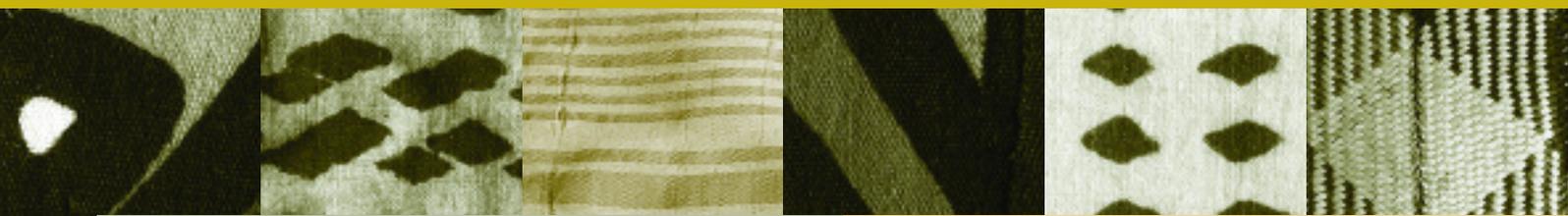


Raising Children in Australia

A resource kit for
early childhood services
working with parents from
African backgrounds

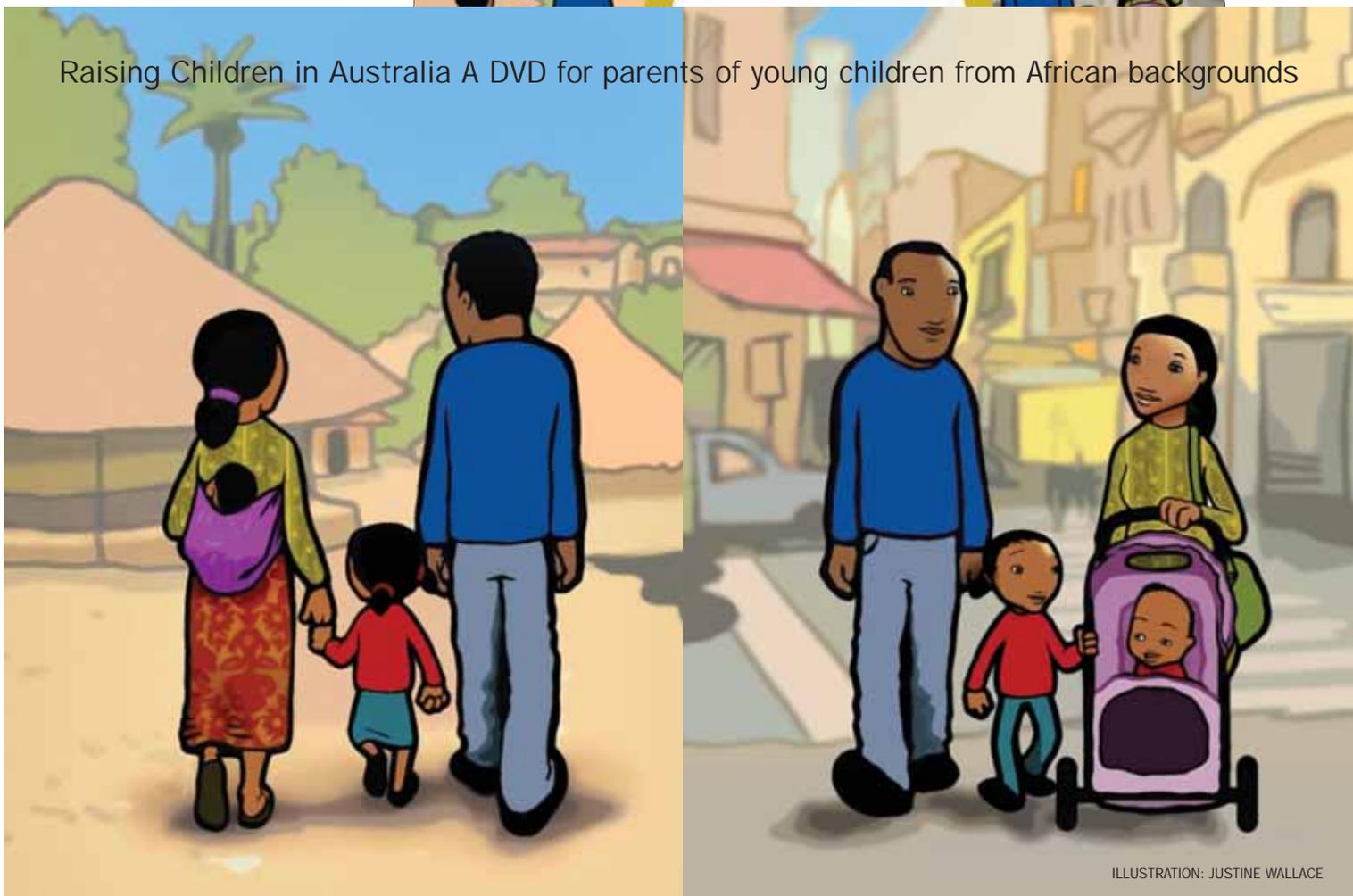
Produced by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.
and the Horn of Africa Communities Network Inc.



The DVD can be obtained free of charge from the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Publication Hotline on 1800 050 009.



Raising Children in Australia A DVD for parents of young children from African backgrounds



Raising Children in Australia

A resource kit for
early childhood services
working with parents from
African backgrounds

Funded by the Australian Government.
Produced by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.
(Foundation House) and the Horn of Africa Communities Network Inc.



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Raising Children in Australia: A resource kit for early childhood services working with parents from African backgrounds

Funded by the Australian Government.

Produced by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (Foundation House) and the Horn of Africa Communities Network Inc.

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The kit includes a DVD for parents of young children from African backgrounds.

ISBN 978-0-9804000-1-4 (DVD).

The DVD is in English, Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Dinka, Nuer, Kirundi, Kiswahili, Liberian English and Krio. Each DVD contains all language versions. Users can choose the required soundtrack when viewing.

Free copies of the resource kit and additional DVDs for parents can be obtained from the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Publication Hotline on 1800 050 009.

The Guide can be downloaded free of charge at www.foundationhouse.org.au

Enquiries about the project can be directed to The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. Email families@foundationhouse.org.au.

The resources resulting from the Parenting Information Project for African Communities in Australia have been developed using a consumer participation model. The resources are based on the insight gained through extensive community consultation. Many people from the target communities contributed to the project and the development of the resources by way of interviews with fathers, mothers and community leaders, providing cultural advice to the project, featuring in the DVD, translating the DVD script into the selected community languages, providing their voices for the recording of the DVD community language versions and – last but not least – composing the background music.

Foreword

I am pleased to contribute to the introduction of 'Raising Children in Australia – A resource kit for early childhood services working with parents from African backgrounds'. The kit was developed by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture in partnership with the Horn of Africa Communities Network and in ongoing close cooperation with community representatives. Funding has been provided by the Australian Government. The kit includes a DVD developed specifically for African parents in a range of community languages, and a resource guide, poster and brochure for early childhood services to accompany and facilitate use of the DVD.

The Australian Government's support for this project goes back to 2004, when an extensive report into parenting information needs in Australia was undertaken. That report identified the need for culturally appropriate parenting information to be developed in close consultation with leaders from relevant communities. The report also identified the need for easily accessible, up-to-date, quality-assured parenting information.

The Australian Government offers a range of other information to support parents in raising children, including the Raising Children Network website. Contact details for those resources are listed in the reference section of this resource guide.

These resources are a result of The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and the Horn of Africa Community Network's commitment to supporting African families in Australia. They also form part of the Australian Government's commitment to providing Australian families with high quality parenting information and support. I wish Foundation House every success with supporting African families in Australia through these resources.

The Hon. Mal Brough

Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Foreword

Parenting is perhaps the most important responsibility many of us take on. Parents play a central role in all aspects of young children's lives – ensuring their physical health, providing safety and emotional security, instilling a love of learning, and guiding them towards appropriate ways of behaving. All parents need support in these important tasks (hence the well-known aphorism, 'It takes a village to raise a child.'). For families in a new culture, away from traditional supports, and in the context of significant past and present challenges, the need for support is so much greater.

This Guide and the accompanying DVD recognise that, for families making the transition from one culture to another, attempts to provide support are not successful unless they are welcoming and appropriate. Those providing services need to have a strong understanding and respect for the cultural background of the families they are working with, as well as recognising their strengths and particular challenges. This Guide provides an invaluable resource for service providers in building that understanding and providing tools to help them be as helpful as possible to the diverse families who have arrived from various parts of Africa.

How we raise our children depends on many things, including our values, goals and beliefs about children. These are largely formed by our own experiences when growing up, and by what is valued in our own cultures. As the quotes in the Guide vividly illustrate, all parents everywhere share the aspirations that their children will be happy, healthy and well educated. But cultures can vary in other ways – for example, in how strongly they value children being obedient and respectful, or conversely independent and self-reliant. They can also differ in the relative importance placed on different aspects of early development such as motor skills, language and social skills. These are all valid aspirations for children.

One's own culture, especially if it is the mainstream culture, is often 'invisible'. It is hard to recognise or question our assumptions about the 'right' or 'best' ways to raise children. Readers of this Guide are taken on a journey of increasing our own cultural awareness. Many practices that are 'different' still support children's well-being. Respecting these differences might mean adapting programs and services to accommodate them – among many possible examples are culturally or religiously based food requirements, and sleeping routines. At the same time, research has demonstrated that some practices are harmful, whatever context they occur in, for example, severe physical punishment, abuse and neglect. Providing support to parents in learning new parenting skills and understanding Australian legal requirements will always be an important role for family support workers.

This Guide and the DVD reflect a partnership between The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, the Horn of Africa Communities Network and African communities, and is solidly grounded on experience, drawing on interviews with many parents and service providers whose voices are heard throughout. Amongst its goals is encouraging better integration of services. There is also a need to continue to build the knowledge base about the strengths and needs of families with different backgrounds, to evaluate the effects of service provision, and to analyse the implications for policy development. This calls for an ongoing partnership between service providers, researchers and policy makers. By working together, we can continue to build our capacity to improve the health and well-being of all Australian children and youth.

Ann Sanson

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Reference committee: Hanadi Awad, North Sudanese community representative; Melinda Chapman, Assistant Director, Free Kindergarten Association (FKA), Manyuak Chien, South Sudanese community representative; Melissa Coutts, formerly Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital; Lisa De Silva, Researcher, Developmental Psychologist, Australian Institute for Family Studies; Fartun Farah, Somali community representative; Munira Mahmoud, Eritrean community representative, Kuz McMehan and Madeleine Smith, Family and Community Support, Department of Human Services Northern Region; Omar J. Omar, Horn of Africa Communities Network representative; Barbara Romeril, Director, National Association of Community-based Children's Services (Victorian Branch); Cathy Spear, Team Leader of Family Services, North Melbourne Community Centre, Mooney Valley Council; Getechew Yosef, Ethiopian community representative; and John Zika, Executive Director, Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups.

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Special thanks to all the people who feature in, or otherwise contributed to, the development and making of the DVD.

1. Introduction

This section discusses why the Guide was developed, and its intended audience. It explains the reasons for focusing on African families, and provides some cultural background information on African communities in Australia. It also includes suggestions on using the Guide.



In all cultures, the environment in which young children grow up has a powerful impact on their health, well-being and development towards adults. Recent research from the World Health Organization (WHO) confirms that children anywhere in the world who are given an

The future of human societies depends on children being able to achieve their optimal physical growth and psychological development. Never before has there been so much potential.

WHO, 2006

optimal start in life have remarkably similar health and development potential. So the relationships between health, physical growth, psychological development and parental caregiving are vital (WHO, 2006). Parents are the primary influence on their children's well-being; therefore, it is important to provide services and programs to support parents. A strong and caring family, along with community and social support, provides a nurturing environment for healthy child development.

This Guide is written for Australian early childhood services working with parents and children from African countries. It focuses on the increasing numbers of families from Western, Central and the Horn of African countries who have come to Australia in the last two decades. Most have come under the Australian Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Program and therefore have experienced war, violence and prolonged periods of deprivation. The effect of past trauma on these families must be recognised and understood. Cultural and language barriers can create further difficulties for them during resettlement.

The resilience and coping mechanisms that have helped these families survive in the past are also important when rebuilding their lives and raising their children in Australia. Service providers will be better able to assess and respond to individual needs when they understand the backgrounds and culture of African families and the resettlement challenges they have faced. By recognising the resources and strengths of these families, service providers will be better able to help parents nurture their child's health, development and well-being. A respectful and sensitive approach by practitioners will also strengthen parents' confidence and encourage the families to share some of their wonderful cultural practices and traditions.

1.1 Background to the development of this Guide

In 2004 the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) funded research into what improvements in parenting information would make the biggest difference for parents and their children. This report identified the need for culturally appropriate parenting information, resources and strategies for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities living in Australia. Parents and children from African backgrounds were identified as one of the target groups. Early childhood and parenting services should be aware of the barriers that prevent these parents from accessing services, programs and resources that are available to them. This is true for both new arrivals and those who have lived in Australia for longer periods. Services can then work to ensure that families from African backgrounds enjoy greater levels of access and participation. (See www.facsia.gov.au/pip for copies of the Parenting Information Project Report).

This Guide is the product of a partnership between the Horn of Africa Communities Network (HACN) and the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House). This partnership has built upon years of experience working with children and families from refugee backgrounds. HACN was established in 1998 and includes representatives from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and South and North Sudan. It also has close links with African communities from Liberia, Burundi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and DR Congo. HACN has enabled an extensive consultation among Horn of Africa, West and Central African communities through linking the project with bi-cultural facilitators. Over 120 individual interviews were conducted to inform the project and its resource, two-thirds with parents and the remainder with leaders from all the representative communities. The interviews were equally divided between women and men. The length of time living in Australia ranged from 6 months to 21 years. Interviews were also conducted with 36 service providers, including 20 ethnic workers employed by them to identify their concerns about providing services to the target communities, and with the 20 bi-cultural facilitators employed to conduct the interviews.

The consultation provided information and insights into the experiences and practices of African families. Parents spoke about Australia and the opportunities it provided for their children. They also spoke of the barriers that prevented them from accessing services, programs and information, and the areas in which they wanted to build their knowledge, skills and confidence as parents.

In order to respond to these concerns, a package of complementary resources has been developed, which includes this Guide for service providers working with the target communities, a 16-minute DVD for parents from African and a mini poster. HACN representatives have worked closely with Foundation House during all stages of development, writing, reviewing and production of these resources.

Terminology

This Guide includes information about people from a diverse range of African countries. Unless referring to specific countries or regions, it uses the general terms 'families from African backgrounds' or 'African families/parents'. While this is intended to help make the Guide more readable, it is important to recognise the enormous diversity among the people and cultures of these countries.

Purpose of the Guide

This Guide aims to support the development of children in their early formative years by assisting Australian service providers to work more closely and effectively with parents and children from African countries. It examines the barriers and gaps currently faced by parents and offers practical ways of responding, rather than reacting to the presenting issues. Guided by key service providers in early childhood development, it provides a framework with information and strategies to help services better cater to the particular needs of the families from the target communities.

Who is the Guide for?

The Guide will assist agencies and practitioners who provide services or run programs for parents and children 0–5 years, particularly those located in areas with significant numbers of African families. It is relevant for a range of family, early childhood and other services including:

- family and parenting services
- maternal and child health services
- childcare, kindergarten and preschool centres
- child protection and support services
- refugee and settlement services
- adult English language schools
- health professionals including general practitioners, paediatricians, nurses
- hospitals and allied health practitioners.

The Guide promotes ways to help all staff working within an agency or program – practitioners, reception, auxiliary staff and management – work effectively with families from African backgrounds.

Throughout the Guide, parents' voices describe their experiences and the challenges they face in raising their children in Australia. Their words are a continual reminder of the need to ensure that the provision of information, education, health services and support considers the language, communication styles, cultural, religious and social background, and the impact of refugee experiences upon children and families. A stronger understanding of these factors will also help services to integrate and build upon the strengths of African families when planning and delivering services.

1.2 Why focus on African families?

Parents from African countries, as all parents, require access to a range of early childhood and family services in Australia. Yet they often face language, cultural and structural barriers. As a relatively recent group of immigrants, many people from African backgrounds are acutely aware of the differences in their appearance, culture and way of life. While African families are not a homogenous group and have diverse cultures and backgrounds, many do share common experiences.

Most African families have come to Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and have experienced trauma as a result of war, violence and forced displacement. Many families have spent difficult years in countries of asylum either in refugee camps or in the wider community. These experiences can make it difficult to resettle in Australia. Added to the refugee experience, adjusting to a different way of life in Australia presents multiple challenges. These may include:

- The roles of men, women and children within the family and in society can be different. Although this can mean a loss of status, particularly for men, it can also allow them to be more involved in raising their children. Women can also assume roles outside the family or children may take on greater family responsibility, e.g. interpreting for parents.

- Many African families are much larger than Australian families and may include children who are separated from their parents or orphaned, adding complexity to everyday family life.
- Parents can feel isolated as they struggle to raise their children without the support of an extended family, such as grandparents, uncles and aunts.
- There are large numbers of single parents, particularly women, raising families alone.
- There are often tensions between couples and between parents and children as they each adjust to cultural change differently.
- The lack of role models to support young parents makes raising children difficult particularly for those who have been separated from parents and family or whose relationships with parents/guardians have broken down.
- Most families have limited economic resources to access available services and resources.
- There are language and literacy barriers to information and opportunities to know more about family and parenting services.
- Many families lack familiarity with new concepts of and expectations about parenting.
- Many African parents report having experienced inappropriate or insensitive service delivery in Australia.

1.3 Snapshot of African communities in Australia

Most families from African countries enter Australia under the Australian Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. This offers resettlement to about 13 000 refugees, or people in refugee-like situations, each year. The main countries from which people originate are Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Humanitarian entrants from African countries have settled across all Australian states and territories.

Since the mid 1980s, significant numbers of people have been coming to Australia from African countries, mainly the Horn of Africa including Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Since the mid 1990s continued high resettlement needs in the African region resulted in a corresponding increase in Australia's refugee intake, mainly from southern and equatorial Sudan (see Figure 2.2, page 16). Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of people from Africa resettled in Australia under the Humanitarian Program rose from 31% to 70%. In 2005–06, over 7000 places were allocated to entrants from the African region.

Australia's current humanitarian intake includes an increasing number of refugees and humanitarian entrants from the West African region, including Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as Central African countries including Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Information about Australia's Humanitarian Program is available in the annually updated booklet *Refugee and Humanitarian Issues – Australia's Response* (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2005).

TABLE 1.1 Settling in Australia: Top 10 countries of birth for humanitarian arrivals 2001–06

Country of birth	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	Total
Sudan	1043	2731	4504	5561	3591	17430
Iraq	2219	2612	1625	1499	1864	9819
Afghanistan	1847	1039	1199	820	1515	6420
Former Yugoslavia	1337	958	386	158	24	2863
Iran	580	536	568	530	397	2611
Sierra Leone	320	176	120	632	516	1764
Liberia	112	143	107	844	552	1758
Ethiopia	230	389	506	384	221	1730
Egypt	134	228	331	422	290	1405
Kenya	25	180	244	494	309	1252
Total (top 10)	7847	8992	9590	11344	9279	47052

Entrants born in Egypt and Kenya are predominantly children born of Sudanese parents in refugee camps. Born in Iraq can refer to a Kurdish entrant.

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (2006b) *New Beginnings: Life in Australia, Supporting New Arrivals on their Settlement Journey* 2005–06.

A number of African communities are small and emerging – they have an Australia-wide population of fewer than 15 000, of whom 30% or more have arrived in the last 5 years. These communities have significant settlement needs, particularly in regard to language barriers, cultural differences and lack of familiarity with the Australian service environment. Because of their recent arrival in Australia, these newly emerging communities may be unable to provide adequate community support to new entrants because a supportive infrastructure has not yet been established. In 2006–07, these communities include Burundian, Liberian, Sierra Leonean, Congolese, Rwandan and Ethiopian communities (Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), 2006a).

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has developed community profiles that include information on settlement locations, cultural and country backgrounds and likely settlement needs. These assist service providers to better understand the backgrounds and needs of Humanitarian Program arrivals. Community profiles include Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Liberian (see Section 6.2).

Further information on African communities in Australia can be found on the websites listed in Section 6.2.

1.4 How to use this Guide

This Guide can be used as a source of general background information or to find information on specific questions and practice dilemmas. It provides a framework for organisations to address service provision and care through their structures, policies, programs and practices. It will assist services by identifying how current programs and resources can be adapted and delivered to better meet the needs of African families, e.g. parent programs may be complemented by additional support and coordination with other services, in order to maximise support for young children and their parents.

Section 1 provides background to the Guide and why it focuses on families from African backgrounds as well as a snapshot of African communities in Australia.

Section 2 helps services to understand the social and cultural background of African families, their refugee experiences and what they face in resettlement.

Section 3 examines key issues identified by parents and service providers regarding African families raising children in Australia.

Section 4 examines how agencies can provide more culturally responsive services, particularly through enrolment, orientation, staff development and training and policies.

Section 5 provides information on Australian services to support families and children.

Section 6 provides information about additional resources for services to support African parents and children.

The Guide is accompanied by a DVD for parents titled *Raising Children in Australia*. It provides parents with visual information in their first language and addresses key concerns of parents including child development, discipline, child protection and access to services.

It is available in English, Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Dinka, Nuer, Kirundi, Kiswahili, Liberian English and Krio. Ideally, the DVD should be shown to parents in group settings, and a free copy can then be given to the parents to watch at a convenient time in their home.

The Guide and DVD can be used separately or combined:

- as a resource for parenting programs and groups
- to provide specific information on issues of concern to parents
- to assist referral pathways and coordination of care
- to assist the planning and review of current services and programs
- and as a tool for professional development and training of staff.

2. Understanding families from African countries

This section discusses significant influences upon parenting and family life for African families in Australia. It provides a context for a wide range of issues faced by early childhood services in Australia including family relationships, health, nutrition, child development, behaviour and discipline.



During their early formative years, children are highly dependent, and therefore vulnerable. Socio-cultural influences, the refugee experience, and resettlement issues, can significantly impact on children and their families. The complexity of family histories often reflects these areas of influence and how they affect each other, and combine with other factors, to shape family circumstances.

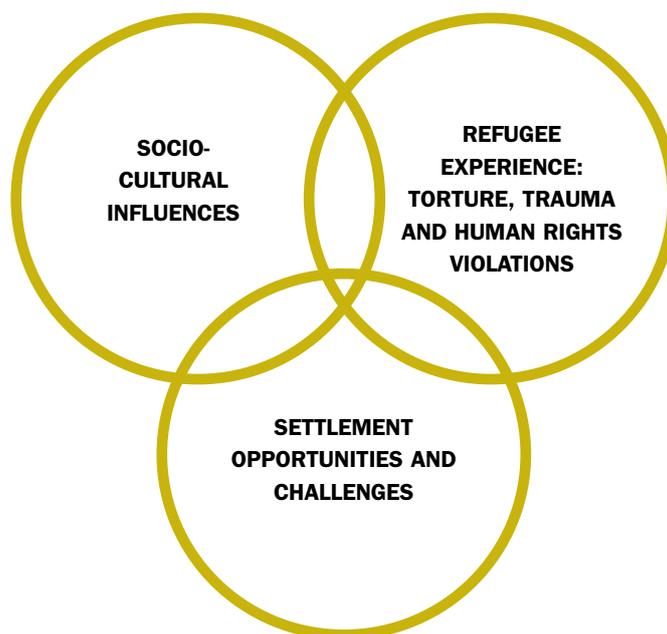
Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationship between three significant areas of influence on family life: socio-cultural influences, the refugee experience, and settlement issues.

Socio-cultural influences: Parents tend to raise their children as they themselves were raised, so it is important to understand the cultures and traditions of families of African backgrounds. Environmental factors such as the social, economic and political conditions of the country and area in which they live also impact on families.

Refugee experience: Many African families will be affected by their experiences of war, flight and living in situations of insecurity and hardship.

Settlement: The process of building a new life in a new country offers many opportunities and challenges as people learn to adjust to different cultures, traditions, language and lifestyles.

FIGURE 2.1 Significant influences on family life.



2.1 Socio-cultural influences

Cultural influences

Culture has an important effect on how parents understand their child's health, well-being and development. It influences childrearing beliefs and practices, coping mechanisms and how parents communicate with their children. Cultural values are often implicit – the natural or right way to do things is taken for granted. Parents transmit their culture and values to their children, teaching them how to behave and what is expected of them.

There is much variation in childrearing traditions and practices among African countries and people. These practices are determined by religion, ethnicity, personality, gender, level of education, and social and economic status. Cultural differences also occur between people of rural and urban backgrounds. It is important not to generalise or stereotype the cultural differences among people of African background. Particular cultural aspects related to raising children are discussed in Section 3.

Many African parents in Australia are very concerned about their children losing connection with their culture. They fear that their children will lose respect for their language, religion and traditions. Parents feel a sense of loss when their children grow up in a different culture and with very different experiences from their own.

In a new and different environment, these cultural values are often challenged. Services in Australia reflect values and practices that are unfamiliar to many African parents. As they encounter new experiences and relate to people with different expectations of how to raise children, their own familiar points of reference are often missing. Incidents such as being reprimanded for being late for an appointment or not returning a form on time can make parents feel disoriented, lose confidence or ‘...feel powerless, like I am a child again.’ They may then become reluctant to attend early childhood services and programs, which means their children miss out on valuable opportunities at a crucial time in their own social, emotional and cognitive development.

Bringing up children in this country is a challenge because of differences in the cultural backgrounds and the laws that guide parents in bringing up children.

SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER

Services should acknowledge and respect cultural differences by allowing time and flexibility for families to settle into their new environment. These services can play a valuable role in helping families negotiate cultural differences during the transition of resettlement, by providing opportunities for African families to share their cultural knowledge and practices, thereby enriching programs and services in Australia.

Country background

It is important to have some knowledge of the countries from which African families come, and an understanding of the languages, cultures and religions, as well as the social, political and economic conditions under which these families lived prior to Australia. This can help services to understand how and why African families see or do things a particular way. Many of the countries of transit have also been devastated by war and conflict. In addition many African countries have also been devastated by famine, environmental destruction and the AIDS pandemic.

The flow of refugees seeking safety and protection affects neighbouring countries. The mass displacement of large population groups has placed additional pressure on the already fragile economies and social systems of the countries that receive refugees.

People who have come to Australia from these African countries may have experienced:

- poverty and insecurity
- displacement caused by protracted situations of war and political turmoil
- flight and seeking refuge, often involving multiple journeys
- destruction of basic infrastructure and lack of health, education and social service systems
- access to very basic services in rudimentary settings such as a primary healthcare clinic or a district school
- high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity due to preventable diseases (e.g. AIDS) and other factors such as the low proportion of births attended by professionally trained personnel and the lack of access to emergency obstetric care.

Figure 2.2 Map of Africa.



SOURCE: BASED ON MAP NO. 4045 REV. 4 UNITED NATIONS, JANUARY 2004

Early childhood services, where they exist in the refugee source and transit countries, focus on primary health care such as childhood immunisation and nutritional monitoring. Maternal and infant health is a cause for serious concern in each of these countries. Morbidity and mortality rates in pregnant women, mothers and newborns are high, as is poor childhood nutrition and development. UNICEF reports that one in 16 women in the sub-Saharan region of Africa will die from pregnancy-related causes. In refugee camps and countries of transit, families have extremely limited support even for basic necessities such as immunisation or adequate nutrition.

Deprived during all the years in exile; no food, no money, illness and no health care, no way to send children to school – all has affected children. We struggled for survival and were unable to provide for the children.

BURUNDIAN MOTHER

SNAPSHOTS OF MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH (UNICEF)

ERITREA:	More than 10% of children under 5 are severely underweight. More than half of pregnant women are anaemic.
BURUNDI:	Mortality rates for infants and children under 5 are one of the highest in the world. One in 12 Burundian women faces death related to child bearing.
ETHIOPIA:	Malnutrition is responsible for more than half of all deaths of children under 5.
SOMALIA:	Measles and cholera are serious threats, against which few have been vaccinated. Less than 30% of the country has access to safe water.
RWANDA:	Malnutrition affects nearly a quarter of all children and causes 40% of deaths of children under 5.
LIBERIA:	More than 15% of children die before they reach their first birthday; nearly 40% of children under 5 suffer from stunting as a result of malnutrition.
SIERRA LEONE:	Exceptionally high maternal mortality rate of 1800 per 100 000.
DR CONGO:	Largest concentration of child soldiers in the world and the worst child survival and nutrition rates.
SUDAN:	Malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases kill more than 100 000 children every year.

UNICEF 2006: www.unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below provide data on basic indicators of maternal and child health in the African countries from which many refugee and humanitarian entrants come. They show the grim reality of high infant and child mortality, low life expectancy, and lack of access to basic services such as health, water, sanitation and primary education. The Australian data at the bottom of each of the tables highlights the enormous difference in conditions.

TABLE 2.1 Basic health indicators for African source countries of Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program. World Health Organization (WHO)

Country	Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (2004) Both sexes	Under 5 mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (2004) Both sexes	Life expectancy at birth (2004)		Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births) (2000) Female	Neo-natal mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (2000) Both sexes	Causes of death among children under 5 Both sexes (%) (2000)						
			F	M			Neo-natal	HIV/AIDS	Diarrhoeal diseases	Measles	Malaria	Pneumonia	Injuries
Eritrea	52	82	62	58	630	25	27.4	6.2	15.6	2.5	13.6	18.6	3
Ethiopia	110	166	51	49	850	51	30.2	3.8	17.3	4.2	6.1	22.3	1.7
Somalia	133	225	45	43	1100	49	23.3	0.8	18.7	6.8	4.5	23.9	2.6
Sudan	62	91	60	56	590	29	31.4	2.9	12.9	5.4	21.2	15.5	4.6
Liberia	157	235	44	39	760	66	29.1	3.6	17.3	6	18.9	23	1.7
Sierra Leone	165	283	40	37	2000	56	21.9	1.3	19.7	5.3	12.4	25.5	1.2
Ivory Coast	118	194	47	41	690	65	34.9	5.6	14.8	2.5	20.5	19.6	2.2
Burundi	114	190	47	42	1000	41	23.3	8	18.2	3	8.4	22.8	1.8
Rwanda	118	203	47	44	1400	45	21.7	5	18.5	1.6	4.6	23.2	1.8
DR Congo	129	205	47	42	990	47	25.7	3.7	18.1	4.7	16.9	23.1	1.6
Australia	5	5	83	78	6	3	55*	0	0.1	0	0	1.2	10.6

SOURCE: WHO World Health Statistics 2006 www.who.int/whosis/whostat2006/en/index.html

* This figure represents a percentage of child deaths.

TABLE 2.2 Health services coverage in African countries (WHO)

The low rates of immunisation coverage and the low numbers of births attended by skilled personnel indicate the difficult conditions of many African countries relative to Australia.

Country	Immunisation coverage among 1-year olds (%) (2004)			Births attended by skilled health personnel	
	Measles	DPT3	HepB3	(%)	Year
Eritrea	84	83	83	28	2002
Ethiopia	71	80	–	6	2000
Somalia	40	30	–	34	1999
Sudan	59	55	–	–	
Liberia	42	31	–	51	2000
Sierra Leone	64	61	–	42	2000
Ivory Coast	49	50	50	63	2000
Burundi	75	74	83	25	2000
Rwanda	84	89	89	31	2000
DR Congo	64	64	–	61	2001
Australia	93	92	95	99	2000

SOURCE: WHO World Health Statistics (2006) www.who.int/whosis/whostat2006/en/index.html

Further information on African countries and community profiles can be accessed through a recommended listing included in Section 6.2.

2.2 The refugee experience

Most people from African countries have lived as refugees or come from refugee-like situations, whether they arrived in Australia recently or many years ago. As with all people who enter Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), they will have been exposed to war, violence and persecution. They may have spent years living in dangerous situations and prolonged insecurity where they had very little control over their lives. Parents may have been unable to meet the basic needs of their family. Families, including young children, may have experienced or witnessed:

- war, bombing or shelling
- destruction of their home or village
- injury and violence towards family members or friends
- death, disappearance or separation from family members and friends
- sexual assault
- continual flight from dangerous situations
- hunger, sickness, inability to attend school.

Prolonged periods of insecurity affect family stability and the relationships to and attachment with other family members. Families are also affected by bereavement and loss.

The war affected us all, moving from camp to camp; split with father, lost each other, some family members are dead, it was very difficult. I don't know the whereabouts of my brother and am very distressed by this. We were all there when the war started and ran off...

LIBERIAN MOTHER

I believe young children are affected... because lots of parents still suffer the trauma from the civil wars and young children are neglected within the community.

SOMALI FATHER

Exposure to violence, whether direct or indirect, can affect children's perception of themselves and the world. It affects their ability to trust and form relationships with others – fundamental elements in child growth and development.

The hardship and deprivation of the refugee experience means children have had limited exposure to factors known to protect and promote health and well-being such as health care, education and a secure environment.

2.3 Settlement opportunities and challenges

Resettlement offers both opportunities and challenges. African families no longer face the insecurity and hardships of life in a refugee camp or country of first asylum. They now live in a relatively safe environment with access to food, safe water, housing, health and social services. There are opportunities for employment and education. Yet there are also challenges – language, cultural, religious, social and structural barriers can make it difficult for African families to access systems and services and adjust to life in Australia.

Resettlement impacts on family life and childrearing practices. Many parents speak of the challenges in understanding the different ways of bringing up their children in Australia. It

For me the biggest problem at moment is wearing a headscarf. Anywhere I go these days people look at me differently and that scares me.

ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

can be hard to find a balance between blending the positive aspects of life in Australia with their own valued traditions and practices.

During resettlement, some families experience racism and discrimination. This can make them suspicious and fearful and emphasises the 'otherness' of parents and children. Parents may deter their children from going out in public or mixing with people from other cultures.

Parents also speak of the difficulties in accessing programs and services to support them in parenting and nurturing healthy family relationships through this transition.

Entitlements

In Australia, most immigrant families are entitled to the same government services and benefits as all Australians. New arrivals under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program are entitled to an additional range of settlement services under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). This strategy provides intensive settlement support and aims to help families achieve self-sufficiency and be able to access mainstream services as soon as possible. Through a case-management approach, particular needs are identified and addressed. These services are generally provided for around 6 months, but can be extended for particularly vulnerable clients.

They include case coordination, information and referrals; on-arrival reception and assistance; accommodation services; and short-term torture and trauma counselling services.

Knowledge of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy can help early childhood services support families as they resettle in Australia. Further information on the IHSS is available on the Department of Immigration and Citizenship website (DIAC, 2005).

3. Raising children in Australia: Key issues facing African families

This section discusses key issues raised by African parents about bringing up their children in Australia. It aims to help service providers build their knowledge and cultural understanding of families' attitudes, experiences and practices in raising children so that they can provide appropriate strategies and programs of support.

In any culture, having a child is a life-changing experience. It raises many questions about family values and significantly affects family life and relationships. Each family member can experience the challenges in different ways and at different times.

Having little knowledge of parenting in this country is not helping me to incorporate the new style of parenting into mine.

SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER

African parents can feel torn between cultures. It can be hard to find a balance as they draw strength from their own cultural traditions while trying to establish a sense of identity and belonging in their new country. Strong

family and community support is important in times of transition, yet networks of family and friends are often missing.

CASE STUDY 1

Leila arrived in Australia from a refugee camp in Guinea in 2005 with her four children, aged 2 to 13. Her husband was killed in the war in Liberia and she was separated from her family. Leila is keen to learn English but is unable to attend classes because of difficulties finding suitable childcare places for her two younger children. Her older two children attend school and she feels guilty that she cannot help them more with their schoolwork because of her limited English. Leila finds it difficult to get out with her children as she doesn't understand the public transport system. She knows few people in Australia; she feels isolated and misses her family deeply. Increasingly, she feels depressed and finds it harder to cope with the children. She is afraid of becoming sick, and having no-one to take care of her children. She wants to find information about parenting support but does not know who or how to ask.

SOURCE: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

Leila's story highlights how one issue can impact on another to create further hardship. The inability to access suitable child care has a ripple effect and makes it difficult to attend language classes, use public transport and access various community services. Leila's sense of isolation and depression affects her health and well-being. Issues raised by parents or service providers are often complex and require an appreciation of the many influences on family life. Such an understanding will help to guide appropriate responses by services, so that they address underlying causes, rather than provide simple answers, and short-term solutions.

3.1 Family structure and roles

In many African countries, the family unit includes extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Raising children is a collective responsibility and the extended family and general community traditionally play a strong role in childrearing, child care, guidance and discipline.

Families tend to have larger numbers of children, and as children grow they are expected to contribute to the family. A child might also be raised by another family member such as an aunt, uncle or grandmother.

Many African families and communities have been separated by war and dislocation. This has resulted in many single-parent families, and children separated from their biological

parents being raised by others. Many families living in Australia include relatives or other individuals who would not traditionally have lived together. In a number of African countries, husbands may have more than one wife, which affects the role and status of the women and children in that family.

Gender roles

Traditional gender roles and strong patriarchal family structures are fairly common in many newly arrived African families. Men are accustomed to being the primary breadwinners and feel responsible for, and make decisions on behalf of, the whole family. Women generally play a stronger domestic role and are the primary carers for infants and young children. Their tasks include the preparation and cooking of food, and serving and feeding the family, as well as responsibility for the health care, nurturing and development of the children.

In African countries, it is generally expected that boys are educated to prepare them for their role as primary income earners for their families. Girls often miss out on education as they are prepared to care for the home and family as wives and mothers. Consequently, the rate of literacy is usually much lower in women than in men. It is customary, particularly in rural areas, for women to marry and have children at a very young age.

In Australia, men from African backgrounds can feel a loss of status and control in the resettlement process. They often find it difficult to gain employment so their role of the main family provider is diminished. Women, on the other hand, may gain status as they can receive entitlements, such as Centrelink payments, for themselves and their children. Women also have more opportunities to access education, vocational training and employment compared to their home country.

Prior to the family coming to Australia, the man was the source of income and the wife was depending on the income of her husband. The husband had the authority. When the family comes to Australia, the husband and wife (are) almost the same. The authority of husband gets lost. This creates misunderstandings and complexities. The problem of husband and wife reflects on the children.

ERITREAN FATHER

Parent–child relationship

Obedience and respect by children towards adults is a strong characteristic of African cultures. Children are expected to contribute to the well-being of the family, particularly elders and younger siblings. Parents may not be accustomed to playing with or entertaining their children. In Africa, larger families often rely on siblings or extended family members to perform this role. Less time may be given to individual interactions, and children can be discouraged from asking too many questions or interrupting adult conversations. Affection and affirmation might be shown in different ways. Children tend to learn more by experience and observation.

Families may feel the clash between their own cultural values and those they encounter in Australia. An example of this is the amount of freedom children are allowed compared to the demand for obedience and control in their culture.

One thing I don't like the Australian way of bringing up a child is they give everything their kids want and they spoil them. They let the children run their life; that means the kids don't listen to their parents...

ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

As a result of their war and refugee experiences, parents may have missed out on strong formative influences of family and community in their own childhood development. Without the experience of forming strong attachments, young parents may lack confidence in their own ability as parents. The lack of support for new mothers can cause intergenerational breakdown of parenting and childrearing skills.

Isolation and the loss of family support

The isolation felt by many parents as they adjust to their role as parents of young children is even more difficult for African parents trying to adjust to Australian culture. Accustomed to close-knit communal and extended family settings, where there was always someone to attend to or watch a child, they may feel the burden of assuming this responsibility. It is often expressed when they describe the difficulty of 'parenting alone'.

Isolation can also be caused by the feeling of not belonging. The pressures of settlement, learning a new language and adapting to a new culture and way of life can be stressful and deter parents from seeking assistance.

African parents have to adjust to a very different environment from that of their childhood, without the support offered in those traditional cultural settings. The natural tendency to turn to family and friends for help makes it extremely difficult when parents are separated from extended family or are located in distant suburbs.

This pressure is particularly felt by many single-parent African families, mostly headed by women. Women must assume new roles and responsibilities as they face the burden of caring for their children alone. They may also be caring for children of family members who were killed or separated due to war or may be raising children conceived through rape.

Women may have limited access to social support, and may rely on their older children to mind the young siblings while they undertake shopping or other tasks. This can place an undue burden of responsibility upon these older siblings and lead to situations of danger and neglect for all the children.

Parents, particularly mothers, may look to early childhood services to share parenting decisions and responsibilities. If children form attachments to staff in these settings, the staff members effectively become part of the family system for a while. This can greatly improve settlement processes for children and parents. It is also a good opportunity to discuss issues of discipline and behaviour.

Supporting African families

Children do better when they grow up in strong and resilient families. Early childhood services can support families by fostering opportunities to strengthen attachment among parents and children. Establishing rapport and trust with parents will encourage them to be

Children are more secure when they are in an environment they identify with. Once the environment changes they feel insecure, lonely, feel different and have no language of communication.

SOUTH SUDANESE GRANDMOTHER

involved in their child's experience of child care, kindergarten, playgroup or health consultation. An understanding and flexible approach to the different experiences and expectations of African families will reassure parents and help them guide staff in caring for their child.

A collaborative effort between staff and parents will enable the child's needs to be addressed more effectively. When the adults involved in their care work together, the relationships surrounding children are more likely to be positive, and supportive.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

- Be open to different notions of 'family.' Check each family's situation. A family may include grandparents, other relatives and friends. Children might not be living with the biological mother or father.
- Get to know each child's family. Encourage significant carers of the child to be involved in programs.
- Ensure that enrolment forms and procedures enable extended family members to be involved and listed as a contact person for the child.
- Help children and families to meet and socialise with other families.
- Spend time with families by sharing activities with them, to build a sense of companionship, e.g. watching the children play or women sew.
- Acknowledge and respect the diversity of families.
- Encourage extended family members to participate and be involved in activities with their children.
- Collaborate with other agencies who are involved with the family to ensure effective support.

African families may be very unfamiliar with the environment and procedures of early childhood services. For some parents, the idea of allowing people outside the family to look after their child can be very strange and daunting.

STRATEGIES TO CREATE A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Allow adequate time to explain how the service operates and reassure families of the professional skills and qualifications of staff.
- Explain the benefits of the service, how it can assist the child's health, development and learning and provide opportunities to socialise with other children.
- Encourage family members to stay for their child's first visit and gradually spend less time in subsequent sessions.
- Dedicate a space for parents to sit and chat with staff or other parents to foster a sense of belonging.
- Continue to hold and carry babies who are accustomed to being carried with their parents, perhaps in a sling.
- Become familiar with the childrearing practices, toileting and feeding routines of African children.
- Allow flexibility with timetables and schedules and help parents to understand why they are important.
- Display information in community languages (see Section 6.2) and include pictures, artwork and books that celebrate African cultures.

Continued over page

STRATEGIES TO CREATE A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT *Continued*

- Ask families to assist the service to use African songs, music and dance in programs. Learn words of welcome in the first languages of families.
- Assess the environment and resources used in programs regularly and be aware of the messages they convey to families.

Families may be afraid of questioning or complaining about certain practices, in case it negatively influences the care provided by, or their relationship with, the agency. Some families may believe that it is not appropriate to complain or advocate for themselves or question authority figures. As parents grow more comfortable in the service, they will increasingly see staff as resources to help them as parents rather than authority figures.

If staff show an interest in the childrearing practices of African families and discuss different cultural beliefs and practices in an open and respectful way, parents will feel comfortable to ask about other childrearing issues. This will help families to acknowledge cultural differences between home and childcare settings. Such differences can make children confused by inconsistent messages and expectations.

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

- Ensure that parents are comfortable talking to staff about their child. Be proactive – ask parents regularly if they would like to discuss anything.
- Ask about practical things such as diet, play activities, social interaction with other children or sleeping routines, which may allow other issues to be raised.
- Assign a staff member to each family – families may feel overwhelmed by many different staff and their different roles.
- Help parents understand procedures for seeking help when their child is sick or feels uncomfortable in any situation.
- Talk to parents about how they would like to participate and how they view their role.
- Encourage families to ask for support and information, particularly with the issues they find difficult, e.g. alternatives to physical discipline
- Encourage parents to share their cultural practices with staff.

The social reality in Australia is such that you can't just plant the African model in. You must find a good middle ground.

SOUTH SUDANESE FATHER

If staff and parents reflect on the influence of their own cultural values and assumptions, then parents should feel more comfortable to talk about cultural differences with their children.

By affirming that cultural heritage is to be respected and shared, services can model a way for families coping with, and responding positively to, cultural differences.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- Provide opportunities to learn the views of different cultures about childrearing practices.
- Identify what is important and valued by parents in their own and other cultures.
- Identify issues that parents find difficult to understand.
- Identify the common ground between cultures in childrearing and family life.
- Help parents to recognise their strengths and use these to address problems in a way that promotes family harmony.
- Encourage parents to talk about cultural diversity with their children.
- Help children to feel special about their African culture but also share things in common with other children in Australia.
- Share ideas and information on formal and informal support networks.

3.2 Involvement of the community

Traditionally among African families, there is a strong communal approach to raising children. The extended family and community are heavily involved. Because children are seen to belong to the community, community members will look out for them.

This knowledge provides a sense of security for families. Many African parents try to bring up their children with an emphasis on the child growing as part of the community and able to contribute to and be an effective member of that community.

In many countries, communal orientations are reflected in how families organise themselves. Many daily activities, including food production and preparation, shopping or collecting supplies, are done together. Young children accompany mothers and other family members as they perform their daily domestic tasks. Special occasions such as the birth of a child are celebrated by the whole community. For example, a number of cultures ensure that a mother rests for 40 days after birth while she and her child are cared for by other women of the community.

Back home when the children do wrong, anyone who is at home or even anyone who is passing near by would talk to the child or shout or yell. But here in Australia only the parent can talk to the child.

SOMALI MOTHER

In the communal setting, children have access to a range of people who interact and guide them, including grandparents, neighbours and older siblings. Within this environment there is often freedom and space for the child to explore different situations. Children may have less access to toys or books yet find activity and stimulation among the people and resources of their natural environment.

Building upon the strong communal orientation of many African families is an important way to engage with families. Relationships with local African communities will foster networks of support, guidance, liaison and information. These connections are a valuable way of understanding community concerns about parenting and early childhood issues. They can guide service providers in culturally appropriate ways of responding to issues. When community leaders understand how early childhood services operate, they will encourage families to feel more comfortable using these services.

Community networks can help to develop culturally sensitive programs that meet the needs of the people involved. They also provide inroads to the community to improve transition and exposure to early childcare, health and education services. Examples of these programs can be found on the Australian Government's Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) website under the *Stronger Families and Communities* website (see Section 6.1).

STRATEGIES TO INCLUDE COMMUNITIES

- Liaise with existing support networks that already have established trust and recognition in the communities, e.g. neighbourhood organisations, cultural organisations, parents' groups and playgroups.
- Invite elders and leaders to be involved in the service and service development.
- Show an openness to adapt the service to meet the particular needs of families.
- Organise social gatherings with the community.
- Invite a community leader to explain to families their rights and responsibilities in the service.
- Employ workers from the communities to facilitate liaison, cultural awareness and communication.
- Link parents with one another and encourage them to support each other and discuss mutual concerns. This is a natural and very effective way to help re-establish social and cultural support that many lost when they came to Australia.

3.3 Understanding childhood trauma

It is important that early childhood services and practitioners understand refugee-related trauma and torture. Such trauma can significantly affect the health and development of children and parent-child relationships. The well-being of young children is closely related to

It has had a significant impact on raising my children... I realised that from refugee experience that suffering is not a pleasant thing. So I work towards making sure my children are safe and secured happy. I do everything at my capacity to prevent my children from experiencing what I have gone through.

ETHIOPIAN FATHER

that of their parents or prime carers. Yet parents can find it difficult to deal with their children's experience of trauma and resettlement, especially if they are suffering trauma of their own.

People who have experienced war and dislocation will be affected physically and psychologically. Refugee trauma affects the family in many ways and through generations. It affects

the ability to communicate and trust. It can affect relationships with other family members and connections with the community and wider society.

In Australia, many African parents continue to mourn the death of family members, or worry about family members left behind. Sad and troubled parents may find it hard to be emotionally available to their children. Parents who have experienced violence themselves may take out their anger on their children if the children are unsettled or misbehaving.

Symptoms of trauma include depression, isolation, shame, distrust, sleeplessness and anxiety. When people become parents it sometimes renews feelings of loss – loss of extended

family, respect, self-esteem, even the confidence that they can be a good parent. Many people from refugee backgrounds were deprived of their own childhood and so cannot draw on personal experiences of a secure home or children's play.

Parents suffering from trauma often think young children are resilient and will not be affected. This is not true. Even if children have been born in Australia and are not directly affected by war, they can still suffer from family members' trauma. There is much evidence of the impact of intergenerational trauma and the effects of trauma experienced by adults upon the children.

The impact of trauma on children

Children who experience adverse circumstances are more vulnerable to developing physical and psychosocial difficulties. Trauma affects attachment within the family and can seriously impact on young children.

The following symptoms and signs, *when persistent*, can be indicators of trauma:

- withdrawal, lack of interest, lethargy
- aggression, anger and poor temper control
- tension and irritability
- poor concentration
- physical symptoms such as poor appetite
- regression, e.g. return to bed wetting
- nightmares and disturbed sleep
- nervousness, fearfulness
- poor relationship with other children and adults
- distrust of other adults
- clinging to parents
- hyperactivity and hyper alertness.

Approaches to trauma

Early childhood services and programs can play an important role in supporting recovery and integration for children and their families who have been affected by trauma.

Service providers who observe behaviour and responses in children that may be symptomatic of trauma should look at ways of promoting restorative and protective factors.

...the most important factor contributing to a child's resilience is the opportunity for expression, attachment and trust that comes from a stable, caring and nurturing relationship with adults.

UNITED NATIONS REPORT:
IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

Services can help to build trust and a sense of security with the child and their family by being available and consistent, attending to presenting issues (e.g. finance, housing, language classes, child care), and being mindful of refugee issues (e.g. bereavement, trauma, isolation).

Family cohesiveness is a crucial protective factor particularly in difficult times. Therefore, it is important to involve the family as much as possible.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN FAMILY RESILIENCE

WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN:

- Create safe and predictable settings and routines.
- Encourage exploration, mobility and verbal and social interactions.
- Allow time for the child to adjust to a new situation.
- Encourage attachments with parents, carers and other significant people including childcare workers.
- Foster security through consistent approaches between staff and parents in such routines as sleeping, feeding, carrying and nappy changing.
- Comfort and soothe children when they are upset.
- Encourage children to express what they are thinking and feeling through talking, drawings and play.
- Avoid over-reacting to difficult behaviour and try to understand its causes.
- Encourage play, laughter and fun activities with other children.
- Provide a quiet, cosy space that enables a child to move away from the group to observe and rest.
- Reassure children about the immediate future, especially the small details of their lives that are so important to their world.
- Provide opportunities for the child to develop skills, share responsibility and feel a sense of accomplishment.
- Focus on safety, attachment, predictability and warmth rather than developmental progress and achievement.

WHEN WORKING WITH PARENTS:

- Provide bilingual or interpreting staff whenever necessary to enable easier communication.
- Ask parents about the type of environment they think is comfortable for their child and how their child's needs can be met, and adapt programs accordingly.
- Involve parents by encouraging opportunities for the parent and child to interact and share experiences.
- Convey understanding and be flexible with parents; encourage them to regularly access the service.
- Provide the space for parents to feel comfortable to stay and be involved in programs and activities.
- Link the family with other families who can provide company and support.
- Follow up if the parent does not attend the program or appointment.
- Make a confirmation call prior to the appointment date.
- Provide information about specialists, and encourage parents to seek help if the need is identified, and facilitate the referral.
- Ensure important cultural practices are provided for.
- Provide regular spaces and activities that enable families to come together, thereby fostering support networks and building community capacity.

Referral

Early childhood services can provide information and assist families with referral to services that provide counselling and support, including specialist services for people from African backgrounds and those who have experienced trauma and torture. Counselling and therapeutic interventions can be provided for children, adults, families or groups. Many families may be hesitant to attend counselling for a number of reasons. They may be preoccupied with the immediate challenges of resettlement. Families may fear that talking about past events will make them relive bad memories and feelings. They may be unfamiliar with counselling and have no tradition of seeking help outside the family. There may be a fear of the stigma associated with mental illness still prevalent in many countries. There may be concerns about privacy and confidentiality. It is important that the parents fully understand the concept of counselling when they give their consent.

If a service proceeds with a referral, it is important that they keep the parents informed about the referral process including possible waiting periods, transport options and appointment procedures. Ideally, services will continue to be available to parents should additional support be required.

3.4 Language and communication

Many African refugees are bilingual and speak a local language as well as the main language of their home country. They may also have learnt new languages whilst in a country of asylum. Many entrants have to learn English upon arrival in Australia. The Australian Government provides basic English language tuition through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and the English language schools for students. This is part of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, which offers intensive settlement support to newly arrived humanitarian entrants. However, not all entrants are able to attend the English language classes because of other demands of settlement such as seeking employment, or finding housing or child care. Language and communication barriers can be formidable when trying to access services and support in Australia.

*How many times do I need help but fail
because of lack of language of communication?
SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER*

Table 3.1 shows the major languages spoken in the countries of origin of African entrants to Australia. Individuals may speak two or more of the languages indicated.

Child care linked to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is a prime opportunity to address settlement issues for young children and their parents. Through AMEP, refugees and migrants are provided with reading, writing, speaking and listening skills to a functional English level to assist them with resettlement in Australia (see Section 5.2). The routine of attending AMEP and accessing the associated childcare service daily will encourage parents to communicate their early settlement experiences with staff.

Many factors affect the ability to learn a language, including a migrant's literacy in their first language and pre-arrival education levels. Many families of African backgrounds have limited or disrupted education, which is linked to low levels of literacy and numeracy. Australian Government data shows that people arriving under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program from African countries have completed less schooling than those arriving from Asia and Europe.

TABLE 3.1 Main languages spoken by African communities in Australia

Language	HORN OF AFRICA				CENTRAL AFRICA			WEST AFRICA	
	Eritrea	Ethiopia	Somalia	Sudan	Burundi	DR Congo	Rwanda	Liberia	Sierra Leone
Arabic	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Amharic		✓							
Dinka				✓					
Nuer				✓					
Bari				✓					
Shilluk				✓					
Somali			✓						
Tigrinya	✓	✓							
Tigre	✓								
Oromo		✓							
English								✓	✓
French					✓	✓	✓		
Kinjarwanda							✓		
Kirundi					✓				
Kiswahili					✓	✓	✓		
Krio									✓
Liberian English								✓	
Lingala						✓			
Mende								✓	✓

SOURCES: AMEP Research Centre Fact Sheets/Community Profiles at www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/factsheets.html and VITS LanguageLink 2003, 2004 – Victorian Interpreting and Translating Services at www.vits.com.au/publications/languages.pdf

Language barriers impact on education, employment, the ability to access services, participation in all kinds of activities – seeking information, making appointments, even talking with neighbours. The smaller emerging African communities, in particular, find it difficult because their languages are not widely spoken and so they have limited access to interpreters and translated information.

The capacity for learning language and skills within the family is restricted by language barriers and low literacy levels. Parents may not be able to read even in their own language, which means they can't access a range of information and resources including information translated into their own language.

The differences in English language proficiency within a family can affect communication among family members. Children generally have a higher capacity to acquire and adopt a new language than their parents. Parents may depend on older children to obtain information or communicate with others. Services might rely on older siblings to communicate messages to the parents. This can undermine parents' authority within the family and create an undue burden of responsibility for children.

Differences in verbal and non-verbal communication styles can create problems. For example, in many African cultures it is disrespectful to make eye contact with parents, elders or other people of authority, whereas in other cultures it indicates respect and attentiveness. There are also differences in customs of greeting, shaking hands, deference to elders, parents or people of authority and communication between men and women.

Many African cultures have a strong oral tradition of communication. In Australia, a lot of communication between service providers and clients is written, for example, health information, kindergarten newsletters and notes. If parents can't read, they not only miss out on this information, they can also feel embarrassed and disempowered. It takes time and energy to seek information. Language limitations also influence a parent's involvement in their child's kindergarten, child care or health appointments. They may feel reluctant to become involved in a program, or adopt a passive position as they feel peripheral and allow health and education to become the responsibility of service providers.

Effective communication is vital to engage with families and strengthen the links between children's services and the home environment. It allows parents to fulfil their role as advocates for the best interests of their children and to actively participate in the children's learning and development. If families can't communicate effectively with services, it may lead to misunderstandings or inappropriate care.

The biggest problem I've got at the moment is my limited knowledge of the English language. I find it hard to communicate at my daughter's day care. I want to ask what she had for lunch or drunk because I have to know, knowing that she is a fussy eater as a mother I worry that maybe they didn't feed her or if she said no they leave her.

ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

Agencies should identify how to communicate with families in the families' preferred languages. Services can use interpreters or bi-cultural workers to facilitate communication.

STRATEGIES TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT LANGUAGE NEEDS

- Become familiar with the agencies that provide language services in the relevant languages.
- Use interpreters or bi-cultural staff, particularly at important times of enrolment and orientation.
- Be aware of the potential for parents to misunderstand information because of language barriers.
- Ensure that staff and families are informed of the principles of confidentiality.
- Encourage families to maintain their first language as well as learning English.
- Encourage staff members to know at least several basic phrases, e.g. hello, good-bye, thank you, in the language of families attending their service.
- Speak clearly and repeat information to families who are not fluent in English.
- Provide information, written or verbal, in relevant languages. Check the relevant languages with parents.
- Use pictorial cues and photographs depicting childcare routines.
- Do not assume families from the same country share a language.
- Link families with other service users who can share and explain information.
- Become familiar with the many websites that provide translated information and advice in relevant community languages.
- Be aware that low literacy levels may mean that some parents won't be able to access written material in any language.
- Develop audio information for parents.
- Share information verbally with parents who are unfamiliar with written formats.

Continued over page

STRATEGIES TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT LANGUAGE NEEDS *Continued*

- Avoid jargon words or colloquial expressions.
- Build staff awareness of different communication styles among families.
- Share and explain to parents about common communication styles and terms of respect in Australia.
- Don't assume disrespect from certain forms of behaviour; rather, attempt to understand its meaning.

Interpreters

If the program utilises the services of professional interpreters, help staff think about how they will establish a relationship and rapport with families.

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS

- If parents come from small communities, be aware that the interpreter may be known by the family, which may have implications for confidentiality and service provision.
- Discourage the use of children or other untrained people as interpreters.
- Determine whether the parent prefers a male or female interpreter.
- Endeavour to book the same interpreter for future sessions to promote continuity, rapport and trust.
- Arrange seating that enables direct communication between the practitioner and the family.
- Speak directly to families, not to the interpreter.
- Explain the role of the interpreter to the family.
- Be aware of body language, what it communicates, and how it can differ between cultures.
- Speak slowly and clearly and allow time for interpreting.
- Always check that the family has understood what you have said.

Further information about interpreter services is included in Section 5.3.

3.5 Accessing services and information

Familiarity with services

Families from African countries are often unaccustomed to seeking assistance from health and social services, particularly in early childhood health and development. Their home countries may have lacked these services or they may have been too expensive to access.

Families are not used to seeking care outside the home, particularly from strangers. They may also see it as shameful. Many parents are therefore unfamiliar with the concept of early

childhood services, early intervention or health promotion and how these can benefit families. Families can also be unfamiliar with the idea of government having a role in family intervention, such as immunisation requirements or child protection laws.

Such limited health access prior to their arrival in Australia means that many African families only associate health interventions with severe injury or illness and not preventative care. They may not be as alert to signs indicating the need for interventions. Therefore, it may be difficult for parents to know how to seek help or who to turn to outside the family. This can prevent them from accessing relevant services in Australia.

The ability to absorb information, ideas and awareness of services also depends on factors such as how long people have been in Australia and the priorities associated with different settlement stages. It also depends on the situation of families, for example the age

Some people feel lost here; lost sense of what they can do here. They try to avoid getting into trouble rather than finding and embracing positive aspects of Australian culture.

ERITREAN GRANDMOTHER

of children or particular health needs, and how much family support is available to parents. They may not know how services operate, e.g. enrolment, waiting lists, attendance, payments and expectations about involvement of parents.

Many families don't have a trusted advocate to assist them with information and guide them through services available in Australia. Unfamiliarity with the system of services, their rights and the range of social entitlements can hinder access. The range of portfolios and responsibilities of federal, state and local governments, public and private systems, the range of agencies and types of care can create confusion and anxiety.

The issue of choice between different services and programs may be difficult to comprehend for families who have previously had little choice in these areas.

Parents are often prevented from utilising services such as child care and kindergartens by the associated fees. They may also be unaware of the range of entitlements and financial support they can access to help pay for services.

Families can often only find affordable housing in areas where shops and services are beyond walking distance. This requires parents to travel some distance to access services and places extra pressure on families in terms of time and cost, especially when families rely on public transport, which can be very difficult with young children.

Agencies need to be aware of, and address, the factors that create barriers to accessing services, especially for single-parent families.

Services may need to adopt more flexible procedures to improve access. Agencies must be open to change and new approaches so that they can meet the needs of families rather than expect families and children to change to fit into the service. This can mean identifying and removing administrative barriers so that families feel welcome to participate. Information and resources need to resonate with families' own experiences and the particular issues they are facing with their children.

Parents need to be provided with information about the available services. That will close the gap created by the absence of the extended family. My task would be easier if childcare, kindergarten and health centres are accessible because failing to use these services makes life difficult and unmanageable.

SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS, ORIENTATION AND ADVOCACY FOR FAMILIES

- Don't assume prior knowledge of services, terminology or concepts, e.g. child care, early childhood services, child development.
- Explain concepts carefully – give practical examples and show what is done.
- Link concepts such as child care to traditional understandings of child care.
- Provide clear and accessible information in relevant languages about family and child service programs.
- Take time to gain views from the perspective of the family.
- Help families to establish contacts with and access to other services. Accompany them if possible.
- Work with other agencies to establish collaboration and networks of support.
- Provide continuing opportunities to access information when families need it.
- Ensure that staff are available to enable ongoing liaison with parents and children.
- Advocate on behalf of families to enable access to a wider range of information and possible support.
- Provide information about entitlements or financial support and benefits to help them access the service.
- Ensure that parents feel able to talk to staff about difficulties and barriers.
- Help parents to complete forms or applications.
- Offer outreach or home-visiting services that help to connect with families.
- Provide information about transport to your service.

3.6 Home visiting

Families with minimal social support and limited access to public transport will find it difficult to attend services such as maternal and child health, post-natal check-ups and medical appointments. This can deprive parents and infants of timely support and information, and contribute to isolation and depression. Home visiting is an effective way of overcoming these difficulties.

When home visiting, practitioners may encounter unfamiliar cultural practices around hospitality. They may be invited to share food and drink with the hosts or be expected to remove shoes before entering the house. Although it is important that practitioners be sensitive to the family's practices, they must make choices based on how comfortable they feel in a particular situation. Even if they do not partake of certain practices, empathy and respect can be conveyed in other ways. For example, if it is considered rude not to accept hospitality, perhaps accept a glass of water. It is helpful to discuss with colleagues how to approach these dilemmas in a positive and respectful manner.

3.7 Food and nutrition

In Australia we are increasingly aware of the need to establish healthy eating habits and good nutrition for children. Understanding the reasons behind particular attitudes towards food and eating behaviour will help services to educate families and model healthy practices around food and nutrition.

As part of the refugee experience, many families from African backgrounds have been deprived of food and nutrition. They may have had to survive on one meal a day or be dependent on food rations for prolonged periods. Their diet may not have been balanced or nutritious (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). This meant that when food was available, people would tend to overeat or hoard food.

It was torture for me to listen to my children cry at night because they were hungry.

SIERRA LEONEAN MOTHER

It is important that services approach issues around food and nutrition sensitively. For families who have experienced food insecurity, the ready supply of food in Australia can lead to patterns of excess and overeating and subsequent problems of obesity, diabetes and oral degeneration. The eating habits that helped them survive as refugees may be difficult to change. They may have limited awareness of nutrition and need to learn about diet, nutrition and healthy eating routines. This can take time.

Services should also respect the cultural and religious approaches around food preparation and eating.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING

- Discuss issues of food, nutrition and eating habits with parents.
- Show sensitivity and adaptability to practices families might have, e.g. particular religious or cultural requirements about how food is prepared.
- Be aware that parents may find it difficult to limit their child's food intake because they had been unable to provide them with sufficient food during their time of displacement.
- Prior to meals, assure children that there will be adequate food to be shared.
- Ensure that food is appropriate to the needs and tastes of children including vegetarian requirements.
- Where possible, incorporate familiar dishes from African countries in meals provided by your service.
- Use meal times to discuss and learn about different traditions and styles of food and eating, including eating with hands, sharing plates of food, or not finishing what is on the plate.
- Through modelling and education, help to teach children and families about nutrition, food pyramids, sources of energy and the value of exercise.

3.8 Child development: The parent's perspective

Raising children in a different culture means parents may lose confidence in their own abilities to guide their children's development.

Parents of different cultural backgrounds can be unfamiliar with the terminology and concepts of the various stages of child development commonly used in Australia. 'Child care', 'child development' and 'parenting' are just some of the terms that might be used without questioning whether they are understood or not. Among many families there is little understanding of early learning and how this can be influenced positively by parents. Parents often assume that learning only occurs at school. They may be unfamiliar with proactive ways of supporting a child's development. They may not be familiar with play materials, books, toys and educational materials used in Australia to facilitate child development.

Parents trying to lay the best foundation for their children can be frustrated by the lack of culturally relevant parenting resources. Few resources provide information and guidance which draws from different cultural traditions and helps parents to integrate what they value in their own culture, with approaches and practices from other cultures.

If parents are struggling with the challenges of resettlement, they can find it difficult to be attentive to their child. Sometimes this can result in less parental intervention and supervision. Communication, guidance and problem solving may become increasingly difficult.

My roles and responsibility has changed because the children become more independent and ask more questions. Every question contains 'why'!

SOMALI FATHER

African parents can feel confused if they have different expectations of raising their child from those they encounter at an Australian childcare centre or parenting group.

Early childhood services are an important source of information for families about the difficulties they are experiencing with raising their children in Australia. Services can also respond by adapting their practices to accommodate the concerns of African families. For example, childcare centres might allow siblings of different ages to play and have their afternoon sleep together in the same room.

Providing information and promoting a shared understanding of childrearing will support parents to negotiate the path through cultural differences and affirm them in this role.

It is important to maximise African parents' access and participation in child care and other early childhood services so that their children have opportunities to develop pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills which help to prepare them for school.

I need my children to spend more time with other communities. This helps my child to integrate with different children to 'break the ice' and then when he or she start school not to be scared or shy.

ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

It is vital to adopt strategies that work across cultures and help parents understand that early childhood is a crucial time of rapid development of cognitive skills, gross and fine motor skills, listening and language skills, social skills and the ability to form attachments.

It is particularly important to support the language and literacy development of children from those families who have had limited access to education. When parents know more about the stages of child development they will be able to:

- support and encourage their child in ways that are culturally familiar
- understand why a child might behave in a certain way
- recognise difficulties their child might be experiencing
- seek help and intervention to prevent longer term difficulties
- feel confident to advocate for the particular needs and interests of their child.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Create a secure environment in which children feel safe to explore, and interact with others.
- Emphasise the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication through activities that illustrate the different forms and styles of communication.
- Model ways of helping children to learn through observing, playing, explaining and demonstrating how to do things.
- Assist parents to combat the power of advertising and consumer pressure on their children who may agitate for toys, junk food and other items.
- Involve parents in activities with children that help them to feel nurtured and encouraged.
- Promote the importance of affirmation and enjoyment when a child attempts new activities.
- Get to know family routines and practices in order to support continuity between home and childcare settings.
- Converse with families to understand their philosophy about how their child learns.
- Organise activities that help children to focus and concentrate on specific tasks.
- Encourage the exchange of ideas and help build shared understandings of children's development.
- Arrange enjoyable activities that promote positive exchanges between parents and children and stimulate the child's development.
- Model ways to understand and respond to children's short attention spans.
- Encourage parents to use stories, songs and art from their cultural background to help children develop their communication skills.
- Encourage parents to adapt learning techniques from their own country to the Australian context and share this with others.
- Give parents opportunities to share their observations about their children with staff and other parents.
- In close partnership with parents, ensure children are provided with extra support and resources if required, such as those available through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program and the Inclusion Support Subsidy (see Section 5.2).

3.9 Play

Many families of African background are unfamiliar with toys and play as a means of education and supporting children's development. Parents may not understand that, in Australia, play and toys are used as a tool for teaching and communicating with children. Service providers may not understand why many families have no toys in the home, or why parents don't encourage children to use and care for toys.

CASE STUDY 2

When the maternal and child health nurse visited 4-year-old Antony and his two younger siblings, she could see that the children had no toys. On speaking with their mother she realised that the mother was not accustomed to buying toys and had very little money. The nurse arranged for the family to join the toy library service, from which they could borrow toys on a regular basis. However, on her next visit she discovered that a number of the toys had been broken and discarded around the house. A little frustrated that the mother seemed disinterested, she discussed the toys with the mother and children. She realised that the mother had never been given toys before and did not understand what they were for or that they were regarded as valuable and needed to be looked after. The mother did not understand how a toy library worked or the concept of borrowing and returning the toys. She described how the children often played outside, building things with the branches from the tree in their garden or digging and moulding things in the soil. The mother found it hard enough to raise her children alone and did not want extra responsibilities looking after toys. The nurse saw that the toy library only added to the resettlement stresses experienced by this family. She affirmed the children's play and discussed with the mother how it helped the children to develop skills and stimulate their creativity.

SOURCE: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

Service providers can help parents to understand that a lot of learning occurs informally and how various activities and games can nurture a love of learning. They also help children develop their motor skills, as well as learn to build and construct, count, recognise letters and solve problems. Playing with toys can also help children express emotions, communicate and learn cooperation and social interaction with others.

Play can be a forum for strong therapeutic exchanges between parents, staff and children, particularly games that provide opportunities for acting out situations and modelling appropriate behaviour.

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE PLAY

- Don't assume that toys and books are readily available in the home.
- Ask parents about what their children play with at home and what they remember playing with as a child.
- Discuss with parents about how their child's play can be used to assist learning and development.

Continued over page

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE PLAY *Continued*

- Allow parents, many of whom are unfamiliar with organised play activities, the time to participate and become familiar with these activities.
- Help parents become familiar with toys and explain how these can provide educational support.
- Model and encourage parents to notice, validate and build on what their child exhibits through play.
- Use natural and readily available resources to design fun activities, e.g. sticks, material, water, bark, saucupans, plastic containers.
- Encourage parents to make choices about toys and what they feel will benefit their child.
- Help children to learn to share and look after toys and games.
- Explain about toy libraries and how they operate.
- Provide translated information about the value of play (see Section 5.3).

3.10 Conducting an assessment

Assessment of health, development, behaviour and learning requires sensitivity and a strong understanding of the history and cultural background of the child. There are different cultural beliefs about, and responses to, disability. Some cultures link disability with religious beliefs or the spirit world. Others see it as a special gift or calling of their faith. In many African countries, there are very limited services for children with disabilities, so families look after their disabled children without external assistance.

Sometimes delayed development or disability can result from the refugee experience such as lack of stimulation in a camp or the need for the child not to speak or move in situations of danger. It might also be caused by deprivation during pregnancy, malnourishment or related physical impairment, or through lack of attachment.

Children present with a wide range of different issues and needs. Hence, assumptions about their developmental delay or disability should be assessed according to criteria that reflect the language, culture and experiences of the child. Services need to be aware of how trauma and social and emotional stresses affect the mental health of young children, as well as their physical and language development. Such stresses may affect the child's movement and ability to walk, concentrate or communicate positively with other children. The child might behave in a disruptive way or continually wander in and out of the room. These factors might be viewed as delayed development in a preschool child. Such delays can be addressed over time as conditions of security, trust, stimulation and attachment are restored.

Assessment and evaluation respects the learner's socio-cultural contexts (for example, the child's first language would be used in a 'test' situation).

KEY PRINCIPLE OF COGNITIVE
DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN DEVELOPED
BY THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICES
AND HEALTH INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL,
NOVEMBER, 2005

CASE STUDY 3

Sarah was 3 and had mild cerebral palsy. She had come to Australia from Eritrea when she was only 8 months. Her dedicated parents looked after her with loving care. Sarah was very outgoing and during a visit to a children's hospital, the paediatrician suggested that it would be good for Sarah to attend a playgroup or kindergarten to help her socialise with other children and prepare her for school. The parents looked stunned and said that, with her condition, Sarah would not go to school. She was special and they were happy to look after her at home. How could a kindergarten or school look after a child like her? After many discussions about support services for Sarah, she attended kindergarten with a special needs aide. Her parents were happy to see her playing and interacting with other children. They are happy that such support is available in Australia.

SOURCE: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

In recognising the special needs of children, particularly during early resettlement, it is important to ensure that children, and their parents, do not feel stigmatised or isolated from mainstream children's programs. Parents may be resistant to having their child undergo assessment because they don't understand why it is conducted or how it may help their child. They also fear it may create stigma for their child and the family and they may be wary of authorities and medical staff.

STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSMENT

- Make sure that working with the child always involves working with their parent/s.
- Appoint a dedicated staff member to facilitate and explain the assessment process.
- Explain clearly why the child is being assessed.
- Provide information about how the assessment will be conducted.
- Ensure that the principles underlying assessment include confidentiality.
- Explain the principles underpinning early intervention.
- Inform parents about the services and support available in Australia which they can access if their child is assessed as being developmentally delayed.
- Explain about waiting lists and delays associated with some services.
- Inform parents about assessment results and discuss further steps.
- Learn about the home environment and the attitudes and involvement of family members.

Practitioners need to consider the potential impact of stigma. If a disability is confirmed, it is important to provide clear information to the parents on the nature of the disability and reassure them with information on how their child can be supported through special assistance, programs, support groups and available resources.

It is important that practitioners conduct comprehensive assessments that include:

- developmental history
- medical, health and trauma history
- personal and family history including issues associated with resettlement
- cultural context and the different cultural expectations and practices.

Conducting assessments that do not include a consideration of all these factors may lead to inaccurate conclusions in the area of learning difficulties.

Although it is important that practitioners help families access services and entitlements that will support the child's healthy growth and development, it is also important to maximise resources that will assist them integrate into mainstream programs.

3.11 Discipline: Managing children's behaviour

People of African backgrounds can have a very different understanding of discipline from what they encounter in Australia. Among African cultures, discipline is strongly associated with the authority of and respect towards parents and elders. It is often considered disrespectful for children to question parents or elders as this is perceived as also questioning their authority and the culture and traditions they protect. Children are expected to obey their parents. Disciplinary practices vary and include physical punishment, and verbal and physical commands. There is generally more acceptance of physical punishment. Many parents equate discipline with physical punishment and are accustomed to smacking the child.

While discipline is primarily the responsibility of the parents or prime carer, it can be administered by others of the community, for example neighbours, if they see a child misbehaving or endangering themselves. If parents are so angry that they might take punishment too far, elders or other members of the community are expected to intervene.

Discipline is an issue that concerns many African parents and is closely related to how expectations and the boundaries of child

behaviour change in Australia. Most concerns about discipline relate to older children and teenagers. Yet even for very young children, it can be difficult for parents to understand how to respond as their child learns new ways of talking and behaving that don't always please them. In Australia, discipline is generally understood to be part of the broader concept of child development. Children are usually encouraged to question, express their thoughts and discuss ideas. They might talk back to parents and question their decisions. Though sometimes inappropriate, this is considered part of the child's learning about behaviour, boundaries and consequences.

This is confronting for African parents who can feel uncertain and lose confidence about what behaviour they should accept from their child and when to intervene. Often parents express the sense that children have too much freedom in Australia and do not show appropriate respect to elders. They feel that their authority and values are being undermined.

Home in Africa, the whole community took responsibility for disciplining children. But in Australian culture, parents do not seem to like other people to tell their children what to do. They think this is interfering.

ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

The different approaches to disciplining children in Australia are confusing for many parents. Australian law discourages physical punishment, yet many parents do not understand the

We are always told what not to do but nobody tells us how we can do it differently.

ERITREAN FATHER

reasons. Parents want to protect their children from harmful behaviour or situations and many feel that corporal punishment is an important way to teach a child right and wrong. Some parents feel that if they can't use physical punishment, they lose their authority and the

means to teach their children important boundaries. However, other parents express relief that their children cannot be physically punished in any setting.

Parents who are unfamiliar with alternative forms of discipline and punishment may find some components difficult to understand. For example, some parents regard sending a young child to spend time alone in a room as more cruel than smacking them. These factors, accompanied by a fear of intervention by child protection authorities, can inhibit parents from applying appropriate or effective discipline.

In Australia it is more difficult to discipline children than the usual way back home. I think it will work for me when I start this style of parenting at an early age. I would like information that will help me to integrate the two disciplinary measures, both Dinka and Australian together

SOUTH SUDANESE FATHER

Services can play a strong role in helping parents to understand approaches to discipline in Australia. Consistent approaches between home and childcare settings will reinforce clear expectations and boundaries for the child. This can be done through discussion about different cultural approaches to discipline with bilingual workers, dedicated forums

or workshops, or bridge-building exercises that demonstrate how to handle children differently and model different forms of discipline.

The following key messages can help parents to understand discipline:

- Establishing effective discipline in the early years will build a strong foundation for when their children become teenagers.
- Parents should guide and set limits and consequences for their children's actions and behaviour even at an early age, explaining and helping the child to understand why these are important.
- Discipline requires a consistent approach both within the family and in other settings.
- Discipline is not just about punishment – praising the child helps to build their self-esteem and encourages good behaviour.
- Discipline techniques that humiliate and anger may lead to difficult behaviour.

STRATEGIES TO APPROACH DISCIPLINE

- Demonstrate alternative forms of discipline that can be used in any childhood setting, e.g. explanation of the problem and consequences, 'time out', withdrawal of a favourite item for a certain time.
- Help to identify early signs of building frustration and ways to redirect attention.
- Discuss examples of positive behaviour with children and invite them to suggest ways these can be encouraged.
- Discourage physical punishment. Research shows it harms children and affects their development. It also teaches children that it is acceptable to hurt others. It causes the child to respond through fear rather than understanding. Fear of punishment can cause a child to become distrustful and emotionally insecure and have low self-esteem.
- Support parents over the time it takes to change their habits and allow them to discuss any difficulties they have in adapting to different forms of discipline.

3.12 Child protection and the law

Many families from African backgrounds are very concerned about the child protection law in Australia.

In African countries children are considered to be under the protection of the family and community. If family conflict or child abuse occurs, it is the role of the extended family and communi-

ty elders to intervene and mediate. In some instances, this may result in the child being removed and cared for by other family or community members, either as a temporary or as a permanent measure. The view is that raising children is a matter for the family and the government should not interfere.

It is therefore difficult for many African families to understand why there are child protection laws and services in Australia. A fear of authorities and lack of understanding of the process makes some families reluctant to reveal family circumstances or give information about family members. This fear can mean that many parents are scared that their child will be taken away. Many parents are influenced by misinformation and hearsay.

Parents may not understand the principles underpinning the child protection system. They may not understand that child protection law is there to protect children against abuse or neglect and that this is a recognised problem throughout all Australian society and not targeted at African families.

Programmes to support parents and develop their parenting skills play a vital role in protecting children and ... preventing and responding to violence.

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S
REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN, 2006

The only thing I hear about child protection is that they take children away from their parents. I do not think I can contact someone who is going to take my child away.

SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER

Discipline in Australia is difficult because of the law. Unfortunately parents know little about the law. They see the law as an encouragement for children to misbehave and rebel against parents. We need information on the child protection law.

SOUTH SUDANESE FATHER

Many families do not understand the stages of the child protection system, which include notification, assessment and attempts to connect the family with social support to address problems. Services can assist families to understand the child protection system and overcome misperceptions through the provision of clear information that explains its purpose and how it operates.

sion of clear information that explains its purpose and how it operates.

- Child abuse occurs when parents or caregivers cause significant harm to a child's physical or emotional health and development. Parents must also protect their children from harm that is inflicted by someone else. The abuse or neglect can be a single incident, or take place over time. Neglect and abuse can cause serious and permanent physical and emotional damage to a child.
- Child protection laws are there to protect children from all backgrounds against abuse or neglect.
- The law is not intended to take children away or break up families. The Australian Government recognises the family as the best environment to raise children.
- The child protection system is there to help families who are unable to provide adequate care for their child or protect them from abuse. It will do this by assessing the family's situation. It will then connect the family with the services that will help to address any problems.
- Removing a child from a family is the last resort. It only happens in a very few serious cases of abuse or neglect. Removing the child is usually only a temporary arrangement while problems are addressed.
- Children have the right to a safe and happy life. Adults have the responsibility to protect children. By law, professionals who work with children, e.g. doctors, nurses and teachers, must report their concerns about a child who shows signs of abuse or neglect. This is called mandatory reporting.
- Parents who need support to raise their children in a safe environment have the right to receive help.
- Services can assist families to build child-safe environments and demonstrate positive forms of discipline.
- Playgroups and childcare centres can offer support to people who are feeling isolated.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that cases of children being left alone tend to be the most common reason for reports to child protection authorities. Many parents, particularly single parents, find it difficult to juggle the daily tasks and may leave young children alone or in the care of older siblings whilst shopping.

STRATEGIES TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD PROTECTION

- Convey the information sensitively so that particular groups or nationalities do not feel targeted or stigmatised.
- Provide the information in the family's preferred language.
- Ensure that the information is meaningful and is relevant to a family's circumstances.
- Ensure that the information affords opportunities for parents to discuss difficulties of raising children in Australia, and explore how these problems can be addressed.
- Ensure that the information helps services to understand the difficulties for families. It is important not to over-react to certain situations but address the causes of child abuse and neglect.
- Explain in a sensitive and non-threatening way the role of services in the mandatory reporting system.
- Give parents clear statements about what kind of behaviour raises concern in Australia.

Child neglect reflects the overwhelming burden of a parent who is solely responsible for a child without other support. Neglect is an issue of concern for child protection authorities. They need to explain the different levels of intervention and available support for the family.

CASE STUDY 4

Jemma is a single mother of four young children who arrived in Australia from Liberia in 2006. Her oldest child, Delores, is 8 and attends the local primary school. However, Jemma often keeps Delores at home to help her look after the younger children, who are all of preschool age. Sometimes Jemma leaves Delores alone with the younger children while she goes shopping for food or to pay bills. She feels very anxious about doing this but it is impossible to take the young children as well as carry the shopping. She has no one else to help her and feels increasingly depressed. Delores' school has become concerned about her regular absences. A teacher visited the home one day to find Delores alone minding her three younger siblings. The teacher felt compelled to report the situation, which created great anxiety and shame for Jemma and the children. The family were visited by a child protection worker who assessed the need for Jemma to access occasional care at a nearby childcare centre. She helped Jemma to enrol the children for a regular time that allows her to do the shopping and other tasks outside the home. Delores feels happy that she does not have the responsibility of looking after the children and is no longer missing school.

SOURCE: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

4. Whole-of-service approach

This section examines the vital role of early childhood services, particularly for families during times of transition. The protective characteristics of early childhood programs provide opportunities to strengthen families and promote resilience in children.



Service providers need to identify the stresses affecting children and families, as well as the supports, and develop appropriate interventions. If agencies can view themselves as catalysts to support the unique needs of each family and child, they will help to build a strong foundation for successful resettlement in Australia.

...due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

ARTICLE 20 UN CONVENTION
ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

External support is very essential because without it, we cannot survive in this country. We cannot make it without health services and financial support and all the services that are taking care of children.

SOUTH SUDANESE MOTHER

There are many exemplary programs around Australia that have developed initiatives to facilitate access and participation of African families. However, there are still many families in need who are not being serviced by these programs.

Many service providers are keen to engage with parents and children from African countries. This section outlines how services can adapt their programs and practices to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of families and their children. It also discusses how

services can include the wisdom and experience of people of African backgrounds to enhance their own service provision.

4.1 All staff have a role

When African families use a particular service, their experience is influenced by interactions with all the staff of the agency – reception, enrolment, practitioners, administration and kitchen. All staff have a role in providing a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. Therefore, all staff need to be aware of language and cultural sensitivities. A shared awareness among staff of the value of explaining programs and procedures will help them to interact effectively and comfortably with parents and their children. Services that actively promote programs that respect and incorporate different cultural practices will attract African families.

If families experience confusion in their interactions with staff, difficulties regarding appointments or completing forms, or feel uncomfortable when they arrive, they will be reluctant to return. Their negative experience may discourage other families in their community from accessing the service.

A whole-of-service approach requires leadership and organisational support to enable all staff to develop the skills, knowledge and practices necessary to respond effectively to families. It also means services need to develop policies that enhance access and overcome barriers that inhibit families from using the service.

4.2 Orientation: Making families feel welcome

Orientation is very important for families who are unfamiliar with early childhood services in Australia or the concept of community services. This section focuses on childcare centres and kindergartens but is also relevant to other services that work with parents and their young children. Both in the initial enrolment and over a period of time, staff can help parents and children feel welcome by explaining the routines and practices of the services and

programs. Assigning a key staff member to look after a family and advocate their needs within the agency is an effective way of developing rapport with parents and children.

Parents often do not know what to expect. Do they hand over responsibility for their child or can they be involved? Is it acceptable to question or make suggestions about the program? Can they bring in food for their child? Do they need to pick up their child right on time? The use of interpreters or bi-cultural facilitators and translated information, if required, will ensure that parents understand the information provided. It also conveys that their culture and language is important and valued. There is much for families to learn as they settle into Australian society, so information may need to be repeated or reinforced. It is crucial that services build trust with African families, who may be unaccustomed to sharing the care of their child with people who are not from their family or community. If the child feels apprehensive, so will the parent and vice versa.

Orientation helps parents and children to understand how a service operates and helps them feel comfortable within the service. Don't assume that parents know even basic details about childcare services. Provide information and explain why things are done in a certain way. Convey the information in a friendly and accessible manner, whether visually or through modelling, sharing, observing and listening.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT ORIENTATION

- Provide information about the services provided by your agency.
- Discuss what is expected of parents and children.
- Explain timetables and schedules and why they are arranged, e.g. educational learning and activities in the morning, rest in the afternoon.
- Explain why it is important to collect a child on time.
- Provide information about meals, food and nutrition.
- Provide information about clothing, including footwear requirements and why they exist.
- Plan curriculum activities that celebrate different cultures.
- Encourage parents to participate in the programs of the service.
- Explain procedures if families are experiencing difficulties.
- Provide an environment where African families can meet other families.
- Adopt a flexible approach with families and don't expect them to immediately understand and follow the formal protocols of the service.

4.3 Enrolment: Helping families feel they belong

Understanding the difficulties of enrolment is important as parents may find it difficult to complete forms due to language and terminology or provide necessary documents, e.g. immunisation or birth certificates. Information about date of birth may not be available if it was not necessary prior to arrival in Australia. This can cause confusion about the precise age of children. Previous experiences with bureaucratic procedures may even create anxiety about why enrolment information is required and how it will be used. Reassure parents about confidentiality. Explain why this information is gathered and how it can help staff to support their child.

STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE ENROLMENT

- Ensure support for parents in the enrolment process, provide assistance when necessary and show sensitivity in obtaining information.
- Provide translated enrolment forms.
- Ensure that enrolment forms reflect different understandings of family situations.
- Assign a key worker to assist parents through the enrolment processes.
- If necessary, help families gather documents or help the child receive immunisation.
- Utilise the assistance of interpreters, bilingual staff, aides and translated material to help families understand and feel comfortable in the service.

4.4 Cultural awareness: Promoting understanding

The most difficult thing here is if something is right or good in my culture but is not good or right in Australian culture. How can I teach my child like eye contact when we talk to someone when this is disrespectful in my culture?

ERITREAN MOTHER

Strategies that recognise African families' cultural practices will improve their access and participation. There are a number of ways a whole-of-service approach can be adapted to be more culturally responsive to African families.

STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP CULTURAL AWARENESS

- Plan and develop programs and activities that incorporate aspects of African cultures, food, religion, songs.
- Emphasise the individual and unique needs of each child and family. This will avoid stereotyping or assuming a list of cultural characteristics.
- Encourage staff to engage and learn from each individual family.
- Acknowledge the great differences between families in their practices, beliefs, attitudes and degree of acculturation, even though they may share the same cultural background.
- Understand that if children have had vastly different experiences to what is practiced in Australia, they may be unfamiliar with such things as routines, forms of play, toys and hygiene practices.
- Ensure open communication around differences in beliefs and practices. It is important to acknowledge and address differences. Be open and flexible towards different expectations and look at ways of adapting programs to incorporate new cultural influences.
- Explain carefully why rules and policies are introduced and implemented.
- Encourage and assist parents to find information and provide opportunities for them to discuss aspects of parenting, child health and development.
- Examine agency assumptions about cultural difference, how practitioners manage their responses to challenging situations and presentations and whether reactions or interventions may be inappropriate or cause further harm or risk.

CASE STUDY 5

Joseph is from Sierra Leone and has a 4-year-old son Thomas. When Joseph dropped Thomas at his kindergarten, he was given information about SunSmart policies which included the need to wear a hat when outside. He did not understand this policy as their skin was dark and they had spent a lot of time in the sun before they came to Australia. Each day he forgot to bring a hat for Thomas and the childcare workers reminded him about this. Finally the childcare worker stated that Thomas could not go out to play with the other children if he did not wear a hat.

The next day, Joseph was racing to get to child care and then work and forgot to bring a hat. He worried that his son would be punished and felt ashamed that he could not play. Another childcare worker asked him if it was difficult for him to buy a hat. He replied that it was difficult to find the time in between working and looking for suitable housing for him and his family, without a car. The worker smiled and said that there were plenty of old hats in a box at the centre that Thomas could wear. Joseph felt relieved and happy that his son could play outside with the other children.

SOURCE: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

4.5 Recruitment and training of staff

Staff members need support to provide high quality, culturally responsive services to children and families. The ability to observe, listen actively and respond flexibly to families can be challenging in the context of busy programs and competing demands. When staff are not familiar with, or do not understand, a family's culture, those challenges can become even more intense and frustrating. Although professional boundaries are essential, it is important that they don't contribute to approaches that seem distant, dismissive or condescending. Being truly respectful of differences will enable cultural sensitivity and competence, and contribute to stronger relationships between staff and parents. This is a vital factor in the healthy social and emotional development of young children.

Recruitment

Recruiting practitioners who are skilled in culturally responsive practices will strengthen the capacity of services to plan and implement programs that are inclusive of African families. Recruiting staff who reflect the diversity of the community is a key strategy. Recruitment strategies that target cultural or linguistic groups and offer training will strengthen the cultural diversity and competency of staff. Bilingual workers who speak community languages provide invaluable support that will help to settle the child in the service. They can help staff communicate with the child and their family, provide information on the child's cultural background, and help to orientate the child and their family. They form an invaluable cultural bridge for children and their parents to feel comfortable and secure in a new environment.

I would like to see or to have someone from my community helping me around when I need them as I understand them or trust them to look after my children.

ERITREAN MOTHER

Training and professional development

Training and professional development will help to build staff knowledge, skills and cultural competencies and the capacity to use creative approaches to meeting the particular needs of families. It will help early childhood practitioners to approach cultural differences from a perspective of openness, learning and acceptance.

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- Include cultural competency requirements in staff job descriptions and discuss the importance of cultural awareness and understanding with potential employees.
- Provide opportunities for staff to discuss issues and cases that reveal cultural differences and encourage a climate where these issues can be raised with sensitivity and respect.
- Provide training to staff about the role that culture plays in a child's development. By understanding how culture may influence our own and others' perception of what is 'normal development' or 'developmentally appropriate practice', staff responses can be more appropriate and effective to families' needs.
- Increase opportunities to employ staff from African and other cultural backgrounds in the program.
- Encourage staff to seek advice, training and mentoring from expert agencies in the field.
- Provide support and employment pathways for bi-cultural staff through work placement and mentoring.

4.6 Parenting and family support groups

Service providers play an important role in establishing, supporting or referring parents to parenting and family support groups and networks. These can include parenting programs, playgroups and mothers' and fathers' groups. Groups can also be formed around a specific focus or certain skills, for example sewing, singing, cooking, antenatal care and cultural skills and traditions. Specific groups can also be targeted, for example single parents, particular age groups of children or grandparents. These groups can be run through local councils, community health centres, neighbourhood centres, childcare centres, kindergartens and maternal and child health centres. Not only are they a valuable source of information, they also help to facilitate supportive networks among group members and provide a place to share experiences, positive and negative, of raising children in Australia.

Parenting groups can help families in a number of ways. They can:

- help overcome isolation and provide opportunities to socialise
- provide orientation to different cultural expectations and practices to childrearing
- support fathers and mothers (and grandparents) with the enormous adaptations to their lives through their refugee and resettlement experiences

- help to increase the involvement of men in parenting
- provide ideas and strategies that help parents cope with issues of food, sleeping patterns, relationships, child development, discipline, listening and communication
- provide a forum for parents to share what works and try new and different ideas and learn new skills
- help to improve communication between parents, and between parents and children
- help parents to organise and plan ahead together to ensure that the tasks of looking after children, work commitments and family and other activities are taken care of
- provide information on other support groups and agencies that can help parents.

There is a range of parenting and family support programs run specifically for the increasing numbers of African families resettling around Australia. Many of these are run in partnership with African organisations and community leaders.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

- Provide clear information on the group and how it can help parents, what topics will be covered, duration, cost, expectations of participants.
- Invite all family members involved with raising the child, including grandparents or other relatives.
- Show a commitment to understanding issues from the perspective and understanding of the parents and families.
- Work with local African community groups or migrant and refugee support agencies that are known to the target groups.
- Be sensitive and aware of community dynamics, why some community members may feel reluctant to attend (e.g. separated women who feel shame).
- Provide opportunities for feedback and evaluation to ensure the program is relevant and meets the needs of parents.

4.7 Policies to support cultural responsiveness

For many agencies, cultural competence represents a new way of thinking about the philosophy, content and delivery of services. Cultural competence requires cultural knowledge and skill development at all service levels, including policy making, administration, practice and ongoing review. It also requires a high level of reflection by individual staff members.

At a policy level, services can address the resources available to staff such as how a family's needs for interpreter services should be determined, or how to handle situations in which communication may be problematic.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

- Promote a whole-of-agency approach and help staff become familiar with frameworks of cultural competency.
- Include representatives of African communities on boards and management committees. Families will be reassured that the community is represented in planning and decisions and programs will be more effective.
- Ensure communication policies that provide clear and accessible information.
- Use interpreters for families with limited English language skills.
- Endorse policies that actively recruit staff from African communities and provide employment pathways for them.
- Develop, mandate and promote standards for culturally competent services.
- Provide opportunities for staff training to develop cultural competencies across the agency.
- Provide encouragement to seek advice, training and mentoring from expert agencies and practitioners in cross-cultural skills.
- Remove administrative barriers and support community-based programs that promote the inclusion of African families.
- Facilitate referrals and support families to access other services when required.
- Support the development and use of culturally appropriate instruments for children's development and psychological assessments.
- Ensure review of progress to assess existing approaches, monitor needs and identify new, emerging groups.

5. Gateways to support: Early childhood services in Australia

This section provides information on the range of services available to support African families in Australia with young children. It covers issues such as child care, health, government assistance and settlement support.



No parent should feel that they have to raise a child alone. Children's development and learning is influenced by their family's access to resources and support from the community. This includes services for children's health, nutrition, learning and development, secure

It is sometimes embarrassing if a grown-up person like me would go to other people seeking advice to raise my children. People are going to say I was not brought up in a proper way myself...

SOUTH SUDANESE FATHER

housing, recreation and social connection. One of the most common barriers for parents from African backgrounds is their lack of familiarity with early childhood services available in Australia.

Service providers can inform parents about services that can assist them, and facilitate their referral. Services must be responsive to the needs of all children. This will reassure parents that to do their best as parents, they need support and assistance, and that asking for support is a positive and normal thing to do. This section provides information on Australian services to support families.

5.1 Key services to support families

It is important that service providers help families to become familiar with the key early childhood services in their state or territory. Agencies and practitioners should use relevant government programs that provide additional support and resources to more effectively meet the special needs of families from African backgrounds.

Services can play a valuable role in assisting families to access information and support to help them with the many challenges of resettlement, including access to housing, education and health services. Providing information and facilitating referral will help to overcome the lack of family and community support that many families experience.

Services can be a gateway to a network of support by providing information on the different types of services that are available, where services are located and how to reach them, how to contact the service and communicate with them, important information such as cost, waiting lists, appointments, and the provision of interpreters and translated information.

It is important that families with young children are introduced to the following services.

Childcare services provide full-time or part-time care for babies, toddlers and children up to school age. There are different types of care depending on the needs of the parents:

- **Childcare centres** provide full-time, part-time or occasional care with play and learning activities related to children's ages and needs.
- **Family day care** provides care in the homes of approved care providers.
- **Occasional care** is hourly or sessional care, e.g. for parents who need a break.

Community health centres provide health services, which may include general medical, hearing, dental care, dieticians, physiotherapy, counselling and group programs including mothers' and fathers' support groups and parenting programs.

Ethno-specific services may also be available. They provide a range of services for families and can link mainstream services and communities. Contact details are available from Migrant Resource Centres, settlement agencies or local government directories.

General practitioners (GPs) provide health and medical services for all the family. They can also refer to specialist care if needed.

Hospitals, particularly women's and children's hospitals, provide care for mothers and children before, during and after childbirth. They can refer to paediatricians and other specialists and healthcare providers. Many major hospitals have special services to cater for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Helplines provide immediate advice and referral to parents over the telephone. Parents can ask about a problem at home, e.g. an accident or a concern about a child's health.

- **Parentline** is a national confidential telephone counselling service aimed at providing professional counselling and support for parents and others who care for children. Phone: 132 289.

www.parentline.com.au/template/standard.aspx?s=201

- **Maternal and Child Health line** is a 24-hour telephone service. Qualified maternal and child health nurses offer information, advice and referral to all families with young children. Interpreter services are also available. Phone: 132 229.

www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/factsheets.cfm?doc_id=9453

Maternal and Child Health services, also known as **Infant and Family Health**, provide free information, support and advice on children's health, development and immunisation to families with children from birth to 6 years.

Mothers' groups are groups of mothers and babies who meet regularly for support and to share experiences. They are usually organised and facilitated by the local Maternal and Child Health Centre nurse.

Parenting programs exist for parents who want to learn more about child development, discipline, communication and other parenting skills. An increasing number of parenting programs are specifically for parents from African backgrounds (see Section 4.6).

I found the mother groups very useful in talking to the other women – not just about minding children but all sorts of things...find out information and become more confident...then they started a play group and I make sure I go there every week.

SOMALI MOTHER

Playgroups are groups of parents and children from birth to school age who meet regularly to provide opportunities for children to play and socialise. They can be a low-key way of establishing connections between local families and provide support for language development and other needs.

Preschools or kindergartens provide learning and development programs for 3- and 4-year-old children to prepare them for going to school. **Early learning programs** exist for children from birth to 4 years who need extra support and assistance, e.g. children of new arrivals to Australia whose parents don't speak much English.

Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma respond to the mental and social health needs of people from refugee backgrounds. There is an agency in every state and territory. Many agencies have specific programs and services for families, children and young people. Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma also provide services under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) (see Section 5.3). Information on each of these services can be obtained through the Forum for Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) website www.fasstt.org.au

5.2 Australian Government Child Care Assistance

Child Care Access Hotline provides information on local childcare services, possible vacancies, types of child care available and government assistance. A translating and interpreting service is also available. Mon–Fri 8 a.m.–9 p.m. on Freecall 1800 670 305.

www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/who-hotline.htm

Child Care Benefit for Families is a payment to help families who use approved and registered child care. All eligible families can receive some Child Care Benefit. Families can contact the Family Assistance Office for information in languages other than English on how to claim the Child Care Benefit on Freecall 1800 810 586 or 131 202.

www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/childcare_benefit.htm

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) assists childcare services to include children with additional needs. Regionally based Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) manage networks of skilled Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) to work at a local level with childcare services. ISFs assist childcare services to build their skill base and capacity to include children with additional needs.

www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/services-ipsp.htm

Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) assists eligible childcare services to improve their capacity to include children with ongoing high-support needs in quality child care. It replaces the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS) and Disabled Supplementary Services Payment (DSUSP) from 1 July 2006.

www.facs.gov.au/Internet/facsinternet.nsf/News/inclusion_support_subsidy.htm

Flexible Support and Bi-cultural Support: In addition to the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS), childcare services may also be able to access additional support through Flexible Support and Bi-cultural Support funding.

www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/services-ipsp.htm#1

- **Flexible Support Funding** – time-limited support provided to eligible childcare services to build their capacity to include a child with additional needs by employing additional staff to increase the staff-to-child ratio for a limited period.
- **Bi-cultural Support** – time-limited specialist support to assist childcare services to include children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), refugee children or indigenous children. This support includes onsite or telephone assistance at the time of enrolment.

5.3 Settlement support services

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) provides intensive settlement support to newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants. It aims to help humanitarian entrants achieve self-sufficiency as soon as possible by providing specialised services on a needs basis.

IHSS focuses on equipping entrants to gain access to mainstream services. These services are generally provided for around 6 months, but may be extended for particularly vulnerable clients.

www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/find-help/ihss/current_ihss_service_providers.pdf

www.dimia.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66ihss.htm

Services available under the IHSS include:

- **Case Coordination, Information and Referrals**, which includes a case-coordination plan based on an initial needs assessment, information about and referral to other service providers and mainstream agencies and help for proposers to fulfil their role of assisting Special Humanitarian Program entrants
- **On Arrival Reception and Assistance**, which includes meeting eligible entrants on arrival, taking them to suitable accommodation, providing initial orientation and meeting any emergency needs for medical attention or clothing and footwear
- **Accommodation Services**, which helps entrants to find appropriate and affordable accommodation and provides them with basic household goods to start establishing their own household in Australia
- **Short Term Torture and Trauma Counselling Services**, which provides an assessment of needs, a case plan, referral for torture and trauma counselling, and raises awareness among other healthcare providers of health issues arising from torture and trauma experiences (see Section 5.2).

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is an Australian education and settlement program for newly arrived migrants and refugees. The program is administered by the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), and is delivered throughout Australia.

www.immi.gov.au/amep/

Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are non-profit community organisations. They deliver a range of services to better assist migrants and refugees to become effective members of the community. Services include childcare access support services, integrated humanitarian settlement services, individual client support, immigration advice and application assistance. A listing of MRCs can be found at:

www.fecca.org.au/Organisations/mrclist.html

Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) provides on-site interpreters, telephone interpreting, through the Automated Telephone Interpreting Service (ATIS), and help with translations, including document translations available to eligible clients.

www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/index.htm

6. Resources

This section provides information on a range of additional resources relevant to early childhood services working with families from African backgrounds and their young children. It includes information on key national programs and resources and linkages to community and country profiles for West, Central and Horn of Africa.



6.1 National programs and resources

In each state and territory, there are services and programs that can support early childhood services to work more effectively with parents and children of African background, including some key providers of family, parenting and children's services. Services provided may differ, depending on the local situation. Below is a listing of some of these services with offices in each state and territory. Information about and links to selected states and territories can be found on their respective national websites.

Australian Childhood Foundation is a national charity that makes children's safety and welfare a priority. Services and programs provided include counselling, advocacy for children, community and professional education, consultancy and debriefing programs, child abuse prevention programs, parenting education seminars and research. In partnership with Monash University, it established the National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse to research the problem of child abuse and identify constructive solutions.
www.childhood.org.au

Australian Institute of Family Studies is an independent statutory authority that provides family-related research and information. Includes research on child care in cultural contexts.
www.aifs.gov.au

Charter for Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society provides a Commonwealth Government framework for services to ensure access and equity to meet the needs of people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It integrates seven service principles into mainstream service planning, delivery and evaluation.
www.immi.gov.au/about/charters/culturally-diverse/index.htm

Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website provides a wide range of information on programs and services provided and/or funded by the Department with a focus on families, communities and individuals.
www.facsia.gov.au/

Early Childhood Australia is the national peak non-government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged 0–8 years. The website provides a wide range of relevant information and resources and has links to state and territory branches.
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Frameworks and strategies to provide culturally responsive services have been developed in most states and territories. Check your state or territory government website. For example, the Victorian Government has developed the *Cultural Diversity Guide: Planning and delivering culturally appropriate human services* (Department of Human Services (DHS), 2004).
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/multicultural/

Kidscount website (hosted by the Australian Childhood Foundation) is part of the *Every Child is Important Program* that supports and resources parents nationally. This initiative has been funded for the past four years by the Australian Government Department of Families, Communities and Indigenous Affairs. The website has parenting information in 16 languages in both audio and print formats. The parenting information is also available on a free talking book CD ROM and can be ordered by contacting the Australian Childhood Foundation at info@childhood.org.au.
www.kidscount.com.au

National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc provides a brief overview of the overarching principles of childcare quality assurance. The principles, which include staff respect for the diversity of children's backgrounds, are accompanied by relevant indicators in the provision of care. Includes advice on the role of families in quality child care and points to consider when looking for a quality childcare service. Publications include *Choosing Quality Family Day Care*, *Choosing Quality Long Day Care*, *Choosing Quality Outside Hours Care* available in community languages including Arabic, Somali and English.

www.ncac.gov.au/resources/cqfdc.htm

Playgroup Australia is the national peak and administrative body for playgroups in Australia to provide advocacy, promote access and exchange information and ideas.

www.playgroupaustralia.com.au/go/about-playgroup-australia

Raising Children Network provides current, evidence-based and quality-assured early childhood and parenting information for parents, professionals, services and the broader community via a national website. It covers a wide range of information and resources, e.g. service directories, listing of hotlines, child health, raising children in a different culture.

raisingchildren.net.au/

Triple P Positive Parenting Program is a parenting and family support strategy aiming to enhance the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents of children from birth to 16 years. It incorporates five levels of intervention of increasing strength for parents. Triple P coordinators can be contacted in each state/territory.

www.triplep.net/

6.2 Community and country profiles

There are a number of helpful websites that provide detailed information on the countries of Western, Central and Horn of Africa such as country and community profiles, profiles of refugee communities, and information on cultural and health beliefs and practices.

Australian

AfricanOz

www.africanoz.com.au/

Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre

www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/factsheets.html

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)

www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/index.htm

Diversity in Child Care QLD Somali and Sudanese Community Profiles

www.diversity.net.au/resources/profiles/

SBS World Guide Country Profiles

www.sbs.com.au/worldnews/Worldguide/index.php3

International

BBC Country Profiles (UK)

www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

The Cross Cultural Health Care Program (USA)

www.xculture.org/resource/library/index.cfm#downloads

EthnoMed (USA)

www.ethnomed.org/ethnomed/

Refugee Health – Immigrant Health (USA)

www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/refugees.htm

Refugee Health Program (USA)

www.health.state.ri.us/chew/refugee/resources.php

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

www.unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html

United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1565&subm=19&ssm=29&area=Investigate&

World Health Organization (WHO)

www.who.int/countries/en/

6.3 Key references used in this Guide

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www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod.php?mod=userpage&menu=16&page_id=26

Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) Early Intervention Parenting Program and Good Beginnings Prototypes

[www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/eipp/\\$File/eipp_factsheet.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/eipp/$File/eipp_factsheet.pdf)

Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) National Agenda for Early Childhood

www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/family/early_childhood.htm_

Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009.

www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-sfcs.htm

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) Community profiles
www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/index.htm
www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/community-profiles.htm
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (2005) Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants 2004–05
www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/humanitarian_support_2005/index.htm
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www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/sett_needs_national.pdf
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (2006b) New Beginnings: Life in Australia, Supporting New Arrivals on their Settlement Journey 2005–06
www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/index.htm
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www.brycs.org/documents/ft_brycs0391.pdf
- St. Joseph's Women's Health Centre Attachment across cultures.
www.attachmentcrosscultures.org/

The Maternal and Child Health Community Leadership Institute Understanding the Health Culture of Recent Immigrants to the United States: A Cross-Cultural Maternal Health Information Catalogue

www.apha.org/programs/additional/mch/

United Nations/UNICEF report: Impact of armed conflict on children

www.un.org/rights/introduc.htm

UNICEF Information by country

www.unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html

World Health Organization (WHO) Child and Adolescent Health and Development website

www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/publications/pubCNH.htm

World Health Organization (2005), Commission on the Social Determinants of Health Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Development Analytic and Strategic Review paper. International perspectives on early childhood development. December,

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www.who.int/whosis/whostat2006/en/index.html

I want you to tell the Australian Government how much I appreciate and honour it. It has taken us (away) from our troubles in Africa. I love the way they (the government) came to where we were suffering and had no hope for life. The government has brought us so much to support our children and has made life worthwhile again. It took the tears from our eyes. We were very discouraged. I appreciate this from my heart. I liked the interview, it was wonderful because it shows that the government is still concerned for us. Extend my thanks and gratitude to Australia, the most beautiful, clean and respectful country in the world.

— SINGLE MOTHER

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