

Bright Ideas



Refugee Council
of Australia

Local strategies to support
refugees and asylum seekers

10. FLYING MOUNTAIN PROJECT



Participants in
the Flying
Mountain
Project show
their kites.

(Photo courtesy
of CMY)

What?

The *Flying Mountain Project*, an initiative of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), used kite making and kite flying as a social and recreational activity to engage newly arrived young men from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne's Southeast and to help build social connections.

Who?

The *Flying Mountain Project* had a specific target group of Afghan young men on onshore protection visas. 25 young men participated in the project. During the program an additional five Islander young men expressed interest in the activity, and the largely older Afghan young men were happy to share their expertise and help the younger boys to participate.

Why?

Melbourne's southeast is home to a large number of single young Afghan men who have arrived over the last four years and who are without significant social connections in the community. Many of the young men who participated in the program are relatively isolated and are struggling to establish positive employment and/or education pathways. Many are very anxious due to the uncertain nature of split family visa applications, which would allow their families to join them in Australia. The young men often struggle with a strong sense of responsibility for their families and frequently feel guilt about the fact that they are comparatively safe whilst their families remain in unsafe situations overseas. Many send a significant proportion of their limited income back to their families and are reluctant to spend any of their income on social activities for themselves, which they see as frivolous when compared with the needs of their family. The *Flying Mountain Project* used kite-making workshops as a way to break down social isolation and provide a recreational outlet.

How?

- CMY applied to the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to deliver this innovative recreation program.

- The program was promoted through local organisations who work with this client group.
- CMY also engaged two well-known older boys from the community to spread news of the program. This process also allowed the two young men to gain some work experience. Their roles were to assist the program coordinator to recruit participants and remind people to come along, assist those who were not sure with how to make the kites and interpret where necessary. They also advised the program coordinator on issues of cultural sensitivity.
- Workshops ran most weeks from 4 to 6pm throughout May to July 2013. Some of the young men took home materials so they could build the kites in their own time.
- The program was initially run out of Noble Park Community Centre for four weeks, and then it moved to Dandenong headspace, which came on as a partner and offered a worker to assist with the delivery of the program.
- A public exhibit of some or all of the kites is being planned.

Successes

- Kite fighting and flying is of great cultural importance to many Afghan young men and the participants were pleased to have had the opportunity to make the kites here in Australia. They were grateful that appropriate materials were sourced. So far the group has made over 60 kites and many have had the opportunity to fly them.
- The program was successful in engaging these young men. It did not have any cost for participants and was a culturally appropriate activity which built on their past knowledge and experience. It allowed them to share stories of their pre flight life in their home country.
- The program was successful in creating connections between the young men and introducing them to other social and recreational opportunities, which were promoted to the young men during the project. The initial Noble Park venue was chosen for its proximity to the English language school that some young Afghan men attend as well as the opportunity to link the participants into a basketball program that runs there on the same night.
- The project enabled these young men to be linked into other services relevant to their needs. Six of the young men joined in with the basketball program after finishing their kites. When the program moved to headspace, some of the young men were linked to headspace staff.
- Attendance was solid, and the cross group sharing between Afghan and Islander young people worked well, with the young Islander boys showing great interest in the project and the Afghan boys were very happy to share their expertise and knowledge in this area.

Challenges

- Many of the young men had limited access to transport either in the form of a car, someone to drive them or money to pay for public transport. CMY addressed transport difficulties by finding venues that were as close as possible to public transport and holding the program on week nights after school so as not to require additional travel for the participants.
- Another challenge was getting consistent numbers. With this particular client group, regular attendance at programs can be influenced by factors including: mental state, fatigue, multiple appointments, committing to more than one thing, the weather and not being able to easily get to the venue. CMY tried to address these challenges by: running the workshops as drop-in sessions (meaning participants did not have to arrive at the start of the session and leave at the end); providing food and drinks; having workers from other organisations linked in (e.g. headspace, council and youth workers); employing two well-known young men from the community to engage with participants and remind them each week; having the venue as close to public transport as possible. However, in heavy rain this made no difference!

Advice for others

- It is very important to consult with the groups you are targeting before planning any program. Whilst this won't solve all the challenges, it does usually help.
- Utilise people from within the communities you are targeting. Be sure to give them a meaningful role and that they are compensated appropriately if you are unable to pay them. This could be through courses or vouchers.
- Be as flexible as you can be. Whilst you may have certain targets, there is no harm in having participants from other cultures or who may be outside of your target age group if the activity is appropriate.
- Be considerate of the activity. For example, we sourced original wooden spools for the kites and properly treated paper instead of using cheaper, easier to purchase alternatives. This was greatly appreciated by the participants. Whilst this sometimes means a bit more work and expense, it is definitely worthwhile.

More info

Centre for Multicultural Youth – www.cmy.net.au

Bright Ideas

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