



# Good practice when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

13 May 2015 | Nadine Liddy and Heather Stewart

## Comments

“ Hello everyone and thank you to Nadine and Heather for a fantastic forum! Knowing the perils of asking too specific questions, I wonder if any one had any thoughts or comments around talking to young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds about being LGBTIQ/working with young people who are CALD and LGBTIQ. I work in an organisation that works around gender, sexuality and intersex status. I'm very conscious that although our town (which has been shockingly anglo) is slowly changing and growing more diverse and I haven't seen this reflected in our service users. Obviously, there's a lot going on here and I'll certainly be doing more thinking and reading, but if anyone has any thoughts about people who are in the LGBTIQ and CALD space, I'd welcome those reflections and ideas. Cheers.

*Lucy | 13 May 2015*

“ An excellent forum. I have come across men from conservative CALD backgrounds trying to stay on as refugees because of fear of persecution in their countries of origin. I have also come across people from the diverse Indian communities with children who are gay, it created some angst but they seemed to have accepted the situation. I'm not sure how they would behave in their own country though. I also looked up some resources and came up with this which may be useful: <http://www.glhv.org.au/category/topic/cultural-and-linguistic-diversity-cald>

*Indrani Ganguly | 13 May 2015*

“ Thanks for your comments Lucy and Indrani. You can also find several LGBTIQ-focussed resources listed towards the end of the CFCA Practice Guide: <<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-ad/reports-policy-papers-and-other>>. A recent report from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society may be of particular interest: <[http://www.glhv.org.au/files/Nothing\\_for\\_them\\_report.pdf](http://www.glhv.org.au/files/Nothing_for_them_report.pdf)>

*Ken Knight | 15 May 2015*

“ Thank you Ken for pointing Lucy to the reports, CMY has the "Nothing for them" report on our website too. It is certainly a critical issue. I think, in terms of the MYAN



principles, it is a good issue for stressing the value of applying a cross cultural framework. We have so much to gain from having conversations with migrant and refugee young people about how their culture of origin understands sexuality. So much of the same sex attracted, transgender, queer literature appears very western to migrant and refugee young people, whose culture of origin may not necessarily even have a language for naming same sex attraction, or the experiences of transgender people. Particularly with very newly arrived communities, who are still adjusting to our western culture, to talk about sex may be culturally inappropriate, to talk about sex with strangers even more taboo, to talk about sex outside of the heterosexual norm may seem impossible. I would suggest that workers think about subtle ways to convey that they are open to conversations: talking about GLBTI issues as part of normal conversation, not presuming partners are opposite sex, having anti homophobia posters, whilst remembering, young people may not necessarily know much about the queer field ie what the rainbow flag signifies. (one client stuck the rainbow sticker on his diary, not knowing what it stood for, and was horrified when he discovered what it meant). For many young people it is about juggling their culture of origin's understanding of sexuality with their new country's approach. A stronger sense that someone must not bring shame to the family, and fear of not being understood may make coming out more difficult. The whole idea of coming out may seem very western: individual pursuing their own personal growth over responsibility to family. A worker may need to sit with young people as they unpack this tension. In my six years here, not one young person has come out in our reconnect case load, but our clients are all refugees in their first year of settlement. I think the dimension of time is critical, understanding that people may be more likely to identify later in the settlement process. International students, though, may chose to come to Australia as they see it a safe space, and may come out almost immediately. Really important issue, I think it is fantastic that GLBTI sector have CaLD young people on their radar, and we keep talking about how to provide support which is culturally appropriate. Intersections are valuable, between these two sectors, to build that capacity.

*Heather Stewart | 15 May 2015*

“ **Hi Heather, thanks for your comments, I would just like to add that it is not a simple West vs. everyone else issue. For instance, the anti-gay legislation that exists in countries like India (where I come from) dates back to British colonial times. While homophobia exists in greater or lesser degree among all the communities, the Indian rulers did not legislate against it. There is also no record of any convictions in the post-Independence era, though gay people unfortunately suffer harassment from police and the public. You can easily find gay clubs through Google, e.g: <http://www.gaytravel.com/gay-guides/mumbai> Activists are working to get this outmoded legislation overturned. It is also pertinent to note that white gay and lesbian groups may also discriminate against gay and lesbian people (and everyone else) from ethnic minority groups. My Asian gay friends say that Indian/Asian gay men are not considered attractive, though lesbians may be. I am not gay but I have had to deal with the same prejudices and stereotypes from them as from straight white people. No culture or**



community is homogeneous and it is important to keep this always in mind. I am aware that my views and experiences are tailored by the fact that both in India and here in Australia my beliefs and practices are shaped not just by my 'culture' but also the fact that I have mixed and worked with liberal activist groups in both India and Australia. I should also add that gay friends from white, Western backgrounds say they would be far more reticent about disclosing their sexual orientation in regional and rural areas....so as I said in the beginning it is not a simple Western vs. 'others'. Incidentally, most CALD groups are Western in origin: British, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, former Yugoslavia etc. etc. The 'visible' minorities are yet but a fraction of the total CALD population.

*Indrani Ganguly | 15 May 2015*

“ Hi Indrani, I totally agree, it is not about West vs other, it is about having a conversation about what is the particular situation for the person and recognising that culture is part of it, particularly, as you say, because no culture is homogenous. And I by no means wanted to imply that western culture was not homophobic, I was just trying to point out that culture informs how people come to terms with issues like sexuality, and what they might see as an appropriate way to express their sexuality. In terms of Lucy's question, I think this is a critical dimension for us to consider when trying to engage same LGBTIQ young people, who may be struggling with racism within communities as well as homophobia. And yes, you are right, I believe there are other dimensions which can be significant, where you live (country versus metropolitan), how educated you and your friends are, your age, your gender. The Mapping Homophobia (? was the right name) report showed there were a range of dimensions which can be significant when trying to understand homophobia in Australia. I think showing genuine concern for a young person whilst they negotiate their pathways through presenting issues in the settlement process is a good start, showing interest, being prepared to learn from them. The MYAN principles guide us to good practice. And collaboration across the LGBTIQ, youth and multicultural sectors is a good start.

*Heather Stewart | 18 May 2015*