



REGIONAL CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE YOUTH VOICES IN ORGANISATION ENGAGEMENT

MELBOURNE SOCIAL EQUITY INSTITUTE
COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP REPORT

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Date
MAY 2026





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About TBYFS

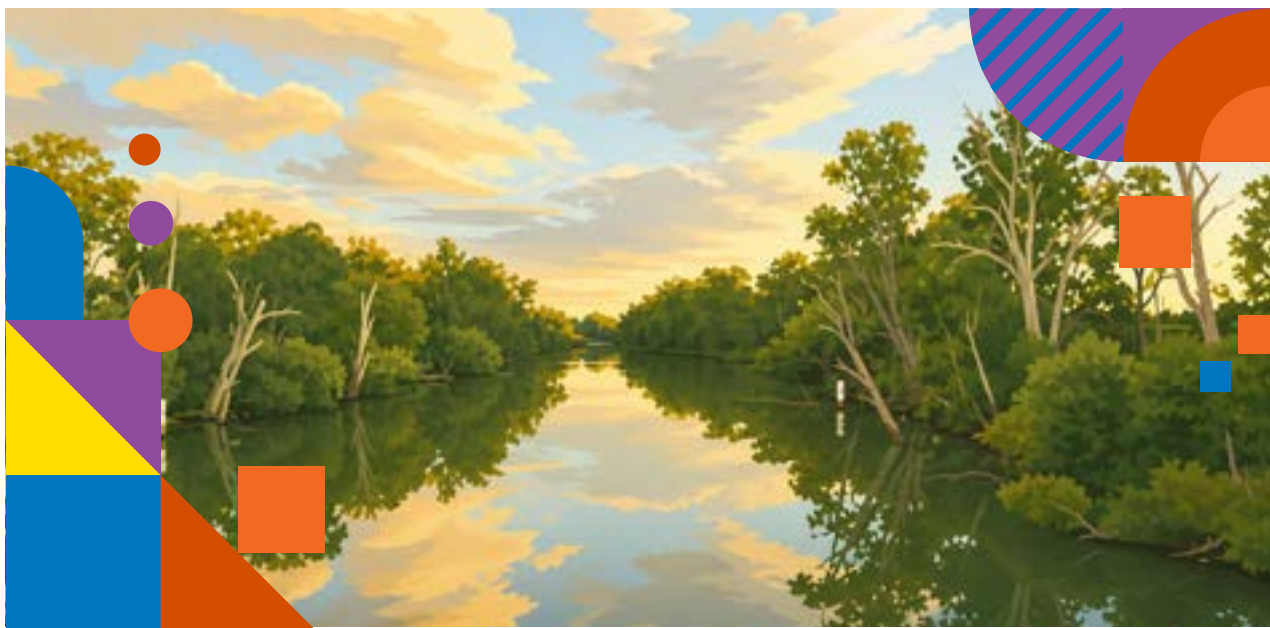


The Bridge Youth + Family Services is a specialist youth organisation supporting 12 to 25-year-olds and their families within the Goulburn Valley, Moria Shire and Lower Hume Regions.

The Bridge Youth + Family Services delivers holistic and tailored support to young people regarding housing instability and homelessness, family relationships, parenting, family unification, education, employment and well-being.

The Bridge Youth + Family Services, in partnership with the University of Melbourne's Melbourne Social Equity Institute, aims to activate the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Youth Voices in Universal Community Service Organisation Engagement Practices.

Project background



The Goulburn Valley community is home to a diverse and inclusive population.

The 2020 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census highlighted that since the previous Census, the Goulburn Valley's community members born overseas increased by 25 per cent and that community members who speak a language at home other than English increased by 29 per cent (Greater Shepparton City Council, n.d.).

The research project sought to understand and address barriers faced by Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) youth when accessing support services, while ensuring their voices and experiences shape how services are designed and delivered.

Greater Shepparton City Council. (n.d.). Multicultural Communities of Greater Shepparton. Retrieved September 3, 2025, from <https://greatersepparton.com.au/community/diversity/multicultural-communities>

Focus group and key themes

Participants

Six young people (18–25 years) identifying as CALD with a varying length of time living in Australia, ranging from 1–4 years, with a strong representation of newly arrived youth and young leaders connected to multicultural networks.



Participants were asked “What does cultural safety mean to you when accessing a community or public service?”

Cultural safety was described as:

- Respect for all cultures.
- Understanding family structures.
- Recognising trauma history.
- Using appropriate language.
- Not retraumatising young people.
- Cultural safety also means having someone trusted present if needed.

Key themes identified

Participants said services feel welcoming when:

- Workers communicate clearly.
- Workers show respect and curiosity.
- There are multicultural staff members.
- Translators are promoted and easily available.
- Information is clear and easy to understand.
- There is privacy in appointments.

Participants said services feel unwelcoming when:

- Lack of translators.
- Language barriers.
- Long wait times.
- Not knowing how systems work.
- Not understanding service processes.
- Feeling disconnected from services.
- Lack of awareness that services exist.



Participants demonstrated awareness of several local services. However, awareness was inconsistent across the six participants.

Community services identified:

- Headspace Shepparton
- Uniting VicTas
- Shepparton English Language Centre
- Greater Shepparton Secondary College
- Shepparton Ethnic Council
- CVGT Employment
- Greater Shepparton City Council youth initiatives
- The Bridge Youth + Family Services

Public services identified:

- Public transport
- Hospitals
- Medicare
- Police

Barriers to accessing services



1 Language barriers

New arrivals who do not speak English struggle to:

- Understand systems
- Navigate services
- Advocate for themselves

2 Lack of knowledge of services

Many participants did not know what services existed, identifying that community members don't know what is around if they are disconnected.

3 Mental health stigma and delays

Mental health emerged as a significant issue.

Barriers include:

- Cultural stigma
- Long wait times (2+ weeks for appointments)
- Perception that accessing help is made to be "too hard".

Participants noted that delays reduce motivation to engage.

4 Transport and licensing

Young people without:

- A driver's licence
- A car

Face additional isolation and difficulty accessing work and services.

5 Social isolation

Newly arrived youth described loneliness and difficulty forming friendships, particularly with Australian-born peers. This isolation impacts wellbeing and connection to services.

6 Employment barriers

New arrivals struggle with:

- Lack of local employment experience
- Difficulty obtaining first employment

Factors that promote engagement

Participants identified several factors that increase comfort and engagement:

- ✓ **Communication**
Clear, respectful communication was repeatedly identified as critical.
- ✓ **Multicultural staff and representation**
Having culturally diverse staff or community-linked workers increases trust.
- ✓ **Translators**
Access to translation services was the strongest and most consistent recommendation.
Participants emphasised:
 - Face-to-face interpreters preferred for planned appointments
 - Phone interpreters necessary in emergencies
- ✓ **Privacy and flexible locations**
Young people valued:
 - Ability to meet in neutral locations (e.g., lake, park)
 - Outreach options
 - Not always needing to attend an officePrivacy was especially important for sensitive issues such as mental health.



Activating Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Youth Voices in Regional Service Engagement Framework:



Recommended actions for organisations



Participants provided clear, practical recommendations:

1. Provide more translators

Recommendation from the young people:

- Face-to-face appointments and connections with different community groups, where possible.
- Phone options available to break down barriers to engagement.
- Advertise translation services clearly on flyers and websites.

2. Improve promotion and visibility

Young people search for help through:

- Google.
- Websites.
- Social media.

Recommendation from the young people:

- Increase digital visibility of the Programs at Organisations, clear language, and clear advertisement of translation services.

- Use multilingual materials in websites and publications.
- Promote through multicultural networks, meet the community within the community. Attending community-led events and multicultural events locally, connecting regularly with Ethnic Council, School Multicultural Leadership Groups and Council.

3. Meet youth in the community

Recommendation from the young people:

- Attend community events.
- Engage through multicultural leaders.
- Build relationships beyond office settings.

4. Increase cultural competency training

Participants strongly supported:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse trauma-informed training, Trauma-informed – Refugee and Asylum-seeking background training.
- Regular Cultural awareness training for all staff within the organisations.

5. Strengthen family engagement

Meeting families and explaining service roles increases trust within the community.

Participants emphasised the importance of:

- Introducing services to families
- Clarifying roles, purpose and boundaries.

6. Maintain communication during waitlists

Young people recommended regular check-ins while waiting for appointments.
“Keep communicating.”

Additional insights

Food and community

Food was described as culturally connecting and welcoming. Providing food at sessions increases participation and comfort.

Youth leadership as informal support

One participant described peers reaching out directly for support before approaching formal services.

This highlights:

- The importance of youth leaders as bridges to support.
- The potential value of peer referral pathways





Additional resources

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/children-youth-and-families-act-2005/147>

Child safety standard

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/>

Centre for Multicultural Youth

<https://www.cmy.net.au/>

Resources and research for digital engagement with multicultural young people

<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/resources-and-research-digital-engagement-multicultural-young-people>

Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc.

<https://ethniccouncilshepparton.com.au/?p=4216>

Youth Justice Act 2024

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/youth-justice-act-2024>

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006/015>

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector

<https://www.yacvic.org.au/training-and-services/code-of-ethical-practice/>

Chapter Three: Working with diverse communities

<https://www.vic.gov.au/place-based-approaches-guide-victorian-public-service/chapter-three-working-diverse-communities>

Creating culturally responsive practice and services to support the mental health of children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/creating-culturally-responsive-practice-and-services-to-support-the-mental-health-of-children-from-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-backgrounds/>

Multicultural Health & Support Service

<https://www.ceh.org.au/multicultural-health-support-service/>