



2013

# Report to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship



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## Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

# 2013 REPORT

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### Overview

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) will complete its sixth term in November 2013. The MMYN has continued to advise the Government on issues affecting young people from culturally and religiously diverse communities; and has engaged in a range of activities, consultations and initiatives that have allowed members to foster understanding and respect within the Network membership, as well as in the wider Victorian community. The MMYN will maintain its advisory role to Government in 2013-14, and will place an increasing emphasis on strengthening the skills and knowledge of members to enable them to capitalise on leadership and other opportunities in the future.

The MMYN has continued to work hard to raise its profile across the wider community, including within the Victorian State Government and, in particular, among young people. Each new cohort of young people joining the MMYN brings with them fresh ideas, passion, enthusiasm and a genuine desire to effect change. The MMYN faces a bright future as its members, both past and present, continue to be involved in the opportunities offered through their participation in the MMYN.

With the support of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, the MMYN will continue to be a bridge between the government and Victoria's diverse young people. The MMYN will advocate on the priority issues of its members and other young Victorians, and work to increase understanding between Victorians from different faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

### MMYN Meetings

The MMYN has met four times in its sixth term. The initial meeting took place in November 2012, and subsequent meetings took place in February, April and August 2013. An evaluation and debrief session took place in October 2013, and offered current members an opportunity to reflect on and assess the past year. It is anticipated there will be a further event to round off the year.

On 28 November 2012, new members met with the current group to network and to learn about the objectives of the MMYN. The February 2013 meeting was an opportunity for members to workshop a number of ideas on which they would work throughout the year.

The MMYN selected two priority areas of focus for research and discussion, and for which group members would develop key findings and conclusions. These areas were (1) social inclusion and (2) religious awareness. Members then self-selected which topic they would work on, dividing into two separate groups.

As the groups were encouraged to work independently to identify and develop their topics, Group 2 decided it best to divide into two subgroups to work on related but separate topics on religious awareness, specifically (a) multifaith education in schools and (b) improving intercultural interaction through sport and art. These three groups (Group 1, Group 2a and

Group 2b) researched, analysed and discussed these issues in their working groups over the course of between two and four months. Each group presented their findings at the MMYN meetings in April and August, discussing and refining their findings with the full MMYN membership. The groups were then responsible for finalising the findings, and developing a brief to outline the key findings and conclusions.

The MMYN meetings have been an excellent opportunity for the members to hone their skills at tabling ideas, chairing a meeting and public speaking, as well as networking, collaborating on projects and developing friendships with their peers.

## **MMYN Working Groups: Key Findings and Conclusions**

### **Social Inclusion**

- Racial bullying is a combination of racism and bullying. It targets individuals based on race or ethnicity.
- Students experiencing high levels of racial bullying are likely to experience greater levels of stress.
- Students' satisfaction with their school is influenced by the existence or absence of (racial) bullying.
- Racial bullying of African-American teenagers in the United States is linked to long-term development of behavioural problems and depression.
- At present, racial bullying is ill-defined and not fully understood, which results in schools struggling to develop and enforce relevant policies and procedures for dealing with the issue.
- Due to the lack of understanding of what racial bullying is, perpetrators of racial bullying are too often not held accountable for their behaviour.
- A clear definition which separates racial bullying from other forms of discrimination will assist stakeholders to develop a greater understanding and awareness of the extent of this problem. This will, for example, allow schools to develop targeted strategies to combat the issue and ensure there is a zero tolerance policy for this type of behaviour.

### **Multifaith Education in Schools**

- Some research suggests that religious literacy rates are low. Religious literacy is vital to assisting people to develop a critical and informed point of view to reduce ignorance and promote understanding and social cohesion.
- While there are already initiatives to increase religious understanding, more needs to be done to engage the wider Victorian community to increase understanding and foster greater acceptance and respect for diverse cultures and religions.
- Educating young children from primary school age is a positive strategy to ensure that young people develop early on the capacity to better understand religions, and to build healthy, respectful relationships across difference.
- Education curriculum should include topics on culture, belief systems and values and faith diversity. This will help familiarise students with diverse faiths in Australia and help reduce misconceptions created by factors such as the media, social attitudes and stereotypes and incorrect information.

### **Improving Intercultural Interaction through the use of Sport and Art**

- Cross-cultural connections between organisations could be better supported by government and non-government organisations, through the type of funding available and support given specifically for inter-cultural events and activities.

- A range of sporting, arts and government agencies encourage the participation of people from diverse cultures. However, there is a gap in facilitating the interaction of individual cultural and faith communities with one another and with more mainstream forms of sport and artistic expression.
- Some grant programs require applicants to have in place partnerships with other culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse groups to be eligible. This can be a challenge for newer and/or particularly isolated communities as it can be difficult to initially form relationships with other communities. Such restrictions should be reconsidered under particular circumstances.
- A database of community groups and leaders involved in music, dance, drama and sport could provide new, emerging and isolated communities with the necessary access to information about other communities and groups to form linkages and partnerships.
- More can be done to promote sources of funding, such as building up the information already available through the VMC/OMAC website.
- To encourage more interaction between local councils, sporting centres and large sporting clubs should work together to organise and promote community events that bring together people of different cultural and religious backgrounds.
- To further enhance cultural diversity and social cohesion, an informal scouting network could recruit talented social players for organised competitive sport.

## **MMYN Projects**

The MMYN has been involved in a number of initiatives and projects that allowed members to voice the importance of interfaith and intercultural dialogue; raise awareness around cultural and religious diversity and youth concerns; and build leadership skills.

### **Ubuntu Youth Stage at Viva Victoria**

In March 2013, the Ubuntu Youth Stage was held for the third year running, and was again part of the Viva Victoria celebration held at Federation Square. The 2013 Ubuntu Youth Stage was dedicated to some of Victoria's most talented young performers, including Limgs 2 Riddims, Esendadus Squad, EE'DA, the Skin Choir, Te Honoga n Nga Iwi, Haily Cramer, Team and Pataphysics.

Ubuntu is part of a South African phase, "Ununtu ngumuntu ngabantu", which means that a person is a person through other people. It is a philosophy based on common humanity, oneness and the belief that our external differences sometimes disguise our internal sameness.

Ubuntu was established in 2011 by a former MMYN member who wanted to see a youth-led initiative incorporated into the Viva Victoria celebration. Each year since, the Ubuntu stage has been largely planned and delivered by the MMYN members, several of whom have worked with Multicultural Arts Victoria as assistant stage managers, learning valuable skills and contributing to a fun day for all Victorians.

### **New Arrivals Survival Guide**

In 2008, the MMYN, together with the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Office for Youth and the Western Young People's Independent Network, developed the New Arrival Survival Guide. The Guide has been a valuable resource for people who are newly arrived to Australia, and struggling to navigate the various facets of life in a new country (e.g. public

transport, education, services, etc.). This year, a five-person team took on the task of updating the Guide to bring it in line with the changes of the last few years. On top of the existing chapters on support services, public transport, employment , education and budgeting, a section on leisure activities was added. Also, a new cover and look has been devised by a member of the group. The Guide will be made available on the multicultural.vic.gov.au website and the MMYN Facebook page, and circulated to OMAC and VMC's networks.

## **Regional Youth Leadership and Victoria University Workshops**

This term the MMYN delivered a series of workshops that enabled members to present to and engage with other young people around issues of faith diversity and identity. This occurred through two Regional Youth Leadership Workshops and three Victoria University Seminars. The first Regional Youth Leadership Workshop was held in Geelong in July with Diversitat. Participating MMYN members facilitated this workshop for a group of 15 young

people aged 16 to 20 from newly arrived communities; discussion focused on religious and cultural diversity in Victoria. This proved to be a unique experience for the MMYN as many in the audience were from non-English speaking backgrounds.



Feedback from Asia, an MMYN member who participated in the Geelong workshop:

*“It is a very different experience for myself and the two MMYN members, as the youth in the group had language barriers. It is a very interesting experience and different to the [Victoria University workshop] but worked out well. They asked questions with curiosity and had so much interest in the content we delivered. we enjoyed their company, will definitely do it again.”*

In August, the MMYN visited Traralgon to deliver a second Regional Youth Leadership Workshop on religious and cultural diversity; in addition to the MMYN members, 16 young people attended. Participating MMYN members reported a similarly positive experience, compared to the Geelong workshop.

Feedback from Oussama, an MMYN member who participated in the Traralgon workshop:

*“That trip was the highlight of my involvement with the MMYN, never have I seen such devotion and commitment from such young people.  
What was good: everyone was involved, really passionate of their beliefs and faith and this made them much more confident speakers.  
Some observations: for those with no ethic background, you could see how interested and keen they are to learn more about our faiths. Everybody will have a different story, with a different background, and yet we can all share a meal”*

*together! Sounds cliché but it was a great night for multiculturalism in "tararararalgon"."*

In addition to the Regional Youth Leadership Workshops, the MMYN was also invited to Victoria University to talk to students undertaking a social work degree, and studying a unit dealing with working with diverse young people. The MMYN presented to three separate classes in April and October 2013. Participating MMYN members delivered a short presentation on the religious diversity within the membership, and provided an opportunity for small group discussions on topics such as mental health, religious awareness, growing up (ethnically, religiously, culturally) different, spirituality, negativity towards atheism and religious practices. It was an excellent occasion for an exchange of ideas and robust discussion of what it means to be religious in a time when an increasing proportion of people claim to follow no religion (2011 Census). Feedback from the lecturers was highly positive.

### **Multifaith Advisory Group**

The MMYN continues to participate in the Multifaith Advisory Group (MAG). Select MMYN members attended MAG meetings in June and October 2013, where they had the opportunity to participate in discussions and offer a youth perspective on asylum seekers, extremism in diverse religious communities and a range of community issues. The MMYN hopes to continue to contribute to the work of the MAG.

## **Training and Skills developments**

### **Networking Training**

In May 2013, the MMYN received training in networking. The training was delivered by Ms Belinda Cohen of *Inspired Reality*, and provided information and practical exercises to build good networking skills. Participating MMYN members reported that the training was very helpful and provided attendees with greater confidence to engage with other people. Belinda was informative and full of tips and strategies to network successfully. MMYN members learnt about the importance of personal branding, to 'pay it forward' (the principle of professional generosity) and self-perception.

### **Feedback and comments about the workshop:**

*"The way the instructor really got us to focus on the way to network and the ease with which it can be done."*

*"The instructor, see how she talks and facilitates and presents the whole seminar. She remembers issues presented by each individual and generously helps each individual to solve their issue."*

### **What did they learn on the day?**

*"Not to make assumptions of what people think of you."*

*"Strategies for communication and building rapport."*

*"Personal branding. I think that was the most important for me. I really [felt] empowered after this session."*

## MMYN Events and Ambassadors

### Premier's Gala Dinner

Four members of the MMYN (Vishnu Chari, Maharous Wagdi Ahmed, Hanisha Sharma-Lital and Nafisa Yussf) attended the annual Premier's Gala Dinner, which was held on Saturday 16 March 2013 at the Crown Palladium. Representatives from across government, the private sector and diverse faith and cultural communities were in attendance. The dinner was a fabulous celebration of the different stories, art and traditions which are now part of Victoria.

### Other involvement

Each MMYN member brings with them a wealth of knowledge, experience and interests. Thus, all members contribute to not only the MMYN's projects and activities, but are also active in a variety of other activities outside of the MMYN.

### NEMBC Radio Active Youth Forum

Mahidiya Monis, currently enrolled in Bachelor of Arts and majoring in Journalism at Deakin University, attended the NEMBC Radio Active Youth Forum. The forum was a full day event held on Saturday 27 April, at The Multicultural Hub. There she had the opportunity to engage with:

- Auskar Surbakti, an award-winning journalist from the ABC, who has worked at SBS as a television news reporter. Auskar talked about his breadth of experience working in the media and as a journalist.
- Georgia Moodi from SYN Media, and currently a journalist for Radio National, who talked about alternative ways to gain wider audiences (e.g. radio documentary production).
- Mohammed El-Leissy, a Melbourne-based comedian, community worker and former contestant of the Amazing Race Australia. Mohammed talked about how to get your voice heard in mainstream media.

Mahidiya gained great tips and advice from these experienced media experts.

### National Youth Awards

The inaugural National Youth Awards event was held in Adelaide, South Australia on 6 August 2013. The MMYN's very own Joel Kuperholz was nominated for the Cultural Understanding Award category. While there, Joel had a chance to network with likeminded young people from across Australia, and met inspirational people from all Australian states and territories.

### Australia Day Youth Leader Workshop

Organised by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Australia Day Youth Leader Workshop was organised to find out what young people think about the following:



- Being Australian – what does it mean as an individual? What does it mean in your community? Do you think there are special or unique aspects of being Australian? Are there special Australian values?
- Australia Day – do you think it stands for something, and if so what? Are there any special associations with the day?
- If you thought something would make being Australian or Australia Day mean more or be something better, what would it be?

Two MMYN members, Annto Hassen and David Sibenaler, joined with other young Victorians to discuss these issues and found the process to be illuminating and rewarding.

## **MMYN Looking Forward!**

The MMYN had a busy 2013, and is looking forward to welcoming its new members soon. While it has been a lot of hard work, it has also been fun, fulfilling and eye-opening. Thanks to everyone who participated in the projects for this year and your dedication in making things happen!