



Creative Methods in Cross-Cultural Counselling:

Supporting the mental health needs of young Tasmanians from refugee backgrounds



Renée Valentino, Phoenix Centre
Trauma & Torture Counsellor, Registered Music Therapist, Provisional Psychologist

Summary

Children and young people from refugee backgrounds face multiple and complex challenges during settlement, requiring significant adaptation, whether they are prepared for this change or not. The Phoenix Centre's 'Transformers' program supports people under the age of 25 to face change and strive for positive growth through culturally sensitive and creative counselling, advocacy and support, during their times of 'transformation'.

Aims

- 1) To provide individual and group counselling and advocacy
- 2) To enhance the skills and confidence of school staff and other service providers in working appropriately with young people from refugee backgrounds

Influences

Socio-Cultural Differences:

- Perceptions of health, wellbeing and development
- Coping mechanisms

Refugee Experiences:

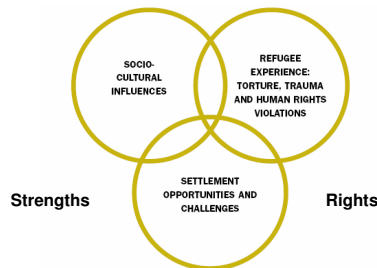
- Multiple loss & grief
- Violence & sexual assault

Settlement Challenges:

- Language barriers
- Negotiating unfamiliar systems



Pre and Post migration stressors



Case Example

- A 12 year old female experiencing:
- Night terrors and Flashbacks
 - Unable to sleep alone

Counselling included:

- Musical story telling
- Expressing emotions through musical instruments

Recovery goals:

- Re-discover sense of mastery and control
- Externalize and process emotional responses
- Focus on positive elements of life story

Outcomes:

- Moved from Mum's bed into her own room
- Full nights of undisturbed sleep
- Able to look after new puppy!



Road to Recovery

Individual Counselling:

- Utilising expressive arts therapies, narrative techniques, cognitive behavioural techniques, play therapy

Group Counselling:

- Relationships workshops, Drum Beat groups

Professional Development:

- Providing training on supporting refugee background students in schools and child care settings
- Incidental counselling for school staff

Creating Links:

- Between service providers, schools, child care centres and youth programs for better access and support

Recovery Goals:

- Restoring safety; reducing fear, anxiety & shame
- Building attachment; fostering meaning and hope
- Establishing personal value and dignity



What's Next?

- 1) Continue counselling and advocacy with young people
- 2) Annual training for school staff, child care workers, and other service providers
- 3) A full day forum to create linkages between services, to share expertise, and to increase ability to provide appropriate support
- 4) Continuous monitoring of needs and delivering responsive services

Contact Details

Phoenix Centre
49 Mollie Street
Hobart TAS 7000

Phone: (03) 6221 0999

Email:
phoenix@mrchoabt.org.au

