



MCCI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we live and work. We offer our deepest respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
Artwork by Jasmine Sarin, JS Koori Designs, a proud Kamilaroi and Jerrinja woman from NSW

Young People at the Centre

Co-designing for participation and inclusion in diverse communities

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Workshop Outline

- MCCI and our roles
- Aim of today's workshop
- Context: global, Australian and local
- Our approach to Co-design
- Co-design activity
- Wrap-up and questions



MCCI: *Supporting Multicultural Communities*

- Aged Care
- Settlement Services
- Youth Services
- Representation and Advocacy
- Diversity and Inclusion Services



MCCI: *Youth Development Programs*

- Facilitating youth services for over 30 years.
- Target group includes migrants, children of migrants, former refugees.
- Free youth development programs include:
- In-school and excursion-based programs from 6-15 weeks.
- Football at The Frat
- Youth mentoring and employment support
- Drop-in school holiday activities
- Annual scholarship
- Youth mentoring
- In-house clinics



Migrant vs Refugee

What do we mean by "Refugee Background"?

- A refugee is a person who cannot safely return to their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution.
- A person seeking asylum has asked for protection and is awaiting a decision on their claim.
- "Refugee Background" describes an aspect of a person's journey, not their whole identity.
- Refugee vs. Migrant background



The Global Context

- At the end of 2025, 117.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide.
- 35.6 million are refugees under UNHCR's mandate.
- 65% originate from five countries including; Venezuela, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan.
- Australia's Humanitarian Program provides offshore resettlement and onshore protection pathways.
- Australia's 2024–25 Humanitarian Program offered 20,000 humanitarian places for refugees
- National statistics are useful context, but each young person's experience is individual.



The Illawarra Context

- Wollongong has a long history of refugee settlement.
- More recently arrived communities include people from the Syria, Myanmar, Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Burundi and Ukraine.
- Communities are diverse in language, education, literacy, health, settlement journey and support needs.
- A strong local network of community organisations and services supports settlement and inclusion.





Why do we need a different approach?

“Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds commonly face a range of barriers to accessing services and opportunities that are not experienced by Australian-born, non-immigrant young people.” – **MYAN National Youth Settlement Framework**

Young People's Roles and Strengths

- Navigating school, training, employment and unfamiliar service systems.
- Building identity and belonging across cultures and communities.
- Supporting family members with language, technology and local systems.
- Bringing multilingual skills, adaptability, leadership, creativity and networks.
- Balancing personal goals with family and community responsibilities.



Barriers to Participation

- Limited English and interrupted schooling before arrival in Australia
- New family structures, responsibilities and tensions around independence, autonomy and cultural continuity
- Changing expectations around gender roles and opportunities
- Balancing individual identity with collective culture
- Navigating unfamiliar education, employment and transport systems
- Displacement-related trauma, mental health challenges and socio-economic disadvantage
- Help-seeking barriers: stigma, distrust and limited awareness of services
- Limited digital skills or access to IT equipment
- Racism and discrimination



Co-design as a process

Core principles of co-design

The core principles of co-design are:

- Shared power
- Genuine participation
- Valuing lived experience; and
- Shifting from **'voice'** to **'visibility'**

Hot Tip: consulting is not co-design



Co-design as a process

		Youth	Children	Families
How	How to capture input?	Surveys, workshops, digital	Play, art, observation, story	Mixed methods, separate spaces
Who	Who carries it forward?	The youth themselves	A trusted adult ally	A skilled facilitator
What	What “visible” looks like?	Named contribution in the design	Displayed/embedded contribution, credited to children collectively or individually	Each member’s contribution traceable; family sees itself in the outcome
Risk	Main risk	Tokenism (youth as a public relation tool, not genuine engagement)	“Cute voice” — heard but not weighted	Dominant voices crowding out others
Success	Success looks like	Youth can point to their impact (mapping)	Children recognize themselves in the result	Every family member can see their mark

Our approach to Co-design

Pre-design

1. What do we need to achieve?
2. Who do you need in the room?

- Define success
- Map the environment
- Share governance



Breaking down barriers and creating cultural safety

1. What prevents people from taking part?
2. What are the ingredients for cultural safety?

- Ideation
- Go to them
- Use asset-based enquiry
- Cultural safety

Balancing hierarchies

1. How are you involved in the process?
2. Can you identify opportunities to step back?

- Run power audits
- Power dynamics
- Group decision making

Methods of delivery and facilitation

1. How would you facilitate a session to centre the voices of young people?
2. Are you hearing all voices?

- Engagement strategies
- 1, 2, 4 techniques
- Consider abilities
- Consider a variety of tools

Acknowledgements and recognition

1. How would you acknowledge participants?
Consider the skills, time, and lived experience participants have brought to the process

- Co-author the outputs
- Map suggestions to final design
- Future engagement

Our approach in practice

Pre-design

1. What do we need to achieve?
2. Who do you need in the room?



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The activity

- You have received a grant to run an activity of your choice from the list available on your tables
- The grant stipulates that the activity must be co-designed
- Use the co-design tool to map how you would engage young people in the co-design process
- Ensure to have youth and / or children's participation from the Pre-design stage to completion
- Be specific with your answers
- 20 minutes
- Share your work



A circular inset image on the left side of the slide shows four people from behind, sitting on a stone wall. They are looking out over a vast blue ocean under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The people are dressed in casual clothing; one is wearing a black hoodie, and another has long dark hair. The scene is peaceful and scenic.

Wrap up

- What worked, what didn't, any challenges?
- How can you use this co-design tool in your work practice to ensure inclusion in your own work?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGV9DCJ-WBo&t=7s>



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