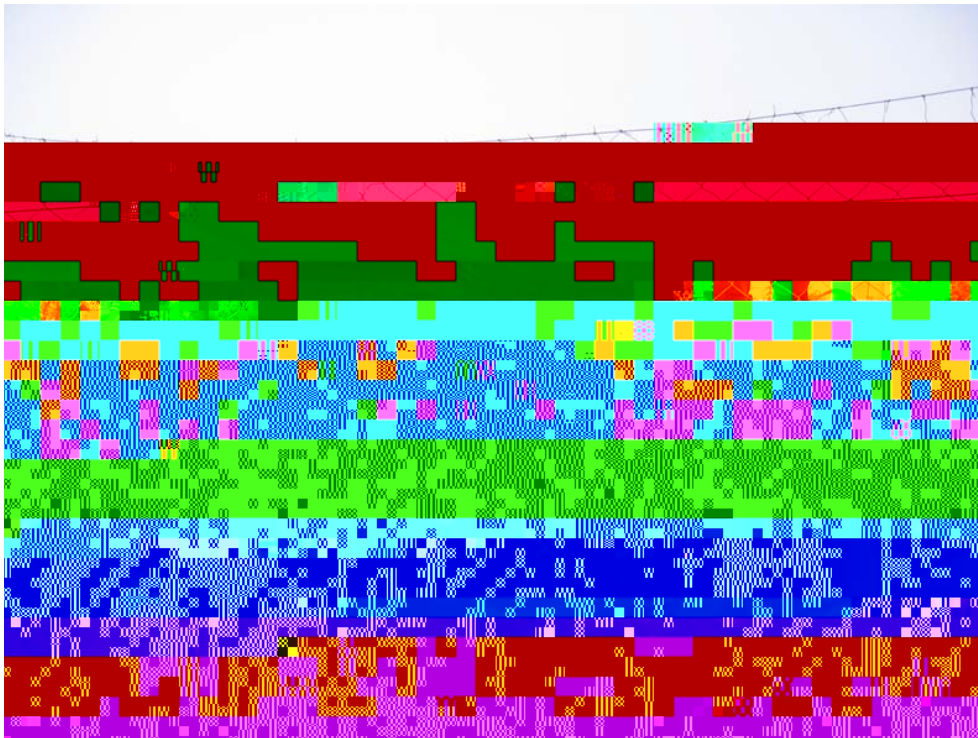


THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

The changing nature of war and warfare since the latter part of the twentieth century has meant that civilians have become the focus of battles, armed conflict and torture. As a result, refugee children and young people are frequently survivors of torture and trauma in their own country. Many have also had horrific experiences during their escape to a country of asylum. Resettlement in a third country can also be traumatic as it requires surviving their past experience and adapting to changes in traditional family structure, roles, culture and language.

It is estimated that about 50% of the approximately 12 thousand people who enter Australia annually as part of the Refugee and Special Humanitarian intake are children and young people. These children have often suffered from severe hardship, have had their sense of safety violated, suffered physical abuse, neglect, abandonment, sexual abuse and exploitation, been forced to fight as child soldiers and have witnessed and/or been tortured.



Refugee children in a holding centre in Lokichokio,
Kenya, near the Sudanese border

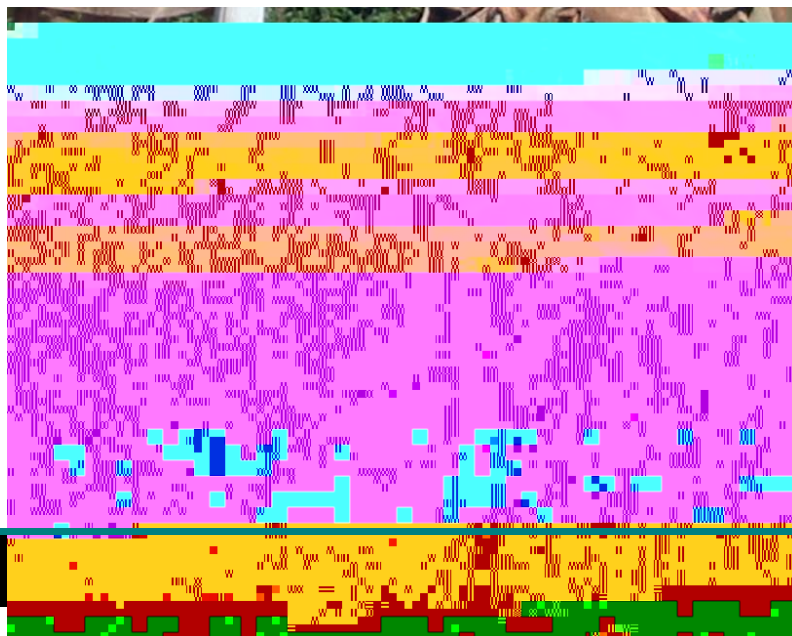
Refugee children and young people have had to cope with a wide range of traumatic incidents and human rights violations in the process of their cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. They are often dependent on adults who are themselves traumatised and unable to meet the

developmental needs of their children. This makes them particularly vulnerable to mental health problems (Baker, 1994).

The past decade has seen important shifts in opinion reflected in the literature about working with refugee children who have survived torture and trauma. One of the most important of these relates to the 'resilience' of children. Until quite recently it was believed that children did not fully experience the negative impact of torture and trauma. It is now recognised that children as young as three experience problems in their psychosocial development if they are not given some extra assistance and support (Fazel & Stein, 2003; Hodes, 1998; Kohli & Mather, 2003). The notion of resilience now relates more to the ability of refugee children and young people to resume their normal development *if* they are given early assistance and support to build their protective capacities. Early intervention has been recognised as essential to the prevention of later mental health problems (Kohli & Mather, 2003).

Over the last decade Australia has resettled increasing numbers of refugees from protracted refugee situations – the so-called 'warehoused' refugees. It is estimated that over 8 million people have lived in refugee camps for between 5 and 20 years, often with no hope of returning home. These experiences can have a profound effect on young people's education.

For an understanding of what it is like in these camps, watch the video *Welcome to Kakuma* available on the DVD.



Kids in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya

REFUGEE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

The enrolment of young refugees and humanitarian entrants in school can pose challenges for teachers and administrators. Many refugee students have had little or severely interrupted schooling and have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Refugee students may also exhibit aggressive and unacceptable behaviours as a result of their traumatic experiences.

Refugee students receive intensive English as a second language tuition

graphics for the brochures, piloted and commented on the text and helped to decide the content and presentation of the video.

Permission, in their own language and with a full explanation of the reason for the project was sought from the parents of younger children and all participants were free to withdraw material depicting them or their ideas at any stage of the process.

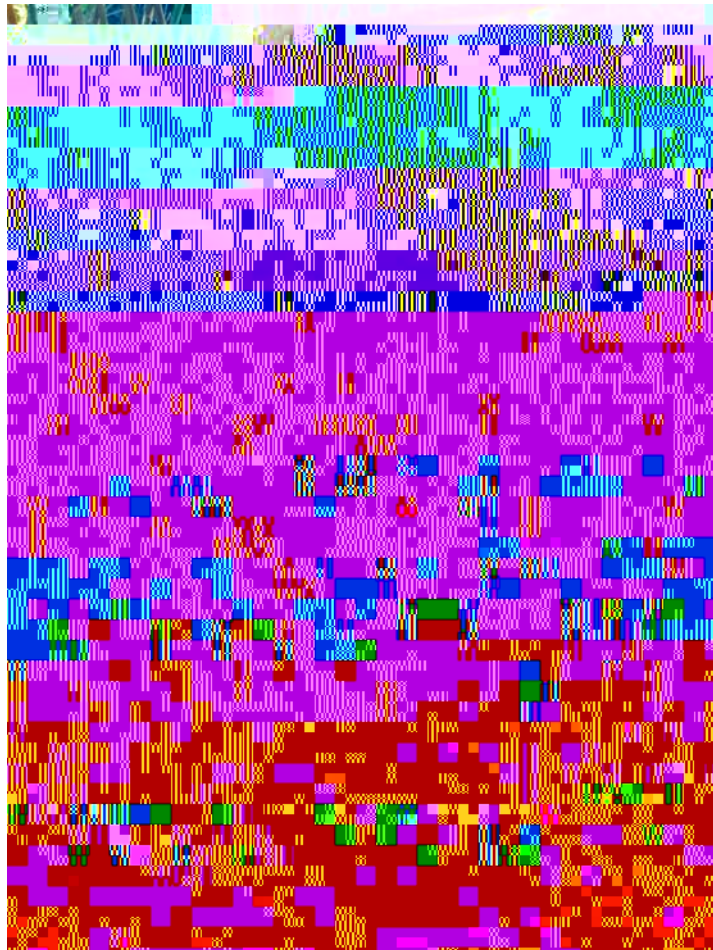
PURPOSE OF TRAINING

This training does not address the teaching and learning challenges that arise from lack of formal schooling and low literacy and numeracy levels. The resource is intended to support school personnel who come into contact with refugee students, particularly teachers and school counsellors, to understand the effects of the refugee experience and to undertake the task of meeting the resultant psychological and welfare needs of their refugee students.

Refugee children and young people have a natural resilience which can assist them to overcome the horrors of the refugee experience. The main focus of this resource is to explore how this resilience can be nurtured in the school environment by providing teachers and counsellors with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to effectively support and assist refugee students and to help to nurture and develop the students' resilience.

The training provides information about the refugee experience and the sorts of trauma refugee students are likely to have suffered. It enables teachers and counsellors to understand the high risk of poor mental health in refugee children and to identify reactions to trauma, including post traumatic stress symptoms. It helps to explain the difficulties that refugee students may have in settling into the school environment.

The training also focuses on helping refugee students recover from their experiences through appropriate early intervention strategies that aim to holistically support the students and their families in the resettlement process.



Refugee children, Thai-Burma border

THE TRAINING COURSE

Allocated time: 5 sessions, up to 12 hours in total

Target group: School teachers and counsellors who encounter refugee children in their classrooms and schools

Aims of the Training:

To provide teachers and counsellors with an understanding of the context and causes of trauma and behaviour disorders amongst refugee students

To provide teachers and counsellors with resources to nurture resilience and support refugee students in their schools and classrooms

To identify strategies to holistically address the recovery of refugee students in the wider context of resettlement

Outcomes

- On completion of this training course, participants will be able to:
- demonstrate an understanding of the refugee experience and the traumas refugee students are likely to have suffered prior to their resettlement
 - demonstrate an understanding of the specific challenges that refugee students face during resettlement
 - demonstrate an understanding of the specific and differing needs of refugee girls and boys
 - know how to support and build the resilience of refugee students
 - identify early intervention strategies which incorporate:
 - cultural sensitivity
 - an holistic approach to resettlement services
 - making school a place of recovery
 - links to other settlement service providers

Method

The training is participatory in nature, using a mix of brainstorming, discussion groups, small group exercises and role play. In each session, the trainer will present key concepts and session context and then involve the participants in discussion and activities to explore and reinforce the information presented.

The training is based around the video, *Surviving War, Surviving Peace*, available on the DVD. For each training session, there is a *Surviving War, Surviving Peace* video section and a series of PowerPoint slides, with suggested discussion points and activities. The PowerPoint presentations are designed to be handouts and trainers should encourage participants to make their own notes on each slide.

Background readings are also provided for each session. Copies of these readings should be made for each of the participants. Participants may then keep them for future reference.

Trainers should familiarise themselves with the slides, participants handouts and background readings before delivering this course. Trainers are advised to add to the PowerPoint presentation notes the examples, stories and activities that they will be using to present the course.

Also included are references for trainers who require further information.

If trainers are unfamiliar with some parts of the material or are not confident to deliver some of the sessions, they should seek specialist input. For advice regarding specialist input contact the [Centre for Refugee Research](#).

Materials needed to run this training:

the video *Surviving War, Surviving Peace*
downloaded PowerPoint presentations on a laptop or a hard copy
of PowerPoint slides
a copy of the *Manual for Trainers*

1. Gender and the refugee experience
2. Refugee girls
3. Reproductive health problems
4. Refugee boys
5. Child soldiers
6. Separated children
7. Inadequate schooling

Session Three – The Challenges of Resettlement

1. Loss and grief
2. Cultural adjustment
3. Learning a new language
4. Adjusting to school
5. Lack of community networks
6. Social exclusion and racism
7. Trauma of parents and family
8. The compounding of previous trauma
9. The impact of detention

Session Four – Impact of Refugee Trauma on Children and Young People

1. Children's reaction to the refugee experience
2. The impact of family stress and poor parental mental health
3. Identifying post traumatic stress symptoms

Session Five – Working with Refugee Children and Young People

1. The importance of the resettlement environment
2. Making schools a place of recovery
3. Early intervention strategies
4. Making early intervention culturally appropriate
5. 4 recovery goals
6. Links to refugee resettlement services
7. Caring for ourselves