

Culturally Safe Sexuality Education For Newly Arrived Migrant And Refugee Young People

Authors:

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Background/Purpose:

Young, newly arrived migrant and refugees often have interrupted schooling and limited access to reliable, accurate and culturally appropriate sex and relationships education (SRE). GenWest, in partnership with cohealth, Maribyrnong Youth Services and Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health developed and delivered an educational program for students at the Western English Language School (WELS) designed to redress knowledge gaps and provide the necessary skills and resources to make informed decisions about their health and relationships.

Approach:

The program was tailored to a cohort of Vietnamese students and delivered in language with professional interpreter support. Students participated in English and Vietnamese to facilitate engagement. Topics presented included consent, healthy relationships, periods, puberty, and contraception. Consultation with refugee services was undertaken to ensure trauma informed and culturally safe program facilitation. On their advice, classes were separated by gender for cultural safety reasons.

Outcomes/Impact:

The program was delivered to 23 students – 15 girls and 8 boys, aged 14-16 years old. Teachers and students reported increased confidence and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, healthy relationships, consent laws, and an increased ability to navigate the Australian healthcare system.

Innovation and Significance:

This program is the only one of its kind. It provides students a safe space to learn about potentially challenging topics before they join mainstream education and employment settings. It also connects them directly with local healthcare services and resources.

Young, newly arrived migrants and refugees have specific and complex needs and as such mainstream SRE is not always appropriate or beneficial. This framework has the potential to have an even more significant impact if it is incorporated more widely across the education/community sector.

The program is ongoing and will be delivered to additional campuses in 2023. It was recognised with a Victorian Public Healthcare Award for Excellence in Culturally Diverse Health.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

No conflicts of interest to declare.