



MDA

Multicultural Development
Association

**Queensland's child protection
system: Systemic challenges for
people from refugee and CALD
backgrounds**

Advocacy and Social Policy Unit

November 2010

1. The Multicultural Development Association

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) was established in May 1998 to promote multiculturalism and empower people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds through advocacy, community and multicultural sector development and the delivery of client services.

As Queensland's largest settlement agency for migrants and refugees, MDA works with individuals, families and communities to achieve a society which values justice, diversity and equality. MDA settles approximately 1,100 newly arrived refugees annually and currently works with 3,500 migrants and refugees. Most of MDA's clients are from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. As such, we are uniquely positioned to identify emerging systemic issues for CALD communities, and to undertake advocacy to achieve better settlement outcomes.

The cultural identity of our current client group is as follows:

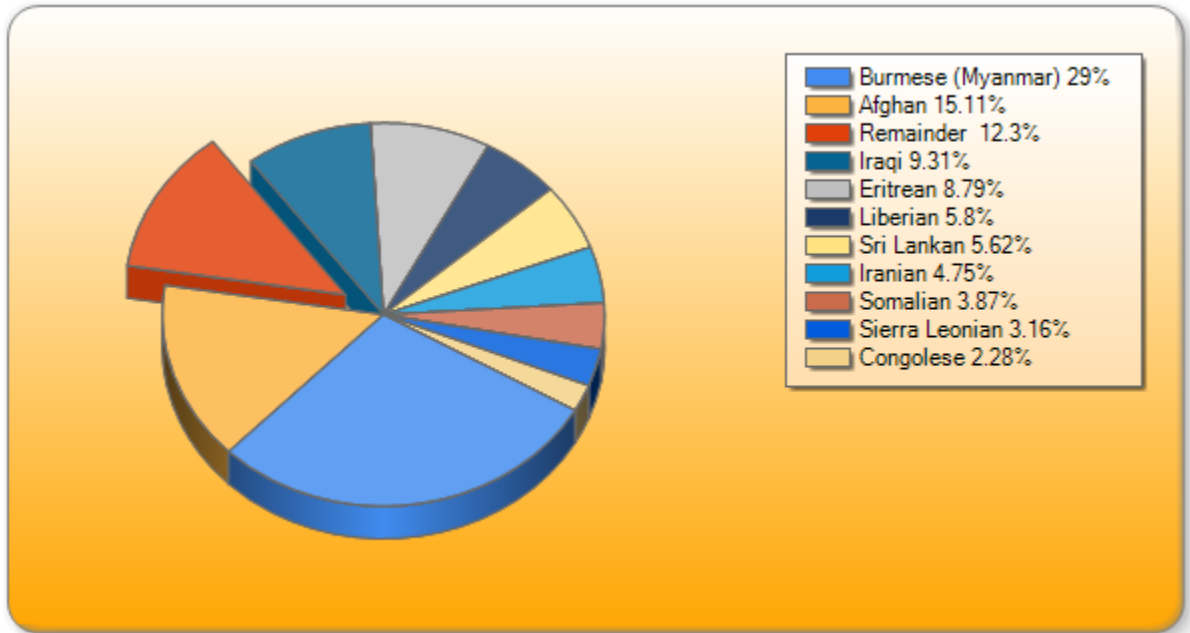


Figure One: Cultural identity of MDA clients as at 15 November 2010.

MDA's Advocacy and Social Policy Unit undertakes systemic advocacy to protect and promote the rights and interests of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds. We advocate about key systemic issues which affect successful settlement of refugee and CALD people, and their inclusion in the community, including child protection issues. Our vision is to improve the experiences and outcomes of refugee and CALD children and families engaged in, or at risk of becoming engaged in the Queensland child protection system through systemic advocacy and reform.

2. Refugee and CALD people and child protection

Child protection and safety is a key systemic issue confronting many refugee and CALD communities in Queensland. Interaction with the child safety system can have a long lasting, detrimental impact upon children, families and the broader community.

In Queensland data collection in relation to the ethnicity and cultural diversity of families within the child protection system is not mandatory, and accordingly it is not known whether refugee and CALD children are over-represented. However, data from the New South Wales Department of Communities' internal system suggests that approximately 4 % of children in the child safety system are from a CALD background, although it is suspected that this number is higher.¹

Given the significance of child protection issues for refugee and CALD communities, MDA's Advocacy and Social Policy Unit is an active member of the Multicultural Child Protection Working Group (MCPWG), and in 2010 contributed to the Queensland Council of Social Services' (QCOSS) Regional Forum in relation to Multicultural Child Safety. The MCPWG's submission to the Queensland Multicultural Policy review is attached at Annexure A. The QCOSS Regional Forum Report for Multicultural Child Safety is attached at Annexure B. Both of these reports, contributed to by MDA, explore systemic barriers and challenges around child protection for refugee and CALD families.

Settlement challenges for refugees and child protection

Increasingly refugee and CALD families settling in Australia are becoming engaged with the child safety system, presenting significant challenges for individuals, communities, service providers and government. As noted in the Australian Centre for Child Protection's 2009 report on the *Working with Refugee Families Project*:

... Many of these families come from African and Middle Eastern countries and have common experiences of trauma, dislocation and loss, and many are victims of genocide, war and torture. Pre-migration experiences together with the considerable challenges of settling into a vastly different new country can significantly affect family well-being and parenting practices. For many of these families, parenting styles that were normative in their countries of origin are not endorsed in Australia. The lack of validation of parenting beliefs and practices may lead to additional stress for parents from refugee backgrounds....²

Common settlement challenges may include finding and maintaining meaningful employment; access to housing; financial constraints; family reunion and migration issues; racism and discrimination; education; social exclusion and isolation; language and communication barriers and physical and mental health issues (including torture and trauma-related illness). The historical background of many refugees, combined with

¹ Social Policy Research Centre University of New South Wales, *Culturally appropriate service provision for CALD children and families in the NSW child protection system* (2009)
<http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/research_cald_families.pdf> at 17 November 2010.

² Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia, *The Working with Refugees Families Project* (January 2009) 7.

challenges for refugee families settling into the Australian community can exacerbate, and be exacerbated by difficulties within family relationships, including intergenerational conflict, changing gender roles, domestic and family violence and lack of extended family support.

Many societal norms, culture, laws and expectations in Australia are new for refugee families, including child protection laws. Refugee families are often confused by these laws, child safety processes and their rights and responsibilities around caring for children. In their home countries, governments rarely intervene in family matters (which are usually resolved within the family unit or through their elders, religious or community leaders) and accordingly the involvement of Australian child protection authorities may result in individuals and communities feeling stigmatised, traumatised and targeted. As a result, many people from refugee and CALD backgrounds experience significant challenges and barriers in relation to children, families and parenting.

Through its daily work MDA observes the long term impact of the refugee experience (conflict, displacement, loss, torture, trauma, persecution, extended periods of time in refugee camps, family separations) on clients, but equally witnesses the extraordinary resilience, strength and courage shown to make a new life, fulfill aspirations and be included and belong. Many have protected their children from violence, war, famine and persecution in their countries of origin, and are willing to make incredible sacrifices to achieve better lives for their children. Engagement within the child protection system is therefore a significant retraumatising experience for many refugee families who do not understand why the children they have strived to protect have been or are at risk of being removed from their care. In many cases removal of children exacerbates mental health issues and contributes to difficulties in settling successfully.

The majority of refugee and CALD parents love, support, protect and care appropriately for their children. MDA recognises however that in a minority of cases the intervention of Child Safety Services is justified due to substantiated abuse, neglect or exploitation of a child. MDA supports the protection of those children and removal from the family unit where it is in the child's best interests to do so. However, in undertaking decision-making around the removal of a child, MDA urges appropriate consideration of the unique challenges experienced by culturally diverse communities settling in Australia.

MDA believes that a comprehensive strategy around child protection and safety issues must be developed in consultation with the communities concerned. MDA considers that Queensland's child protection system can be improved to more appropriately engage with and respond to the unique circumstances and needs of refugee and CALD children and families, in order to achieve better outcomes.

2. Key systemic issues in the child protection system

Key systemic child protection issues for refugee and CALD children and families include:

- **Lack of cultural sensitivity, competence and responsiveness** when Child Safety Services engages with children and families from refugee and CALD backgrounds. In particular, there is often a lack of knowledge and recognition of different cultures within diverse communities.

Understandings of best parenting practice differ significantly between cultures, which may result in misunderstandings within refugee and CALD families about parenting responsibilities in Australia. Culture influences child rearing practices, communications between parents and children, family roles, status and expectations. Accordingly, diversity in parenting practices within different cultures is common place, and may conflict with what are considered to be 'acceptable' parenting practices in Australia. Common examples of such practices include disciplining of children (in many cultures it is acceptable to physically punish children) and leaving older children at home to supervise younger children.

As noted by the MCCPWG:

there is often 'an assumption by our mainstream education, health and community services that people who have low levels of literacy, people who cannot speak English and people with few socio-economic resources cannot parent'.³

In some cases this may result in the removal of children in circumstances where alternative approaches may be more appropriate; loss of culture and identity for children in care; and the undermining of traditional family values.

There is also often a failure to consider the ramifications of removal of children in the broader settlement context. For example, the removal of children may result in a single mother losing her Centrelink parenting benefit, resulting in accumulating debt and financial instability, inability to pay rent, and consequent instability of housing. In the more extreme cases MDA case workers have had experiences of clients having to move into smaller, more affordable accommodation, which in turn renders difficulties in children being returned by Child Safety Services as the new accommodation may be deemed inappropriate for children. For those families, the combined impact of removal of children and other settlement challenges has a severe psychological and retraumatising impact, often exacerbating existing mental illness, poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. It is therefore vital that the removal of children is always considered in the broader settlement context, and occurs only as a last resort.

Culturally competent practice, particularly understanding of parenting in other cultures and the settlement process and challenges is critical to appropriate and effective child safety service delivery. It is understood that other than preliminary staff induction, minimal ongoing, specialised training in relation to working with clients and families from diverse cultures is received by Queensland Child Safety Services staff, contributing in some instances to a lack of cultural sensitivity, responsiveness and understanding when working with refugee and CALD children and families.

Case Study

Following a domestic violence incident between an MDA client and her husband, the police notified Child Safety Services as they were concerned about the safety of the couple's children. Child Safety Officers visited the house and expressed

³ Multicultural Child Protection Working Group, *Submission to the Queensland Multicultural Policy Review* (May 2010) 5.

concerns including that there was insufficient food in the house for the children, and a lack of essential living items, namely beds for the children.

When MDA case officers spoke with the family, the mother explained that the children feel lonely and scared sleeping in separate beds, and consequently they prefer to sleep together in the one bed. In that family's culture, children sleep in the parents' room and often together to look after each other, particularly when children are under five years old. In any event, extra beds were located in other areas of the residence. A cultural support worker also advised that the family's ethnic group was a hunter gatherer group in Africa, and accordingly they prefer obtaining and preparing fresh food daily.

- **Lack of early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly in relation to parenting practice.** At present there is limited provision of education for parents and families through early intervention and prevention programs to newly arrived parents as well as families already engaged with Child Safety Services about the child protection system; domestic laws; parenting practices; roles and responsibilities and caring for children in Australia. Knowledge and understanding of these areas is essential in order to prevent, at the earliest stage possible, engagement of families in the child protection system.

The current child protection system is adversarial and parents are not supported to address these issues which led to the involvement of Child Safety Services. Indeed, in some cases there appears to be an expectation by Child Safety Officers that parents/families should 'amend their ways' independently without external support to rebuild relationships between the parent/family and child. In these circumstances, parenting education and support is essential to overcome issues.

Amona is a mother of four children between 10 and 17. She has a long history of torture and trauma and attends counselling sessions. She is on medication for her anxiety attacks.

Recently Amona's two daughters were taken away from her by Child Safety Services and are now living with another family. Amona was accused of violence towards her daughters. She denies that she hurts her children, and disciplines them in the only way she knows how.

Amona doesn't know why Child Safety is involved with her family, and if she will ever get her children back. She attended a meeting with Child Safety Services, but even though there was an interpreter she still doesn't understand anything about the system.

This situation is causing Amona a great deal of stress and she feels very depressed. She doesn't want to leave the house as she feels like people are judging her for being a bad parent.

- **Fear of authority and becoming engaged in the child safety system:** Many refugee and CALD community members have expressed fear of Child Safety Services and the child protection system, and are apprehensive that their children will be taken from them. A contributing factor to this fear is the socio-historical background many of refugee and CALD communities, which often include negative

and exploitative personal experiences with policing and authority structures due to events in their country of origin, such as civil war and internal conflict. Many parents and families have protected their children from harm and death throughout those experiences, and therefore cannot understand why their children are being removed from them upon settling in Australia. Anecdotally it is also understood that fear of removal of children and the intervention of Child Safety Services has in some cases had the reverse effect of parents being too lenient with their children and letting children do what they wish for fear a complaint may otherwise be made about them.

- **Intervention by Child Safety Services on the basis of minor conduct:** It is anecdotally understood that in some cases children have been removed from families and placed in care on the basis of perceived neglect, misunderstanding of child-rearing practices and minor conduct. For example, in April 2010 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Department of Communities was intervening in refugee families due to incidents including failure of parents to give children school lunch and parents leaving younger children at home to be supervised by an older child.⁴ MDA is anecdotally aware of similar interventions occurring in Queensland.

In the incident involving school lunch, the reason for the failure to provide lunch may have been cultural, as in some cultures families do not eat in the middle of the day and consume their main meal in the late afternoon.⁵ With respect to the supervision of children, significant confusion exists within communities about when it is appropriate for older children to be left alone to care for younger children, which is a common parenting practice countries of origin. These examples demonstrate instances of child safety intervention on the basis of minor conduct which could be more appropriately addressed through education and support for families.

- **Removal of children from families based on child notifications:** Upon settling in Australia, some refugee and CALD children experience difficulties in trying to adapt to a new culture while maintaining, through community and/or family expectations, their traditional culture. These acculturation stresses can be exacerbated by factors such as sudden access to income (through Centrelink) and technology, a new educational setting and interaction with young people outside their community, and perceptions of increased independence and freedoms in their new home country. This can create strong intergenerational conflict and tensions within family relationships, particularly as most children learn English and adapt more quickly to life in Australia than their parents/families, who generally continue to adhere to their traditional culture and values.

It is anecdotally understood that in some cases, due to intergenerational conflict, 'clash of cultures' and other settlement issues, some children have made false reports of abuse/neglect by parents/family members due to family grievances and rejection of parental authority. In some cases it is understood that children have made such complaints due to parents refusing to allow them to do what they would like, and a false perception that they will be fostered into the care of families who do not experience socio-economic disadvantage. Upon being returned to their families, those children and parents often experience extreme difficulty in rebuilding their

⁴ Adele Horin, 'Refugee Children Removed' *Sydney Morning Herald* (19 April 2010) at <<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/refugee-children-removed-20100418-smn6.html>> at 24 November 2010.

⁵ In other cultures, the main meal may be consumed in the morning.

relationship and trust, contributing to further conflict and family problems.

- **Lack of support for families as well as children:** The focus of Child Safety Services on the best interests and protection of the child often results in other complex issues for refugee and CALD families, particularly those in crisis or experiencing extreme socio-economic disadvantage, being overlooked. The absence of holistic support around child protection in the broader settlement context, for example, alongside employment, housing, English language, health, transportation and other settlement issues exacerbates marginalisation, disadvantage and poor outcomes for families. In the absence of support for the family many refugee and CALD families often do not have the tools to rebuild relationships and trust with children, and to prevent reengagement with the child protection system.
- **Absence of formalised kinship care arrangements.** At present the formalised kinship care arrangements available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not available to refugee and CALD communities. Given the collective and communal nature of parenting practices in many refugee and CALD communities, where extended family members play a significant role in child rearing, the extension of formalised kinship care to those communities is culturally appropriate and likely to provide stability and wellbeing for the child. Many refugee families settling in Australia wish to maintain and pass on their traditional values, culture and beliefs to their children, therefore kinship care within the child's community would facilitate and maintain ties to culture, tradition and community. Such arrangements would also be consistent with the right of a child to be placed in care that is most culturally appropriate, and to maintain relationships with the child's family and community, as espoused in the Charter of Rights for a Child in Care.⁶
- **Lack of transcultural workers to provide cultural support, and absence of a Multicultural Support Unit within Child Safety Services:** It is understood that there are presently no transcultural support workers within Child Safety Services to provide support to children and families engaged in the child protection system, to advise and educate child safety officers on culture and cultural issues, or to improve community knowledge around the child protection system.

Further, unlike the Cultural Advisory Unit within the Queensland Police Service, and Queensland Health Multicultural Services, Queensland Health, there is no specific unit or branch within Child Safety Services to coordinate interpreter services and provide translated resources/information; implement strategies to address or provide support around child protection issues for CALD communities; collect and analyse CALD data; develop, implement and deliver cross-cultural training and education of Child Safety Services staff; or to promote, develop and maintain effective relationships with multicultural communities. Given Queensland's rapidly evolving cultural diversity, service delivery must be responsive to people from CALD backgrounds, particularly refugee families. Accordingly, a coordinated approach is essential to effective and appropriate multicultural child protection service delivery.

⁶ *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld) Sch 1.

- **Inconsistent data collection:** The number of children from refugee and CALD backgrounds entering or at risk of entering the child safety system, and incidences involving people from CALD communities is not known due to inconsistent data collection by Child Safety Services. This presents considerable challenges to the delivery of responsive child protection services to refugee and CALD children and families. It is understood that these issues are currently being addressed by the Queensland Government.
- **Inconsistent and inappropriate interpreter usage:** In some cases interpreters have not been engaged where required and inappropriate interpreters, such as relatives, have been used. This can compromise the family's understanding of the situation and reasons for the intervention, exacerbate distress, may result in inaccurate information/evidence being provided and may prejudice the investigation and/or decision-making process.

Case Study

In 2009 MDA provided significant support and advocacy for a refugee woman engaging with the justice system. Police attended a reported domestic violence incident between a refugee woman and her husband. When making a formal report about the incident, the attending officers used the husband's friend as the interpreter, despite the friend having no training or qualifications as an interpreter. The interpreting by the husband's friend was intentionally biased and depicted the woman as highly volatile, mentally ill and unsuitable to care for her children.

The report was used by Child Safety Services in assessing the safety and living conditions of the children of the couple. The children were subsequently removed from the woman's care and placed with relatives, resulting in the youngest child being abruptly weaned from breastfeeding.

Despite numerous attempts by the woman to engage with Child Safety Services there was minimal communication with her. In her words "Every time I talked to child safety they didn't take me serious, they made out I was crazy."

Significant individual advocacy about this issue was undertaken by the woman's MDA caseworker. Prior to her initial Magistrates Court hearing MDA advocated to ensure she had adequate language support throughout her legal proceedings, and a professional interpreter was ultimately engaged. Through the interpreter it was determined that the information which guided the decision to remove the children was misleading and false. The children were returned to the mother's care. However, it was too late for the youngest child to continue breastfeeding.

3. Recommendations

The above systemic issues indicate there are aspects of Queensland's child protection system which could be addressed and reformed to significantly improve the experiences and outcomes of refugee and CALD children, parents, families and communities engaging or at risk of engaging in the system.

MDA provides the following recommendations to the Queensland Government for improvement and reform of the child safety system to secure more equitable and improved outcomes for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds:

Recommendation One

Implementation and resourcing of early intervention and prevention strategies to develop, enhance and improve refugee and CALD parents' knowledge and strengths around parenting, and to prevent engagement with the child safety system. Strategies could include:

- Education programs and community information sessions to facilitate knowledge and understanding of domestic laws, the child safety system, parenting practice in Australia, and rights and responsibilities. Currently these programs are carried out by some agencies within the community sector (i.e. the Strengthening Families project in Toowoomba; Building Stronger Families at QPASTT – see below) however further funding and resourcing is required to deliver these programs throughout Queensland, particularly to new and emerging communities. Programs could be delivered collaboratively by Child Safety Services, the Queensland Police Services, community organisations and private providers (for example, the Triple P Program), or through government funding for external service provision by the community sector.

Such programs would provide relevant knowledge of child protection and parenting in Australia, ensure people better understand their rights, overcome fear about the child safety system and may also have a deterrent effect. These programs should be delivered not only to newly arrived refugee families at an appropriate time during their initial settlement, but to parents already within or at risk of entering the child safety system, to prevent their re-engagement. These programs should also be delivered to children to educate them about the child safety system, and to reduce instances of or temptation to report misleading information to Child Safety Services.

- The production and dissemination of information and education resources including fact sheets, publications and DVDs to communities and individuals (in a variety of languages) about child safety (including child abuse and neglect), domestic violence and other related topics. For example, MDA has developed a resource package around these issues entitled 'Safe Communities for Children', as discussed below. Such resources should compliment, rather than replace practical workshops and training/information sessions with CALD families in relation to these issues.
- Support for the establishment of parenting groups and mentoring arrangements within communities to provide information and support to newly arrived parents and families around caring for children in Australia and the child safety system; to encourage open discussion of parenting and child safety issues; and to promote the capacity of established and new and emerging communities to address these issues. This could not only be an effective early intervention and prevention initiative.

Examples of early intervention and prevention strategies

The Building Stronger Families Project - QPASTT

The Building Stronger Families Project commenced at the Queensland Program for Survivors of Torture and Trauma in October 2008. The Program provides a safe place where individuals, parents and carers can discuss issues of concern to them, share ideas and develop strategies around parenting with a strong and proud ethnic identity. It is funded year to year through short term grants received by the organisation.

Workshops offer practical information and aim to enhance people's conceptual understanding of their new environment including Australian systems that impact on family life. The workshops also offer emotional support for participants as they develop peer support relationships. Through a series of 10 modulated workshops groups of between 10 and 15 people from selected ethnic communities undertake the Program in a location that suits their needs. A secondary component to the Program is the training and paid employment offered to casual workers engaged with the Program who are themselves of refugee backgrounds. Their role is to improve the cross-cultural understanding of the service through community liaison and co-facilitation of workshop activities. Other aspects include consultation with local community groups and members before each workshop series to ensure that what this Program offers meets the needs of local community groups. Interpreters and child care workers are also provided.

Topics include: Discovering what's the same and what's different and key family values; communication strategies; child development needs; alternatives to physical discipline; raising teenagers; labelling and styles of parenting; gender; play and family fun; responsible children and strong families.

'Safe Communities for Children' Project - MDA

As part of the 'Safe Communities for Children' project, MDA has developed resources for community education, including a DVD and hard copy resources in multiple languages, which cover topics such as child abuse, neglect, domestic violence and children, and your family and the Department of Child Safety. These resources could be used as part of education and awareness raising strategies for new arrivals.

Families in Cultural Transition – New South Wales Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

The Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program commenced at the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) in 2006. It is a ten week workshop program to assist successful settlement of newly arrived refugees and to provide education about Australia. Topics discussed include Australian culture and systems, torture and trauma experiences, families, children and parenting, gender, health and other key areas. The Program builds skills, knowledge and confidence of refugees, and has been adopted by most Australian torture and trauma services.

More information about FICT is available at:
<http://www.startts.org.au/default.aspx?id=126#Funding>

Recommendation Two

Introduce mandatory and continuous cross-cultural training and professional development for all Queensland child safety officers, both at employee induction and throughout their employment, which focuses on the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services to refugee and CALD people. In particular, education and training should focus on:

- the differentiation in parenting practices among diverse cultures
- cross-cultural communication
- child protection in a cross-cultural context
- cross-cultural family units and dynamics
- settlement stages, including complex and high needs groups such as newly emerging communities, asylum seekers, etc
- working with bicultural and bilingual workers
- accessing and working with interpreters and translators
- new and emerging communities settling in Australia
- services and resources within the multicultural sector.

Recommendation Three

A Multicultural Services/Policy Unit should be established within the Department of Communities, Child Safety Services to address the unique needs of refugee and CALD children, families and communities, and build the capacity of the department to deliver culturally appropriate services to that cohort.

For example, the New South Wales Department of Community Services has a Multicultural Services Unit which provides specialist advice on issues affecting child safety clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Its role is to improve the Department's capacity to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services in line with its *Multicultural Strategic Commitment 2008 – 2013*.⁷ Among other services and functions, the Unit has a multicultural caseworker program, and coordinates the development and delivery of resources and training on culturally-reflective practice to departmental staff across New South Wales. In Queensland, similar functions are performed by the Cultural Advisory Unit of the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Multicultural Health Services, Queensland Health.

Such a unit in Queensland could have functions including:

- engagement with CALD communities to ascertain their unique needs
- delivery of interpreting and culturally appropriate support services

⁷ NSW Department of Community Services, *Multicultural Strategic Commitment 2008 – 2013 (2008)* <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/multicultural_strategic_commitment.pdf> at 23 November 2011.

- training of child safety officers/staff and developing resources to build a culturally competent organisation
- establishment culturally competent recruitment practices i.e. multicultural caseworkers
- responsibility for multicultural liaison/bicultural support officers (if they were to be introduced)
- advising the Department and Queensland Government on child protection policy and practice for culturally diverse communities
- developing relevant resources for child safety officers/staff
- providing updates and ongoing education and information in relation to existing and new and emerging communities settling in Queensland (for example, the Burmese ethnic minorities including the Rohingya, Chin and Karen)
- providing information and referrals for CALD communities as well as to foster and kinship carers and
- other functions as detailed in the *MCCPWG's Submission to the Queensland Multicultural Policy Review* (see Appendix A).

Recommendation Four

In addition to the employment of Child Safety Officers from diverse backgrounds, it is recommended that Child Safety Services introduce bicultural support and liaison workers, similar to Cross Cultural Liaison Officers and Police Liaison Officers within the Queensland Police Service, to:

- Improve communication, relationships and understanding between Child Safety Services and multicultural communities.
- Educate and assist case workers in understanding culture and cultural issues, values, beliefs and protocols of different ethnic groups and communities, and issues affecting people from refugee and CALD backgrounds
- Act as a conduit between Child Safety Services and communities and families, particularly around individual cases new and emerging issues for those communities
- Improve the communities' knowledge and understanding of Child Safety Services.

Such a role could be performed either through a pool of casual bicultural support workers or through creating key positions.

If these positions are created, they should not replace the need for ongoing intensive engagement and dialogue between community leaders and Child Safety Services, but should operate alongside this process. Community leaders and their communities must continue to be engaged in planning and policy development in these areas, particularly around early intervention and prevention.

Recommendation Five

An increase in funding and resources in the 2011 State Budget for holistic, integrated early intervention support services for refugees and CALD families is required to prevent families engaging with the child protection system. While MDA commends the Queensland Government for its commitment to the Helping Out Families early intervention initiative in the 2010-2011 State Budget, a commitment to further funding of early intervention and prevention strategies across Queensland, with a specific focus on refugee and CALD families, is required. Programs such as the Families in Cultural Transition program in New South Wales have been successful in working with families to overcome settlement challenges and prevent child protection involvement. Similar programs could be established in Queensland and delivered through the community sector in order to better support families as well as children.

Recommendation Six

Kinship care arrangements, reflecting those currently in place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, be formalised and implemented for refugee and CALD communities through legislative reform. As noted above, such arrangements would enable the child to remain in the community where their cultural needs and extended family relationships will be maintained.

However, in implementing such arrangements, care should be taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the child and the child's family is respected, particularly in relation to the circumstances which led to the child's removal from the family home. This is essential in order to avoid stigmatism and/or opprobrium towards the family by other members of the community.

Further, the processes for recruitment of kinship carers from refugee and CALD communities should be culturally appropriate and ensure accessibility to this role, and must be accompanied by appropriate training for successful carers.

Recommendation Seven

Child Safety Services implement mandatory collection by staff of data regarding country of origin, ethnicity, languages and religious affiliation to ascertain how many notifications relate to children from refugee and CALD backgrounds, and how many of those children are placed in care. Consistent data collection would ensure better recognition of the needs of refugee and CALD children and families engaging with the child safety system, and would facilitate tailored service delivery to meet those needs.

Recommendation Eight

People from refugee and CALD backgrounds have access to a professional, qualified, accredited interpreter in all interactions with Child Safety Services where the individual requires English language assistance, and that ongoing funding be provided for access to interpreters for Child Safety Services.

Recommendation Nine

The Department of Communities work alongside refugee and CALD communities to build capacity to address issues around child protection and to ensure collaboration and engagement and input of communities into policy development and service delivery. Many people are aggrieved by child safety engagement within their communities and are motivated and eager to assist in developing and delivering early intervention and prevention strategies, establish an ongoing dialogue with Child Safety Services and to consult about and input into child protection issues.

For example, the Burundi Community Leader has formed a working group of men and women from his community to discuss child protection issues, and to develop resources for their community around child safety. This is an excellent example of an opportunity for engagement between Child Safety Services and communities in order to achieve better outcomes for refugee and CALD children and families.

Recommendation Ten

Child Safety Services consider child protection issues in the context of broader settlement challenges for refugee and CALD families, and remove children only as a last resort when all alternatives to removal have been explored and exhausted. As noted above removal of children in cases of minor neglect may not always be justified, particularly where enhanced education and support for families could address and overcome those concerns. Delivery of education and support for families, ongoing dialogue and negotiation with families, and where appropriate community leaders, and the greater impact of child removal on the family unit should always be considered and pursued prior to removal of children and placement in formal care.