

Episode 2: Supporting Children and Young People

This podcast is brought to you by Southern Migrant and Refugee, Better Place Australia, and South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network.

Host: Malahat Kamali:

Salam and greetings to the audience and viewers of our today's program, provided by the SMRC.

I am hopeful that all of you have good health, I am Malahat Kamali one of the staff of this program, and I am here to present you with one new podcast about the youth's mental health and the support of young people.

Today, we have two guests, Mr. Temor Rezai, and Mrs. Somia Farahan. Mrs. Somia was born in Iran and finished his high education in chemical engineering, then served as a teacher of Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics. Mrs. Somia came to Australia in 2012 as an Asylum seeker and then secured the job of co-teacher in a primary school. During this time, she successfully completed her further studies in support of education and since 2018 she has been working as a cultural and educational officer at the Dandenong secondary school. Also, she is working in NAP which supports new arrival students to Australia.

Our second guest is Temor Rezai, who has left Afghanistan when he was one year old before accommodating in Melbourne, He has lived in Pakistan, Iran, and Norway as an asylum seeker. Mr. Razai has completed his high education in social science, international development, and social work here in Australia.

Mr. Razai has a special interest in social support activities, and he has contributed to different organizations such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Southeast Monash Legal Services where he had different activities in areas of capacity building and supporting community members in understanding their social roles and responsibilities.

Recently, Mr. Razai has been working in the areas of supporting youths with Centre for cultural youths, where he guides and supports newly arrived youths in the development of their capacities and capabilities.

Right now, he is working with South East Community Link, (SECL) in a newly designed program for newly arrived young people in Australia.

Most welcome guests!

I understand that you both have tight schedules, and you give your precious time to be with us for a while, and our Afghan society may get benefit from your experiences. Thank you very much.

Malahat Kamali:

My first question is for both of our guests. Could you please give us a brief information about your work with Afghan youths migrants?

Mrs Somia:

Thank you so much, as you mentioned I am working at Dandenong secondary school and as you know a huge number of Afghan migrants arrived to Australia and we developed a program for them under the name of the New Arrival Program (NAP), because language schools are very busy, and those who attended our school, at first, we assess their knowledge and English level and give them some test to understand the level of their knowledge about that syllabus taught to them before, then based on these assessments, we classify students into groups and based on their learning needs, we focus on their English language skill to get them ready for the mainstream and their classes.

Malahat Kamali:

Thank you Somai Jan. Temor Jan

Mr. Temor Rezai:

In recent four and five years, I worked more with Afghan youths who were new arrival to Australia, and we could develop information sessions, leadership sessions, group programs, and individual consultations. The purpose of our work was to support and help them to better resettle here in Australia and to enable youths to start a successful new life. Also, my work is more focused on leadership, confidence, young people development and to have their presence and contribution to the community and making them successful leaders in their community.

Malahat Kamali:

Really great thank you. Temor Jan,

During your work with these youths, what kind of challenges have you witnessed in their life?

Mr. Temor Rezai:

In regard to the Afghan youths, we know that there have been more than 40 years of war, and Afghan youths have witnessed to the war, displacement, and absence of caregivers. The war and displacement have a very negative impact on youth, on their mental health to be able to have a good picture about themselves, have a good relationship with family and community, and cause a defect in their education and in their future career and these are the initial problems, and these may arise problems for them in their settlement in Australia. Settlement in a new community on its own is a very big challenge, because, in a new community, youths need to learn English, culture, and the education system. Most of the time, the unrecognition of their qualifications and work experience, it may cause to discourage the youths to not continue their studies.

The third important point is generation conflict, disagreement between parents, we are coming from a collective community, where we value the family and needs of families and demands of the community, instead of focusing on our own needs or our plan, so it causes a conflict. The Australian community is totally different from the Afghan community in its beliefs, culture and values perspective, and its own make a conflict for the Afghan community.

Malahat Kamali:

Important point raised by Mr. Razai. As the same time, Mr Rezae talked about the challenges Mrs. Somia what capacities and capabilities you have observed in Afghan youths during your work with them, that could help them cope with these challenges in their community?

Mrs. Somia:

Well, when I go to school every day, by seeing these youths, I get energy. When they are coming, they are hopeful for their future, they are very hardworking and when they get tired, you look at them, you see hope in their eyes. They tell me stories about their hopes for the future, and their jobs in the future. I see that despite the hardships and struggles this community faced, they are very flexible and resilient, and strong, they have a warm family environment where they support each other. These are all positive points that I think will help them in their future life. They only need encouragement and support from us to do for them and guide them to the right places and directions and we will see how they serve the Australian community.

Malahat Kamali:

Mrs. Somia, you talked about the warm heart of the family, which is a reality in Afghan society thank you so much. Mr. Temor in regard to your previous discussion about the challenges that exist in the life of Afghan youths, we know that such challenges may have negative effects on the thoughts of every human being, but the youths or teenagers are very vulnerable or susceptible, do you realize such things in the environment you work with?

Mr Temor Rezai:

Yes, what I said before is that war and displacement itself have a very negative effect on mental health, it causes young people not to have a positive self-image, and most of the time young people feel less, many times they don't have the confidence to say who they are, what they want, what they like. War and displacement itself prevent children and young people from education because we know that every young person wishes to have a job. But if young people do not have good mental and psychological health, have family problems, if they cannot attend school, all this can cause young people to do wrong things, and join wrong friends or a wrong social cycle. The problem of family conflict and family violence are very major problems, and we know that it has caused suicide most of the time it is a big problem and needs to work on it. Most of the displacement and the homeless, for example, a young person has a problem with family and

leaves family and becomes homeless, and this itself causes a series of other problems.

Malahat Kamali:

Thank you, Mr Temor. Mrs Somia regarding your experiences in your work, as you mentioned earlier that you also work with the parents of these young people, how can we help parents understand these challenges, for example, how can we help parents to understand some of the behavioural changes of their children and young children that caused by psychological or social problems, what changes can they expect that may occur in their behaviour?

Mrs Somia:

As Mr. Temor pointed out, being homeless or losing your home and being forced to immigrate and leave your country, remembering all your memories, you miss that land, you remember that when you were walking on the road, all the people spoke your language, you were aware of their habits and customs. But when people come here, first, it is very scary for them, many people do not know English well, they see a new culture and experience a culture shock because most of the habits and customs are different in their society and here it is different, and it takes time for them to get acquainted. Families who have just arrived in Australia need time to understand how the education system works in Australia, how the family laws work, and how the driving laws work. Immigration is very difficult. So, it is important that parents, who form the backbone of the family, should take care of their own mental health. Sadness and anxiety are common things for those who emigrate from their homeland, but it is important to identify anxiety and sadness and so that they can deal with them peacefully, they should go to the doctor and talk to them and raise the issues they face with. Like, I am feeling sad, have anxiety and I am concerned about the future. It is very important not to keep these worries and feelings of sadness with us and they should talk about it with trusted people and slowly these worries and anxiety will decrease and be cured.

Our students and children are also greatly influenced by the mental state of their parents, the happiness and sadness of parents or their anger or happiness affect their children. The first point is that parents should protect themselves and

should take care of their mental health. Second, if they notice that their children are crying a lot, in comparison to the past. This excessive crying may be one of the signs that their child's mental health is at risk. Either the child shows aggression, or he behaves with violence and anger, considering these symptoms, parents should go talk to the teachers at school or go to their doctor, and much support are available in this regard. Other symptoms are unusual or abnormal changes in eating food, or isolation, for example, children used to talk with their parents, they talked and sat with their brothers and sisters, but now they sit alone in the room, or they don't like to have guests come. As parents, we should take care of their behaviour and if we see a change, we should go and talk to the children ourselves, so that, if possible, they will tell us their feelings or their problems, but if not, we should go and ask for help.

Malahat Kamali:

You mentioned very important points, and really one of these symptoms or many of them you mentioned may be seen in children and young people. Mr Temor, as Mrs Somia explained this issue very well, do you want to add anything based on your experiences, especially among the symptoms mentioned by Somia, are there a specific number of these symptoms that are more common in these young people? And would you like to provide more information to parents on this topic?

Mr. Temor Rezai

Yes, in addition to the points mentioned by Somia, in my opinion, the best thing or gift that parents can offer to their children or young children is to allocate time for them. Unfortunately, Australian society is a very busy society, and what I can say based on what I experienced here is that parents, especially fathers, are busy with their jobs and daily work and don't have time for their children, which can have a negative impact. I believe that the first thing that families should do is that parents should establish a good relationship with their children. Second, parents should listen to their children with open ears and parents should put aside all their opinions, perceptions, and prejudices and listen to the young children, and see what their children wish and what are their problems. Another point which is very important from point of view is that parents should

realize and accept that when they are coming to a new society, whether we like it or not, our culture, the way we are living and dressing and the way we are thinking will change. We are using all the opportunities and benefits, but we do not accept some other differences that may occur in our life. Sometimes, I received emails from the teachers saying that the families of our students are very conservative and do not allow their children to attend extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, parents do not know the negative impact of such obstacles. For parents, my message is that culture is something that is changing time to time, Even the Afghani culture in Afghanistan is also changing, so when the culture is changing, then why should we insist that the culture should not be changed, also sometimes our perception about other cultures is negative, so that is why we don't let our children get close to other cultures, which is a wrong perception. In my opinion, what is important for us are values, so what we can pass on to the next generations is good values. The last thing I want to mention is the awareness of our parents about mental health, parents need to know what mental problems the young people are suffering, which services and institutions are available and get familiar with them and encourage the young people to go and use the services, for example, if you have a mental problem, this is not a big issue or everyone can suffer mental problem, we should ask for help, not be the shame of asking for help, and anyone can have a mental problem. There are many services available in the mental health sector, many informative services are available, services in the parental care sector, and parents should participate in these services.

Malahat Kamali:

Yes, fortunately, there are many services available in the Australian community, and it is the responsibility of parents to be aware of and use them.

As Mr. Temor mentioned these services and said that there are many services available in society to support children, young people, and parents, Mrs. Somia John, can you specifically name a few such service providers or organizations so that our viewers and audiences can refer to them if needed?

Mrs. Somia:

Of course, there are a lot of support services available, there are many people in the Australian community who can help us, and there are many services available that are free and provided by the government to help citizens, especially newly arrived families. It is important that if you feel an issue or a problem, you must first identify the problem and then seek help. Those who can help us in the first step may be the school's teachers. If you notice that your children are not studying well, or if they have problems with their friends at school, or if you have problems with them, please, please, do not be shy and come to school, as we see it is inappropriate in our culture to discuss such issues with someone outside the home, and we presume it is a bad action, but indeed it is inappropriate when the issue is not solved and even getting bigger. I myself often have problems with my own children, so as I am both a mother and a teacher, I understand other mothers, and every mother may not agree with her children on one issue. Therefore, I request the parents to come to the school and the door of the school is open to them, to talk with us and we have a lot of help in the school, we have a well-being team and we refer the parents to them, if there is need the wellbeing team can refer the parents to other service providers such Foundation House, which has excellent services and those who used the services were very satisfied with it, and it has made their lives much better. Another organization could be SMRC in the Dandenong region, which can help you, and if SMRC does not have someone to take care of your problem, they can refer you to specialized service providers. Another problem is language and many parents do not know English, they are embarrassed or do not feel comfortable coming to school and raising the issues with us, but this problem can be solved very easily by using the phone number 131450, you can dial this number, select the Dari language, you will be connected to a person who speaks Dari and you can talk to them easily, he will provide you with interpretation and give him/her the school number or your GP number. After school, the second place that I can recommend for you to go and share your thoughts, feelings, and problem without embarrassment, is your GP. For example, you can talk to him/her about children's lessons, sleeping too much or too little, or eating too much or too little. The GP can introduce you to some services or specialists through a referral letter in the same area where you are living and you can go

and talk to them there. One thing that is not good for us to do is that we should not play the role of teacher or doctor and put our own diagnoses to them. For example, if a child does not study or is not successful in his studies and we say that he does not have the talent or does not like to study, that is not true at all, and it prevents us from reaching the right people or the right support services. Sometimes, we are going to a neighbour's house or a party and then we raise the children's problems in front of family and friends, but this will embarrass the children, and this will not help us. It is better to talk to people who are confidential and experts on the problem and compassionate, which is really a doctor and a school.

Malahat Kamali:

Thank you so much Mrs. Somia, In this part, on behalf of the SMRC office, I would like to thank you both we are proud of you, and we are very lucky that we have people like you in our society who do not only help the community but also share their experiences and knowledge and sense of humanity. I would like to express my gratitude to our viewers and audiences who were with us for a few moments, and we hope that we have presented important topics for you in the program and that it will help you. If you have any questions or if you need more information, you can contact and reach out to these two dear guests where they are working. Goodbye, see you all in the next program.