small food in my house, then I have to share with other people.

Someone will have a little food and that food is for their family, you can't starve them just so you can eat a little bit. Some people do have a kind heart and I meet

them and they invite you and if you are starving, you would not be proud to say I won't eat because you will find something to sustain you, for you to stay alive.

The journey to resettlement in Australia

Refugees do not leave their countries voluntarily, and are reluctant to accept that they will never be able to go back. Most want to return to their homeland, to reconnect with their land and their community, culture and way of life; but resettlement to a country far away, and unknown or little understood, is often the only chance for safety for themselves and their children.

I was at my house [in the camp], and some people they told me, your card is there [on the resettlement list]. I fell down. And I said, is that true? I fell down, straight away; for three hours I don't have my mind.... [As a] refugee you don't have anything! And after that I went to them ...and they said, perfect, you are an Australian woman. And I said, I don't believe it, I don't want to fall again!

Oh, it's just like going to heaven! Because in our country when we hear about it, [that] where we are going, there will be no war, nothing like that: is just you feel like going to heaven, there will be no more... dust again in your life.

RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement to Australia is an opportunity to regain and rebuild shattered lives. However, the impact of their experiences is not left behind when refugees are resettled to Australia. Resettlement itself presents many challenges, not least of which is adapting to new social systems and changing family roles and dynamics in their new environment.

What's good about resettlement?

Everything organized, you know [when we first arrived]. They say this is your house, I say whoa! You found a chair, a table, TV, bed, the children's bed. You say, this is my house! Oh my God! I found life again! Very, very happy day.



Children can go to school and they are learning. People can go to hospital when they are sick but back there [in Africa] - no transport, no medicine.

Everything becomes new because we have come to Australia. We come to new life - means new love, means new life and that's the life we were dreaming. In that life we were thinking, we are trying to forget the past and move on. We thank god and we forever remember because he has brought us to this peaceful country.

As parents there we were in a war, and here in Australia we are not in a war. We are not worried about hearing a gun [at night]; we just sleep at night, look after our children, go to the shop. Centrelink money is a big thing for us because there's a war in Africa, we run away with nothing.

We found ACCESS, and we had a caseworker. They showed us things, how we can do...we found people who were living together in the same refugee camp. They help us, to show us, where shops are, how we can buy things. And ACCES showed us how we can use stuff in the house, washing machine. For cooking in the stove because we didn't use that before. We got support from ACCES and other friends we found.



In Australia we have schools, our children are not struggling to go to school, they are studying free. In Australia they are not hearing noise of guns, they are not hiding in the bush. Here in Australia everyone has peace.

The women recognise that they have a lot to contribute to their new community, and are strongly motivated to make a contribution.

[Experience as a refugee] - it gives you a lot of strength, it makes you a very strong person, makes you work hard, appreciate everything in life.

[Refugees] bring different strengths. Some people will bring education, work experience. Everyone will bring a different type of strength and even though someone isn't skilled, they have brains, they bring different types of food, different type of dancing, sports - we can have future runners, soccer, playing volleyball, basketball. In everything, we just think we want to be part of everything. We want to succeed. So everyone will bring something really good.

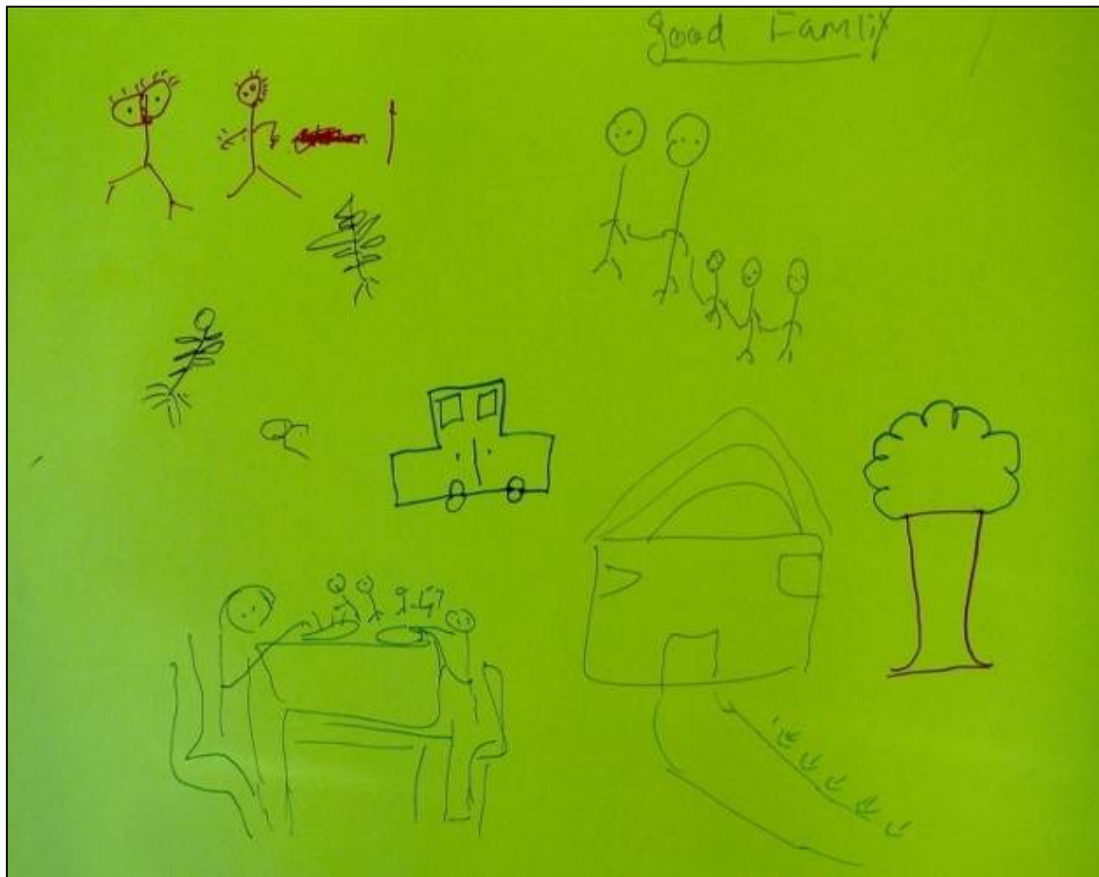
Aspirations for self and family in resettlement

All of the aspirations the women expressed were wrapped up with their hopes for their children - a safe life and a bright future for their children – and a desire to live a happy life with their family.

I was hoping that if I go to Australia, I would not worry again about things like war, and my children will go to school for free without thinking about what can my child eat tomorrow, and today. Now where can I find a thing for cooking, and water? Everything will be really good. I was not thinking of everything, but I was just thinking of important few things. The first thing was not to worry again about someone will kill me tonight, for nothing, or running away with kid at night time. And number two is my children go to school and make their studies better than I did. Because I go and cut and go and cut the education. I didn't learn well. Maybe my children, if I go there now they will learn more, and they will be in good life and they will not suffer like I do. The best thing was about my children because I [lived] half of my life in that condition.



We are happy and we hope that there will be no war in Australia and we hope that god will make our lives better....We run from country to country to country to Australia and where else can we go? Better die. We hope that such a thing like that will not happen again.



This is flower, house and tree. This is good family, coming together, with shelter to live, they are all sitting together having a meal, have a car, some pretty flowers. It is a good family that everyone is together.

We don't want our kids to be working in the factories - we will do that because maybe it's already too late for most of us. The women, it's too late for us to go to university, ... Without this education, most are doing this [factory work] for their kids to go to school. You know, it is for a mum to feel good when you see your child is up there [succeeding].

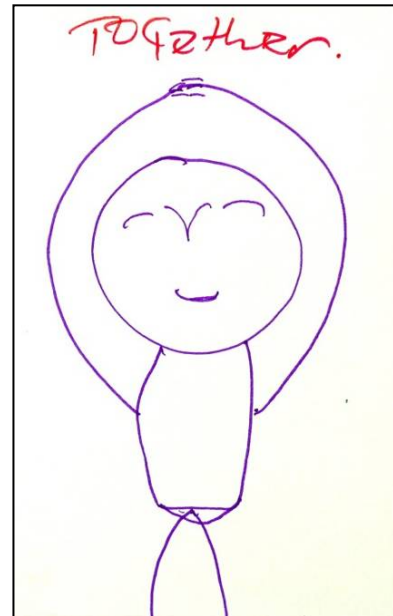


Hopes? Everybody should be happy, be a family united, healthy and happy children.

They want to be very successful. They want to contribute to Australian society. Everyone comes here they want their kids to have good education, to want to be able to work. They want to be very successful Australians.

We came because we want for them life to be better. Not for them to lose their life.

To be together happy big family altogether.



What's challenging about resettlement?

Social isolation and dislocation

It's very hard when you are in a new country, when you are from a different culture especially when you don't speak the language. You just get suspicious even at something small, like why are they looking at me? Maybe they don't like me? So there's a lot of misunderstanding ... I think it takes a bit of time for someone to settle and really find their feet. It takes a bit of time, and it's really hard.

In our country your next-door neighbour can just talk you as you want. And in Australia you cannot even know who is in your next-door house because they don't come and say hi to people.

The language is a big thing and I think with African people, some people get isolated.....We come from a culture, where we are bubbly. Doesn't matter if you come from a different place, when they see you, they talk to you about anything and they will invite you to eat. You just find everyone knows each other. Even the children, they can play freely, they can go there, you don't need to worry about anything that will happen to them. So because we come from that very social culture and when you come to Australia, you just see everyone thinking individually, it's all about myself. If someone doesn't know you, they don't talk to you ... So when they come to this new culture, it's so quiet, no one talks to the other person, everyone has their own business. It is hard.

Changing gender roles and expectations

You know, when you have the men not working, especially when it is not his choice and the woman is working, it's like the women are the boss automatically. Especially in cultures where the men are suppose to be earning, that can lead to depression. ...

There are men who can't take that. Here is my wife working and I am at home looking after the children and cooking. It is my job to do that and it can lead into depression.

[A lot of mothers raise children on their own] because a lot of the men have been killed during the wars. And then apart from that, even when they come here they have a high rate of divorce, that's another thing. Marriages don't last for long and one of the reasons is women say when we were married there and you use to bash me, you use to this and that, and I have my rights now. You can't do this and that and they say, no you are my wife and that's it if we can't go this way, just go out. So women feel that yeah, I have my rights now, I can do the right thing. If you don't like it you can kick him out.

Recovering from the refugee experience

While some people settle quickly and are immediately able to embrace the challenges of settlement, others take longer to adjust or recover, or have more to catch up on before they feel they can participate in community life.

I came to Australia [and] at that time I didn't like to do work, I didn't like to do anything. I like watching TV. I didn't like to study or anything, I don't want to do anything. I feel like nothing, like I was tired because when you are a refugee, you don't get nobody to look after you, nobody to look after family. When I came to Australia little bit feel tired, I don't have family here, I can't drive car, nobody support you. ACCES [offered me support] but I don't want support; I don't want to do anything. It's not rest [I needed], but I [was in] shock...For 9 months I was like, nothing. Then [after 9 months], I wake up. When I wake up: I felt, 'you can do anything, you can be everything'. And I wake up and I do it.I learn English, I did [a level one TAFE] certificate, secondly I did TAFE certificate three, I did work, I learned to drive quickly, I feel like an Australian. ...We are women; we can do anything we want. We are women, we are strong.

Because when they [children] go home, remember that their parents, they themselves have their own challenges; so how are they are going to help this child with this homework and school work, when they themselves have their own catch up to do with the rest of the system?

Even if they go to TAFE, they don't go there and learn, they will go there and some are sitting down, staring at the teacher but not concentrating, thinking about their problems.

Inadequate or inaccessible settlement support

Despite a strong commitment from many settlement providers to supporting resettling refugees, the needs of newly arrived refugees are not always met. At times new arrivals may not know that services exist, or how they can access them. Health, language,

education, employment and housing issues all pose significant barriers to many refugees.

We were just put in the same class with people with different [levels], different age groups. Someone doesn't feel comfortable to speak because his grandpa is there. And a lot of young people, they weren't put [into classes] according to knowledge, they were just put according to their age ... they feel they can't cope because their English language is not that good because they just arrived in Australia.

If you come from a refugee camp at the age of 13 obviously your education is way, way, way behind the Australian 13 year old grade. To think that a 13 year old from a refugee camp can immediately go into the 13 year old level education in Australia that is a big challenge for that child. ... I've heard of cases where children don't want to go to school because they feel like they don't understand what the teacher is talking about.

If they can't communicate in English, what's the use of going to the GP when you can't even ... tell them what the problem is? You need an interpreter and they are not always readily available. If you know that you have to make an appointment, the services don't offer interpreter service to know what the appointment is for.

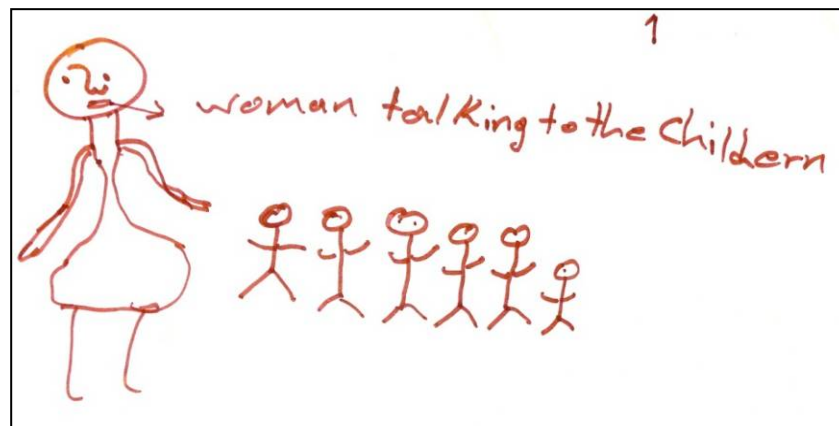
That's one thing, language. The other thing is the lack of knowledge with regards to location of the service, and even then people don't know that there are some services that are available to them.

So my, what I need in my heart or my feeling is, if there is a way that we can find any help, from anyone. We [are] begging people. Our communities... women are there some haven't been at the school before. They go to TAFE, spend their hours, hours finished. They sitting in the houses, some got difficulties; they have seen English is hard, learning English is hard. So what can we do now?

Some people don't have good English background when you go for interview and it's really hard and you will not go well in job interview. We have hard working people out there but if there are language barrier, [they] have so many problems.

The biggest challenge they face is housing. Even the private rental cannot rent them a house for children because the owner of the house doesn't want someone with four children because they are going to damage the house and all of that. ... When you look at the single mothers, at least for some time they will need community housing until their kids grow up, their kids study and when the kids can say we are getting a house, we are doing that. So housing is a very big issue because they are being very discriminative with their numbers and a few different other things.

FAMILIES AND RESETTLEMENT



Our women are excellent parents. We drew the women and children having a good time together as a family.

It doesn't matter where the family is, whether it is African or not, we love our children and work hard to have a strong and happy family anywhere.

Through their refugee and settlement experiences, parents from refugee backgrounds have demonstrated great strengths in caring for their children and looking after their families. Like all parents, they love and are concerned for their children and want them to take up the opportunities that education and safety in Australia offer them. They appreciate these opportunities as one of the very important aspects of life in Australia.

And like parents everywhere, they want their children to grow up as good citizens. They see one of their roles as mothers and as families as being to guide their child's moral development.



These are the children sitting down and mother is standing up talking to their kids and advising children to grow in a good way that they can listen to their parents



We draw a picture here: a family and there are children playing outside the house. The woman and the husband they are talking, they are sharing issues. If there is good communication between women and men, they build a good family, a good relationship in the family.

Raising children in Africa and in Australia

The women talked about some differences in the norms and social and family environment in which parenting occurs between countries in Africa and in Australia.



In Africa when the parents are cooking the children come around [to help], whereas here in Australia the mother is alone in the kitchen, the children are all gone.

[In Africa] we just had that support you know, the family extended from me. We didn't have to worry about childcare; Oh can you look after my kids? You don't have to worry about that. But you know here, the childcare is a big issue.

In our community it is not just the mother with the child: the whole community is responsible to take care of their child. There is more community responsibility to ensure the child is brought up as it should.

[In my home country], if a child misbehaves, they know that someone will see them they will have to tell their parents. So even kids wouldn't do anything bad.

Sometimes when we were in Africa, we used physical [punishment], and they accept, and they understand they make a mistake and they become good, but here you cannot do that.

Bridging cultures – changing norms and expectations

Many of the women described the challenges they and their children face in being caught between two cultures and the life they want for their children, and in managing the differences between bringing up children in Africa and in Australia.

For me, to raise the kids here we think is good but it is going to be a culture thing between us and the kids too.

For their kids it is hard. For us, we are mature women. We born in Africa, we don't have half African culture about food, wearing the clothes and sleeping. We have full African culture. But for them they have half. Because some was born in refugee camp, they don't live in [our home country]. Some grow up here, we bring when they are small. They just half African, half Australian.

A lot of women say it is a cultural thing, with the children being lost in two cultures. With the kids it is very easy they go to school, they can easily pick up languages and that and their mother tongue will disappear and the parents are not able to speak to their children - that's a problem.

With their past experiences as a refugee, and hopes for the future focussed on the opportunities resettlement has made for their children, some of the women described their disappointment when their children do not see things the same way.

For study, for kids to study, that is our wish. That's why if I see my kids start doing bad things here, I say ... 'Oh my God, I want them to study.' Because we were thinking of them to bring here to have a good life. You know for me, now, I still cry. I cry towards my mum, I cry towards my friends who were killed. I think all the things in my head. So, I am trying to do better for my kids. [In Africa], maybe they will die because no food, they die because no medicine. And then the kids I bring here, free medicine, free food. And they start to bring trouble. It makes me sad.

Differing social norms and expectations can be challenging for families, with many of the women reporting conflict between children and parents over apparently different moral and social standards or behaviour.



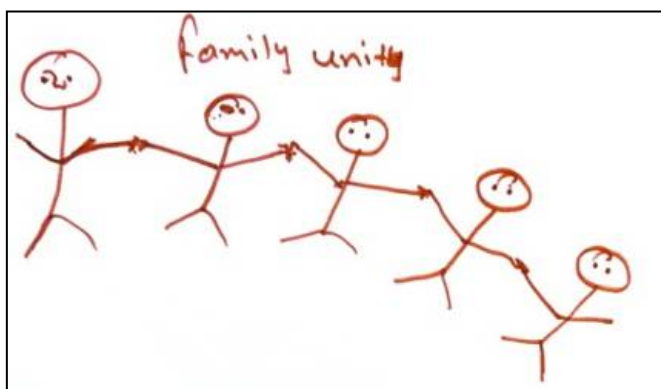
In our culture we look and found out that for example our teenagers, they are kissing in public. In our culture it is a bad picture, to kiss in public.

The same thing applies to dressing. ...If they come from a background where they have to cover up, suddenly because other kids from school don't cover up and then they feel they can dress like that and you say sorry, this is not how we dress up in our culture.



Here the mothers are more particular about the children smoking drinking and just clubbing, not studying, which they think is a bad thing because of the law. The children do what they like.

They report that for some families this can lead to a breakdown in family discipline



In Africa the mother has control, the community has control over the child to the child is disciplined. In Australia the mother has no control over the child, the child do exactly what they like.

Intergenerational conflict

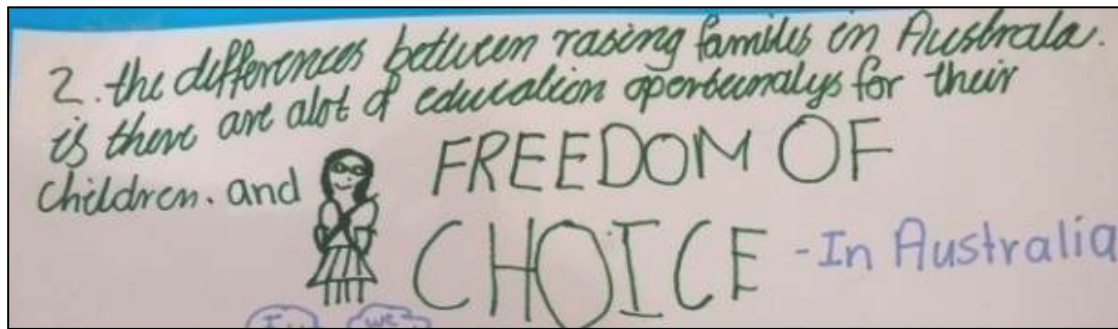
I would say more than anything else, cultural shock you know your children coming here, having been brought up differently, from different backgrounds and I mean there's only one culture here, Aussie culture and they go to school, they want to do what the other kids are doing. And it might be not what the family is used to or what the family can accommodate. So you find that there's a clash between parents and children because they don't understand. To know that, you know that this is a different culture for you that's the Aussie culture and we have own culture. And not that we don't have respect for the Aussie culture, but this is how we have always lived our lives. And it doesn't mean that you have to change because we live in Australia. And I only say the good thing is that when people come to Australia no one forced them to do things. Like no one can say to me I should take off my scarf. It is illegal to get someone to do that. Legally we are protected in that there is democracy. I can dress up the way I want to and go to work and it would be wrong if my employer says to me, take off that dress. I can legally challenge that, is what is good about it.

Then the kids again, are stressing the mum. They are not listening. I don't know maybe it's the peer groups sometimes, I don't really understand.

Financial and family problems arise from children being paid Centrelink benefits directly. Where Centrelink may anticipate this payment as part of the overall family income, children do not always see it this way, which can lead to financial shortfalls in the overall family budget, and family conflict.

Centrelink is good but it has its own problems as well. When you have children it is a big issue here. Where parents with youth allowance, if that benefit is on behalf of the child and they don't give it to the child, it creates a whole lot of problems. Because if a child is receiving that amount from Centrelink and as a mother I'm unemployed, my husband is working but it is not enough to run the home, there's rent to pay, there are whole lot of things, health care to worry about, education to worry about - like books, like sports equipment. We have to pay for them, government doesn't have to pay for them. So If I say I use your money to buy the sports equipment, it creates a problem between the parent and the child because the child says it is my money and the government giving it to me, it is not yours. But then how else am I supposed to pay?

There are young ladies who come as minors, they didn't have their parents;...when they come here some of them might find themselves in troublethey might start drinking, getting bad things like that, drugs. The reason why, I think, is maybe some were born in the refugee camp and from that life, and when they come here, there's not [enough] support. They just end up meeting other young people and - we are going out today, try this, and try that. And the person just ends up getting distracted and end up having a bad life and then later - [its] too late.



Where we came from the life was just down, and the first day we came [to Australia] these people give you fridge, they say this is your house: [the kids think] it means we just get everything from nothing. They get high rights in Australia, the rights they have destroyed them.

Some parents are shocked and disappointed to see their child take advantage of their rights in Australia without taking responsibility. They love their children and worry for their future. They feel unsupported by a system that they see gives all the rights to children without supporting them in their efforts to help their children learn right from wrong, develop their moral life, understand their responsibilities, and make the most of the opportunities they have in Australia.

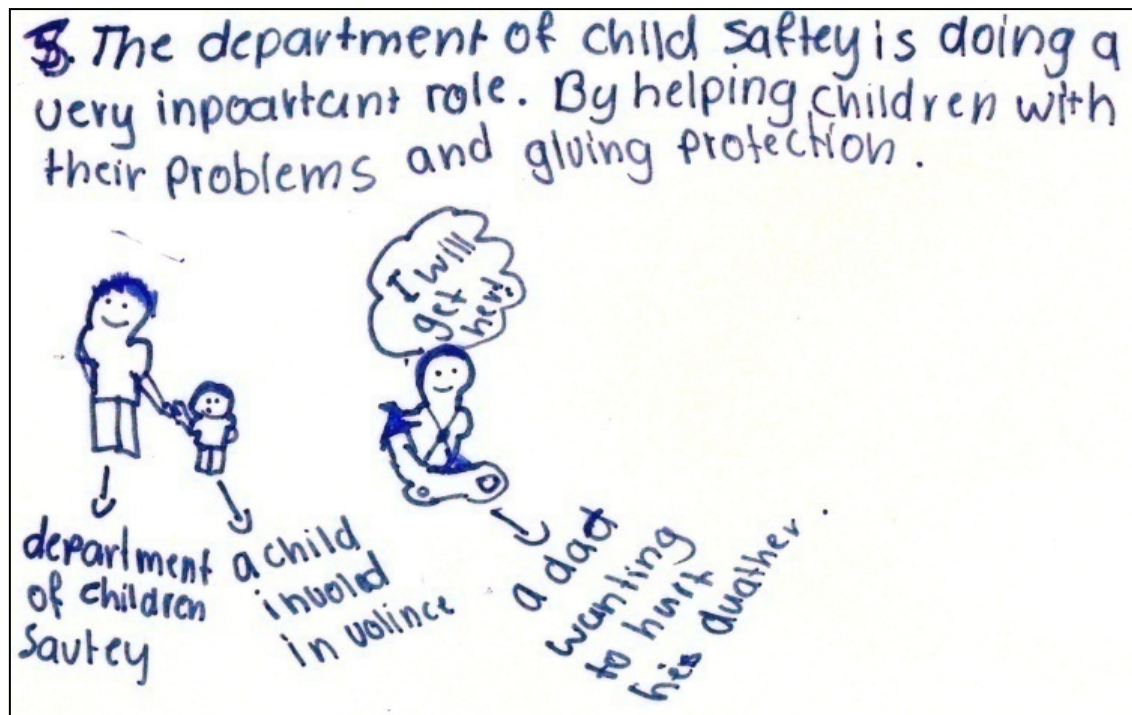
Because the kid, if they don't want to study, if they don't know how to study, what are they going to be after many, many years? They going to be in trouble for future. And we came because we want for them life to be better. Not for them to lose their life. Sometime it could happen, you know.

But we wish police came, when she call the police or you call the police, when police came, just show the children how bad they did. Because I love my kids. I think every mother loves their kids, but we don't like their behaviour.

But when police came, they say, oh your children they are now 16, they are mature, they can live wherever they want.

AFRICAN PARENTS AND CHILD SAFETY AUTHORITIES

The women recognised and acknowledged the important role of the police and the Department of Child Safety (DCS) in protecting children exposed to violence or other danger.



The women recognise the importance of abiding by Australian law and norms and cited examples where intervention by DCS has helped families.

Child Safety told their family that, if you fight again then your children will be taken away... decide one thing, to take care of the kids or you will lose your children. We will take them and give them to somebody to take care of them. So they make a decision before the children been taken away. The wife say ok, I don't want to leave my children.

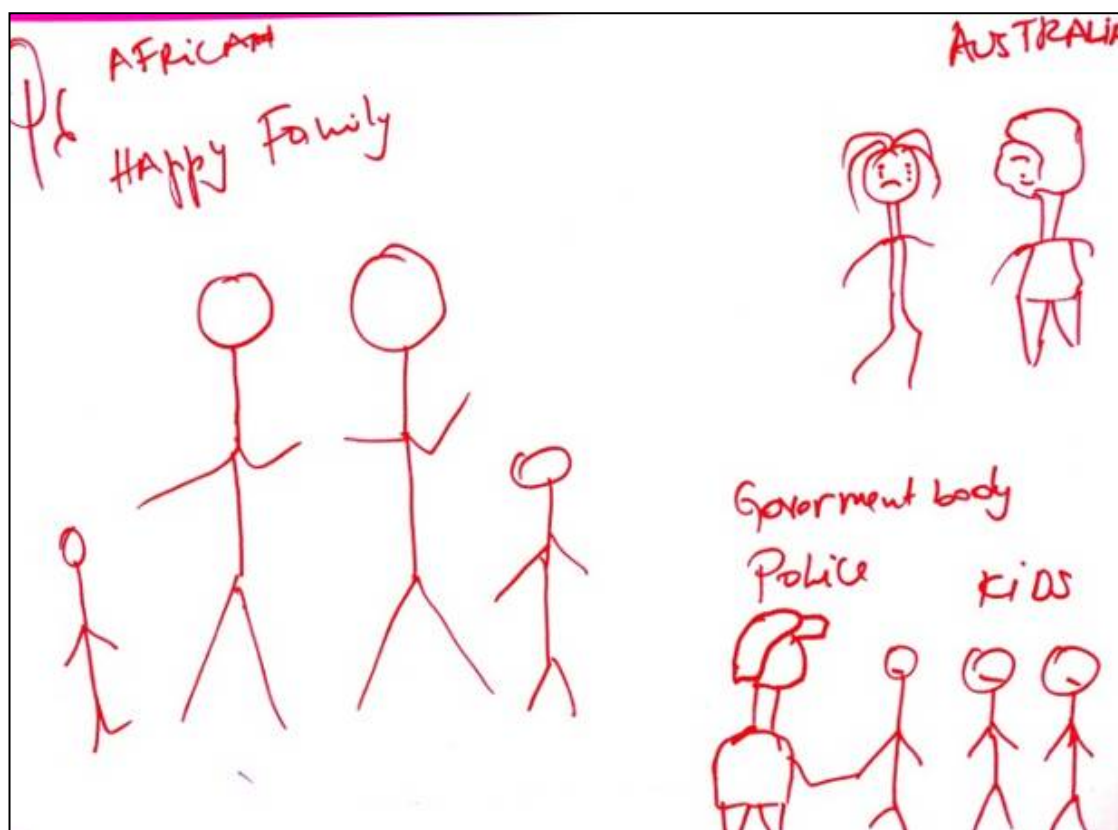
Mostly, however, the women described how they feel powerless and frustrated by the child protection system. They believe assumptions and judgements are made about them because of their African or refugee background, including that they need to be taught how to "parent". They are saddened and bewildered by family separation within their communities.

Child Safety have a bad picture in my community. Among my community, they are scared that they will come and take away their children.

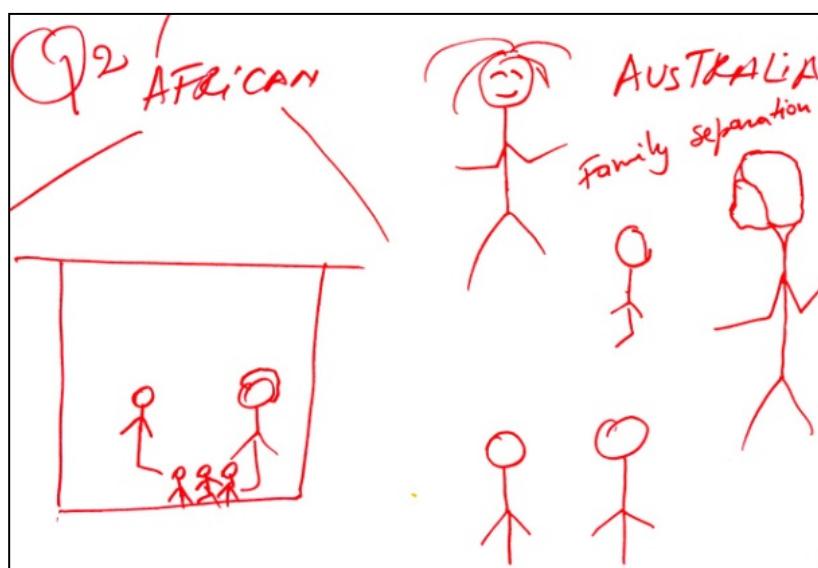
I think it is the perception that, this person is from Africa: oh, he is not good for the kids, he does not love his wife.

From the [child protection] services, they think, [that family] don't love their kids and oh yeah, the kids are being abused.

A lady was telling me about the [child safety] service, she feels that they just think that, oh yeah you are African, that's it, you abuse your children.



The women feel like, in Africa we used to be a very big family, mum and dad and kids. In Australia they are miserable, Child Safety taking over, they been left by themselves. Mum can't even speak the language and she is crying. She doesn't know what to ask, why did I lose [my child]?



In Africa we all live together and in Australia there is a lot of change, there is separation, kids with child safety and those parents are miserable & not understanding what is going on.

Mothers reported challenges in knowing how to discipline their children in this new environment, isolated from the family and community structures that supported their parenting in their home country. They report that there is fear in the communities about the department and that some children exploit this fear, further disempowering them in their parenting role; children threaten parents with Department intervention when parents feel discipline is warranted.

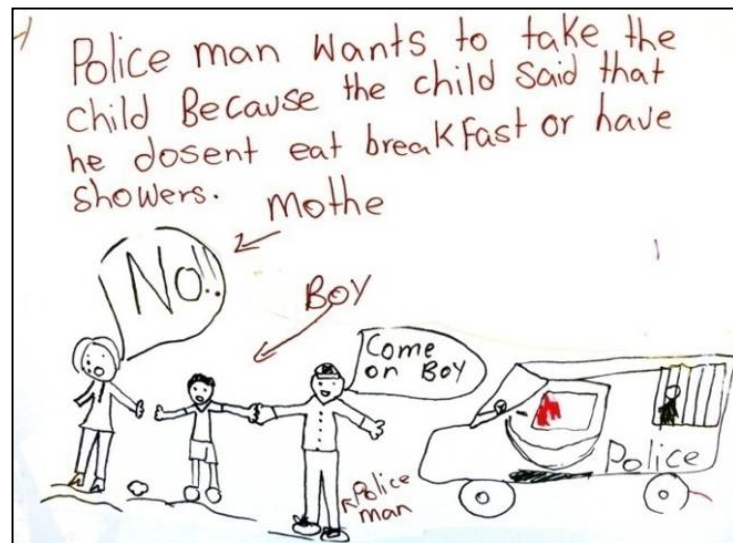


In Africa, as you see in this picture, dad is talking with his little boy and they respect and understand what you are telling them, your child respond yes dad thank you. Here in Australia as you can see that we find it difficult to discipline children, for example they go out by themselves, we put a picture here your daughter come late mother ask why you are late, they don't care. They don't listen Maybe if you become angry, maybe they call the police.

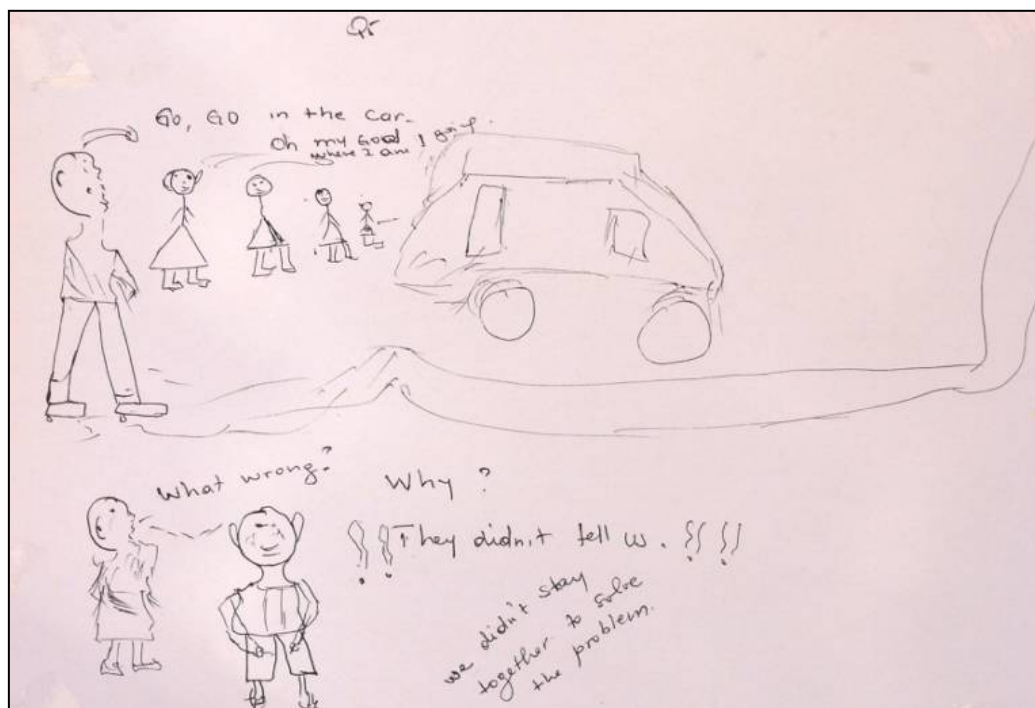
[Say] the issue is the kid doesn't come home [until very late]. As a mother, I feel that this is wrong. And they just ring [the authorities] and say that mum is emotionally abusing me. [It is] the influence from other people, like those people who are making him not to come home, and your mum cant tell [you] off because that's emotional abuse, that's physical abuse and all this different thing. And it gets so hard for us mothers, they love their kids and they want the best things to happen for their kids, and they don't have any power to tell their kid what's right and what's wrong.

The women feel the authorities listen to children without listening to parents, which further enables children to abuse the power this gives them over their parents. They reported that there was no opportunity to talk or solve problems and that often as parents with poorer English language skills than their children, the police and DCS relied

on talking to the children without asking them anything. They feel that families are separated without appropriate recourse to mediation and resolution of problems.



This is a bad thing about raising children here. The boy rang the police and the policeman is holding one hand and the mother with one hand and the mother saying no! You cannot go! The policeman says come on, come on. Mother is yelling a lot and these are the difficulties: sometime you talk to your child, the child will say I will call the police. Police couldn't understand the family.



Here we draw a picture of the issue for child safety, we draw a car, and the boss of child safety. They took the children, go in the car. Parents stare, and mum says, what's wrong? They didn't tell us. We didn't stay together and solve the problem together. They came to took our children.

Some of them are not true cases, especially for the young girls, those who are teenagers who run away from their houses. Some of them are just like children lying to the Child Safety group. And the Child Safety group consider what the kids say to them.

Women expressed that there is a view within the communities that the current approach to child safety is damaging their families and communities.

And I just think there have been a lot of incidences talking about it and - oh yeah, we've taken the kids - and not thinking the negative perception to the community. I've had a lot of people from the community talking about it: they are just damaging our families. So there's a negative perception in the community to the work of the services.

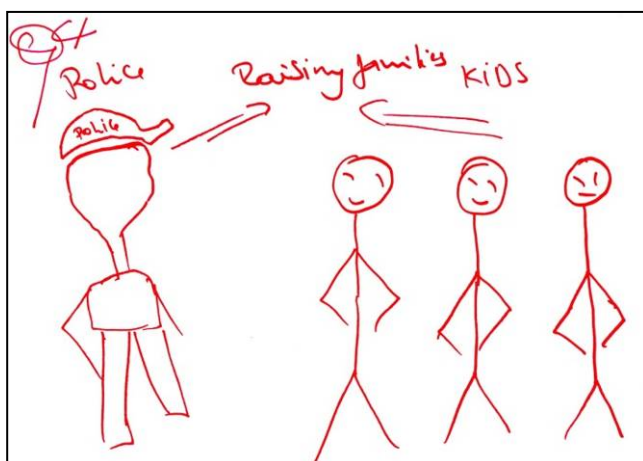
They were also concerned that families may not know their rights or who to try to seek help from, or that their responses may be misinterpreted due to language barriers.

The Child Safety did investigation, interview the children. And they found it was happened last year, not [a new event]; it happened last year. But when they went to visit the family to talk to them, the family did not want to talk to them, because they were scared that they will take our children.

Misunderstanding makes matter become worse thing. Translation is hard in different culture.

[The mother] feels that maybe one, she has disadvantage, two she's African, three she doesn't speak the language. So she feels, I can't really express what I really want to say.

They report that families are feeling oppressed by the system and by the department. Some feel they have lost control in their families, but that intervention by child safety authorities does not necessarily lead to good outcomes for the children.



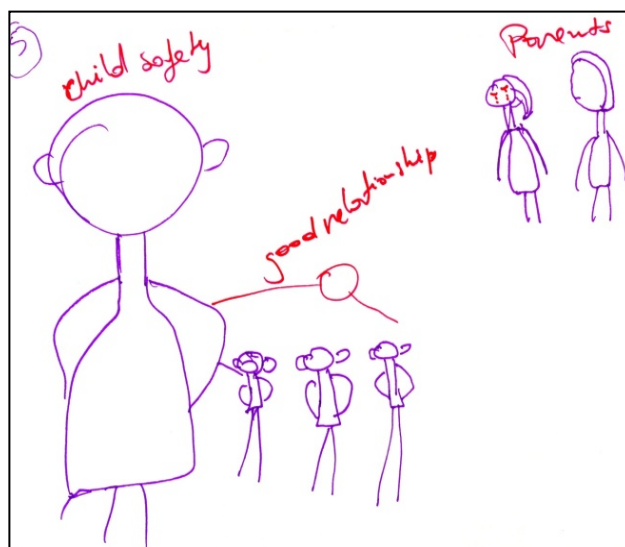
What are the bad things? There's a man there in charge; we used to think we were in charge, but police is in charge. "Mum I'm going to call the police on you." We feel that the police gives [the children] more power.

They come and they just listen to the kids.



What do [we] know and think about the Child Safety? We don't know the good things, but what we tried to show here is the Child Safety officer oppressing the mother, taking the right of the mother so that the children do what they like. It is not actually good for the child.

These are the big men with power over families so we have nothing else to say. Our kids know their rights as soon as they walk, they call police, they call child safety. They can call anyone; Mum can't speak the language and the child safety pay more attention to the child. There's a good relation with the children and police and child safety, and there's no relationship between us and the police. They pay more attention to our kids and they ignore us, they are going straight and we feel left behind.



This problem [of having no power] comes in Australia. The mothers are good. They want their kids to have good things. But if you tell your kid, you can't do this, they go to school and they've been told, your mum cannot smack you, because no one helps their children. The mother is the best person for the children. From the services, they think, [that family] don't love their kids and oh yeah, the kids are being abused

I just think, one of the biggest things is family service, honestly, they need a lot of education because they are breaking families by saying, the kids have rang us, blah, blah, which I think it is wrong and they should be blamed for a lot of things that have happened in the community. They have taken kids away, taken them to the foster home.

In one family, the mother she is facing lots of difficulty, one boy is turned 15. But that boy is coming very, very naughty. Before he was scared about police. Now he found police if they came, they not doing anything. Now he is becoming very, very bad boy. He don't scare about police he just doing whatever. He don't want to go to school. He was trying to do things [to get] Child Safety to take him in charge. But

Child Safety don't take him. They just come home and say why you do this to the child. He tell us this and this. He just go and tell them lies, just like so they can take him. So they think that staying with Child Safety, they start getting the money, it will be easier.

Child safety found [her] a place to live, a place with where they put children who are not living with their parents. She is pregnant now. She was doing well in class, every teacher was saying good, intelligent. But now she is pregnant, and living with her boyfriend, and she is only sixteen

[Our children] they see everyone here as equal. That is why it is hard to discipline our children. People say children they have rights, but the way the children see that right is not true. They [also] have to respect their parents.

[The children] have left behind the situation where they were before, they have another situation they have now, in this country. To deal with those situations, it is hard, because there are things they did not have in overseas, like TV, access to computer. Now they use computer, they learn, they want to know things. Sometimes our teenagers ... learn bad things from the internet. They see with the time of adolescents, and mix of some cultures, they learn from others: why can't I do what the others they are doing? That is why sometimes to discipline them, they got things from outside. Sometimes when they come home, you cannot deal with them, it is hard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REFUGEE WOMEN FOR IMPROVING SETTLEMENT AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

Although the participants in the consultations and interviews were clear about the challenges to parenting and family life in Australia, they also shared many ideas about how to improve things for their families in settlement. Some of the women's ideas relate to broader settlement issues, as the women see clearly that their family experiences are impacted by and occur within the framework of their wider circumstances, challenges and opportunities. Others concern the interaction between child protection services and refugee families.

The ideas and contributions of the women demonstrated thoughtfulness and wisdom, and a strong desire to be engaged in finding and contributing to solutions for issues within their communities. They see this kind of community engagement as a means to achieve mutual understanding between communities and service providers, and to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for refugee families. Their ideas are rooted in concepts of community development, whereby community members are actively involved in the issues that affect their lives, and service providers employ strategies that enable genuine engagement and participation of community members, and are responsive to the needs of local communities. Such strategies have the potential to enhance the successful settlement and integration⁴ of refugee communities, in particular the young people, many of whom have not previously experienced life outside conflict or refugee camps. They will foster stronger family relationships and help to reduce incidences of negative contacts between families and child protection agencies and the police, while helping to rebuild the social and community lives of resettled refugees.

The suggestions made by the participants in the consultations and interviews were:

- For services and communities to implement strategies for two way learning – acknowledging that “Active integration comes from both sides”.
- For services to provide culturally competent services and opportunities to keep families together – in particular enhancing family unity and resilience through talking and mediation.
- For services to ensure they talk to the parents as well as the child, including where language or other communication challenges exist.

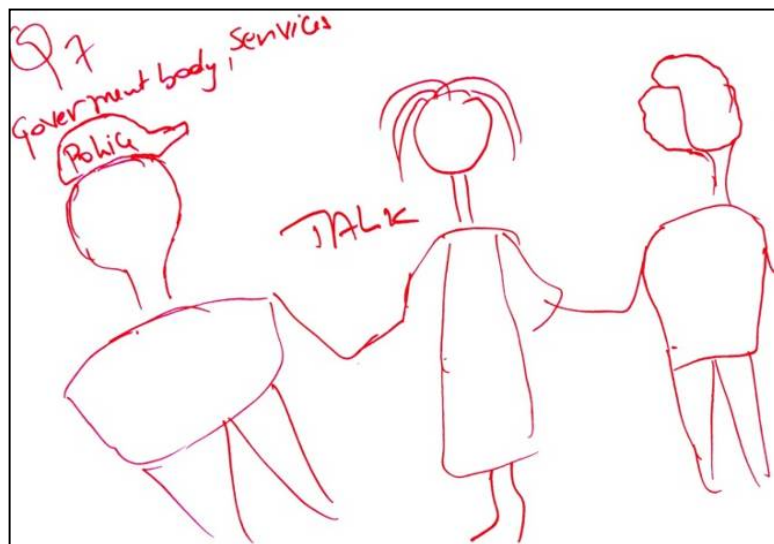
⁴ In this context ‘integration’ of refugees is seen as a positive humanitarian endeavour that benefits both the resettling refugee and the host community. Resettlement is a protection measure for those who are unable to return to their country of origin or to integrate into the country of first asylum. It is part of the humanitarian response to the international refugee crisis to which many developed countries have committed. Integration is not the responsibility of the refugees. Integration is the two-way process of mutual adjustment and participation on the part of the host society as well as by refugees themselves, rather than as a process of assimilation in which refugees learn to adapt themselves to the prevailing culture of the host society.. As such providing services and infrastructure necessary for integration is the prerequisite of inviting refugees to resettle.

- For families and services to have strategies and mechanisms to ensure balance of freedom with discipline, and between rights and responsibilities.
- For services to engage the knowledge and resources of refugee communities, including through paid employment.
- The need to address broader settlement needs to facilitate overall settlement including family harmony and resilience, including:
 - Need for more diverse and flexible learning and training opportunities for refugee communities
 - Need for engagement and training with men about women's rights
 - The value of support groups, including community-based and community-delivered activities and information to enhance settlement.

Implement strategies for two way learning - "Active integration comes from both sides"

The women suggested that their communities need more knowledge and understanding about local child protection practices, but that services, including child protection authorities, need more knowledge and understanding of their communities. As one woman said, active integration comes from both sides.

It's about living a positive way and talking to people. Active integration comes from both sides. You know as Africans, we cannot say that, yeah, they have to come to us; or no, we have to go to them. And really if there's a problem, we can say this is active integration, these are the things that can help and we can help being part of the society.



The women were aware that, as new arrivals to Australia, they need to learn and understand the new systems that make up their new home. They invite such learning.

When we arrive in Australia, new arrival, it's good for Child Safety to give us awareness of what is their job, ... what is the aim, why do they take children away. Is it because you smack your children? Is it that we did something wrong? We must be aware, they tell us the rule of their job.

We as the African community, we need to have more awareness in Australia. ... We have had a lot of things in different ways. [If] we learn more in Australia life - we need to be given awareness - and then that will be fine.

They should have some people from child safety [to teach] new arrivals our aim as Child Safety... [Teach them that], if you do this, then this one will happen, then this and that, ... so that you can follow the rules, because you are aware of what cannot be done.

But they also see that there would be benefits to 'the system', including the child protection system, listening to and understanding their communities. There was a strong feeling that such understanding is currently lacking.

The women love to spend more time with the police, talking; organise a meeting like this so the police can understand the mothers, so we can raise issues. We really look forward to talking with the police, just the parent and the police

They need to listen to the community and they need to know about people from other cultures and they need to know that they love their kids.

Someone might just have that thinking [that Africans are not good parents] and they are not interested in getting to know the community and getting to know really the truth and what is bringing this [problem in the family]. They should do the research and find out. Find what are the issues with the young people; and why do they think they have conflict with their parents; and why do they think they have problems with Family Service; and what do they think should be done to make it not happen, or maybe to reduce it.

It is two ways of learning, it is the services, the police, the department of child safety, they need to learn about you and your family, but you also need time to understand things in Australia.

The women saw that such mutual understanding would have mutual benefits, with agencies and community working together to achieve good outcomes.

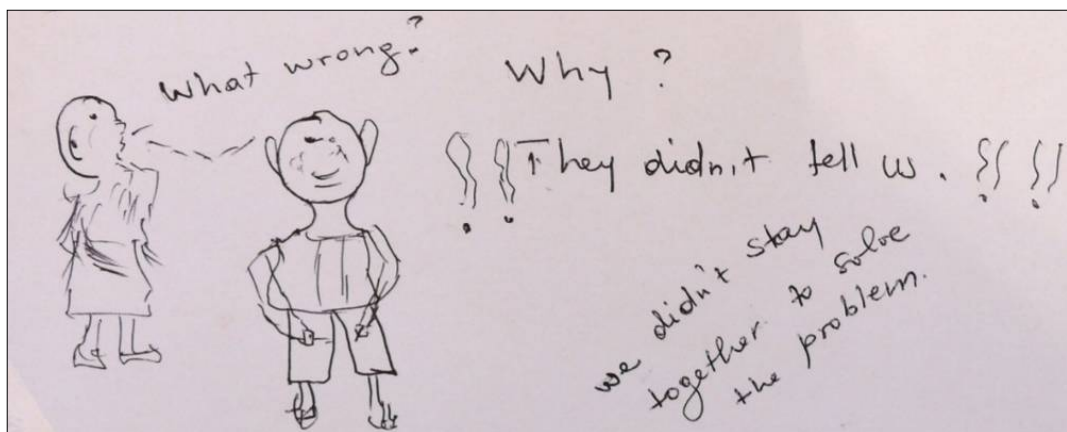
The best way is education. If you bring two pieces together, the culture and the law and say let's talk about it, how far can I go? And then you talk about the culture like in our culture this is what we are allowed to do and it doesn't mean that you are abusing the child and that the child safety people come in and say according to the law this is how far you can go. It's a matter of educating people. In any situation, not just bringing up children, in any situation it's education and if people are educated as to what the different cultures are all about, we wouldn't have the problem we have in the world today.

Nothing beats education. People get to know who you really are, your identity, where you come from and why you do some of the things you do, without me feeling there's something wrong with me. You know just enlightening people about this culture will make a very, very big difference.

Maybe they can talk to the family, how they can discipline. Maybe they can talk each other because in our culture they can explain how they discipline children. Maybe Child Safety can tell them what happens here in this country. And they can share together the idea of how they can work together.

Provide services and opportunities to keep families together – enhancing family unity and resilience through talking and mediation

A strong picture that emerged during the consultation was the bewilderment of parents when children are removed from their care. There was a sense that more needed to be done to help families, that communication and mediation and support programs are needed to enable families to stay intact.



What we think is, everybody should sit together if there is an issue. Instead of just coming to take the child, expect them to sit with the family and work through the issues instead of just taking the child. We are distressed parents.

There are some times when police and child safety can do the right thing but the most important things is they need to sit and listen and talk to families. It is about understanding the culture, the different ways that they relate to their children.

Talk to the parents as well as the child

As the women felt parents do not have much of a voice in the current system, they suggested that opportunities need to be provided for them to be heard and to participate equitably in decisions about their families. This includes ensuring interpreters are available when needed, to right the language and power imbalance resulting from unequal English skills.

7. Services Can do better with family. Is by talking to them privately. And seeing how they can help them!

We wish if they can come first just to check to the parents what happened. But they will come together with the children, everything they will put on the table and then give children a decision.

If I shout [at] my children, they can call the police. I would like the police to be sitting down with me to understand what caused me to shout to her or to beat her. So maybe that the police or the services, they need to sit down and talk to you as parents and understand where you are coming from, what's happening for you. And talk to the children, and say you know, you have rights here but you also have responsibilities. You need to respect your parent.

You have to try and listen and try to find out what and why this is happening in the situation and you will save a whole lot of money preventing problems by caring because once the problem is there, then you spend money to treat the cause and not the symptoms, you look beyond that.

Balance freedom and discipline, including when children are placed in care

The women are concerned that children see removal by Department of Child Safety as a 'free ride', and that there are no restraints on their behaviour when they are in the care of DCS.

When they go to Child Safety, you know, there is no rules.

The women see a need for balance between freedoms and discipline both when the child is in their care or for a child in the care of the department. They want help in working with their children to establish an equilibrium between rights and responsibilities.

When the child start doing bad things at home, for me, I am thinking when Child Safety taking them [provides other care arrangements] it's better to give them some discipline.... some rules... In the morning you have your breakfast, shower, you wear your uniform, you go to school. After that you come back home, you have your dinner. You have to come back home after school, immediately.... To tell them that the police are watching you, you cannot run away from Child Safety. You have to go to school and come back. That kind of Discipline, some rules. So the child will feel oh that is not what I was thinking. This is the rules, this is what life is really like.

The kid, ... they think, when I go to the Child Safety, it will be better, easy life. ...[But if] when they go there, there are some rules, things will be different. Because then, when you there you think 'Oh I was better at home, because we have lovely home,

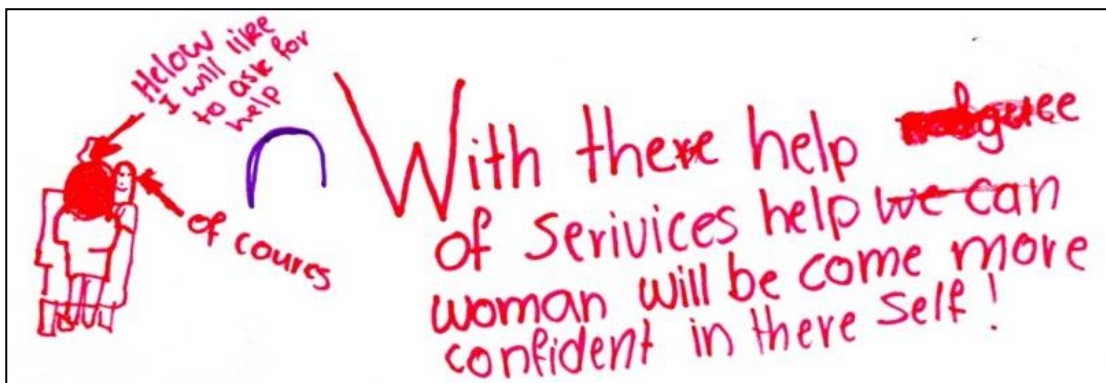
everything you need, TV, good things in the house, I am sleeping on the good bed. So why I was running from home? So they will start thinking of the mother and feel to cry. And I was doing wrong things to my mother. When you go back you say if I start going wrong thing they take me to Child Safety. So I will lose all the opportunity I am getting from [my family]. But when they go to Child Safety, you know, there is no rules.

I was thinking that maybe if the government talk with parents, how the situation is here in Australia, what strategies they are using to discipline children. Maybe they can share their experiences they have, how they discipline children when they are here. They can share ideas together and agree how they can work together to talk with children.

If you get them [parents and children] together they can talk and ... exchange ideas; how we can improve their life, how we can discipline them, the way they want parents to discipline them. If we talk to the teenagers, they can give you some ideas how deal with their problems.

Recognise and engage the resources of refugee communities, including through paid employment

The women desire to be engaged with services and involved in finding solutions to issues, and they articulated many benefits of such engagement. In some circumstances this engagement may be voluntary, but it is also important that services not exploit the goodwill of community members in providing unpaid time to assist their community members, and that opportunities for paid engagement or employment are also sought and supported by services.



If maybe someone from their own community was there to talk about what are the rules, what are the different ways that parents can relate to their children here in Australia: it is good that way because, if you come to me now, and I just came from overseas, I will be scared of you. But if there is someone... from my country, and she knew everything about my culture, then I will have to open my heart and ask her more question about what I know in my culture. Things like, and what about if I beat my child? Like if my children are doing wrong thing and I smack them, is that also bad thing? But if it is you asking me not to do that, I will not speak out more; I may

be afraid of telling you some other things. Because ... if I tell her now she might think that I am like this. But if it is someone from my country, yes I will be able to tell her more about what I know and I know she already knew it. So it is good that they might sometimes work with people from the same culture and talk with the new arrivals.

If you have some issues in your heart, in your life: if you can get someone [to listen], and if you get the opportunity to talk, I think later the change is coming. That is why it is good to find an interpreter to help [us] women. We have issues but we don't know how to talk with you. It is very hard. Even if we are not going to school...we have ... good ideas which can help to make change, which can help maybe other people to get the picture.

Maybe if they organise for a week, maybe ten women from different countries, stay together, training them how to go to the community to talk with other women. Training on how to come to community, maybe to give them the picture, they can work with other women to give them skills. I think maybe that they can be helpful.

In my community when we were in a refugee camp, they trained people and [those] people go to the community and teach them what they learned. [Things] like family planning, about vaccinating children. Those women they train can go to the community and tell them.

What I can see is if they can give more opportunity for traineeship for some people, so that they can help their own communities

Child Safety ... might train some women to work with them. And also don't let them go alone to teach their own communities. It's good for them to come with them, just to be like a key. You go to the house to open, and you yourself go in. The community will be the key of going and see the community for child safety people and also some other organizations. That will help a lot, because it will make people understand a lot of things. Like if we talk to the police, I cannot say that I need to be trained to be a policewoman, because it will take some years to do it. But if they told me about what they are doing, and I work with them. Like someone opening the door, going and telling people this is a policeman, they want to tell you about this and this.

We should use people from the same culture and the same background. You can't have an Aussie, for instance, going to a Somalian and saying, I'm a bilingual worker, we need to talk about your culture, and you go there as a mediator. Because when you go there you want them to understand that the law is there and you can educate them, but also [that you really] know what Somalian culture is about. They will look at you and say what do you know about my culture? To get someone from the community, just the appearance that they understand the language so let's talk. You have to have the right people basically, trying to bridge the gap, working as mediators between the system and the community.

Address broader settlement needs to facilitate overall settlement

While the women expressed a strong desire to improve the situations for their families including in their interactions with child safety authorities, there is also a need to see family issues within the overall context of resettlement needs. Several women made suggestions about how broader programs could assist families in learning about services that can help in their settlement, in providing peer or other support, and in meeting broader settlement needs.

One thing is, the services have to be there [to support people where they are settled]. You cannot just spread someone like that whereby they don't have the services. You are just going to create more isolation. [There needs to be] settlement service, proper education, good childcare. There should be centres where people can drop in, organisations [dealing] with housing, a social worker I can go and talk to. There should be active things going around to get everyone out of isolation. People can come and talk and if there's issues, I'm having problems today, I'm having family status issues, this is what we can do it and let's [deal with] it.

Need for more diverse and flexible learning and training opportunities



All the women they are spending more time to go to TAFE, to learn English. But maybe if the government think about them to create some project that they can do and they can gain a little bit for their family. In Africa if you didn't go to school and you come here in Australia you are maybe 40 years, to study English is very hard. [But] they know many things they can do to look after their families.

When we go through our background, we passed too many difficult situations. We didn't have opportunity go to school and when you come here, they have some things to do. They can make things with their hands. When they come here they have to go to TAFE to study English. You don't get money. They have... things they can do and get money to look after the family, yes they have to go to study and the government has to think about us and how to get a job. They are not able to work in

the meat factory, but if the government create some activities for example, hand craft, sewing, we will do them and get money and provide for their family.

Providing some things, different opportunities to earn an income which is not just about Centrelink and not just about going to TAFE. For example, maybe sewing - she knows some kinds of things she can do - she can make two days there [at TAFE], two days there [working for] money - balance between going to TAFE and learning English and other skills. Learning English is important, but not every day.

Need for engagement and training with men about women's rights

[I suggest] organising a meeting, like this one with women, maybe you have an opportunity to get men together and talk about issues with men. Sometimes men are saying equal for women and men, in one way it can hurt men; they don't like the same level of women. Maybe if you call men and have a meeting with them and talk to the issue about women and your rights.

The value of support groups, activities and information to enhance settlement

Women sometimes do not know where to start to get help. If you meet with them, you give them the picture where they can start to go and get help, which help they can get. How they can talk with other people because their eyes are still closed. They don't see out. They do not know what happens out. But maybe if they meet with other people they can get the picture of what happens outside, how they can get help

If the government can help them to create activities to meet together. If they create activities which can help them to get something which can help the family.

We ... want to start a small project, maybe later on it will be big, [if] we have support from other organisations. We ... want to see what we can do, where we can get help. [We] know many things, like sewing, handcraft, cooking, dancing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultation and interviews undertaken in this project revealed a great depth of knowledge, experience and ideas amongst the women participants. The women participants acknowledged that many of them face challenges in settling into a new community and rebuilding lives and social networks, including in family relationships. Breakdown of families in resettlement causes great pain and confusion and negatively impacts on, and is impacted by, other aspects of settlement.

This project also demonstrated the women's strong desire to maintain intact families and communities and to be actively engaged in finding solutions to challenges facing them; and ACCES Services' willingness to support and facilitate the women and their communities in this aim.

It is acknowledged that the task of child protection agencies is difficult and complex, and the paramount obligation is to protect children from harm. However the women described a view within communities that the current approaches and practices within child safety agencies pays insufficient regard to their needs and rights, and is damaging their families and communities. They report the need for both 'sides' to develop better understanding and knowledge. The women expressed a strong desire to work together with services and agencies to gain (and contribute to) skills and knowledge that will enable strong and intact families.

It is hoped that this report can be used to further this aim, and it is recommended that it be used as a platform to begin a dialogue that can lead to the mutual learning the women see as necessary for progress.

The women themselves have made additional and important recommendations, as outlined above, and it is hoped that the various services, agencies and communities can work together to engage their resources and implement their suggestions.