



# MMYN Annual Report 2015

**Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network**  
[www.multicultural.vic.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au)

DEPARTMENT OF  
PREMIER AND CABINET





## Who is the MMYN?

The Multicultural Multifaith Youth Network (MMYN) completes its eighth term this November, 2015. The MMYN has been advising the Victorian government on key issues affecting young culturally and religiously diverse young people since 2007. The MMYN has been engaged in a range of activities, consultations and initiatives that have allowed members to foster understanding and respect within the Network's membership, as well as with the wider community. Alongside these activities the MMYN maintains its advisory role through the publishing of an annual report.

The MMYN experience is exciting, diverse, challenging and meaningful. The work that MMYN members have and are producing has increased the Network's profile within the Victorian Government and wider community. Each year members join the network bringing with them fresh ideas, passion, enthusiasm and a genuine desire to effect change. MMYN provides young diverse Victorians with the opportunity to become more involved with government and the decision making process.

With the continued support of Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC), the MMYN will continue to bridge the gap between the Government and Victoria's multicultural and multifaith young people. The MMYN will continue to advocate on priority issues identified by its members and other young Victorians, and work to increase understanding between Victorians from different faiths and cultures.





## What they've been up to

The quality of applicants for membership in 2015 was record breaking, all of whom wanted to give back to the community whilst working with other talented individuals. The group underwent a two day induction, allowing members to understand other cultures, probe interfaith topics and gain deeper perspective into government.

### Induction Day

#### New cohort meets second year cohort

Sunday 8 and Thursday 12 March

Over two days, MMYN members got a chance to meet new people and renew old friendships. The two days were a mix of interfaith training, work-shopping of project ideas and team bonding exercises. Induction day enabled new members to familiarise themselves with the MMYN and the standards expected of them as members.



Once again, InterAction provided training to arm the MMYN with tools to assist with engaging with young people through interfaith dialogue. It was great fun yet also very thought provoking as we undertook role play to look at different sides of the same issue (such as racism, bullying and discrimination).

Matt Campbell, the MMYN facilitator, also provided us with some principles to focus on as we planned topics for our working groups.



### Cultural Diversity Week

#### Premier's Gala Dinner

Saturday 14 March

The Premier's Gala Dinner is a grand celebration that showcases the different stories, art and traditions which are now part of Victoria. The annual celebration brings together representatives from across



government, the private sector and community members from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds to support Victoria's multicultural and multifaith focus. This year ten MMYN members were invited to attend the Premier's Gala Dinner during Cultural Diversity Week festivities.

## **Youth Leadership and Community Engagement**

### **Victoria University Workshop with Youth Work Students**

Monday 4 May, Tuesday 5 May

Monday 17 August, Tuesday 18 August

Once again, the MMYN was invited to run Interfaith workshops at Victoria University. For three years now the MMYN has been delivering interfaith workshops to youth work students at the university to assist students to understand the nuances of working with youth from CALD backgrounds. The presentations looked at Victoria's religious diversity and discusses issues relevant to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

This year, MMYN presenters chose to share their refugee and migrant stories with the students. These stories represented triumph over adversity and showed strong resilience in the face of settlement issues faced by themselves and their families. The students were encouraged to ask questions of the presenters that were sometimes difficult but we hope leads to a better understanding of some of the barriers and challenges faced by young migrants and refugee youth.

### **Youth Leadership Workshop**

Saturday 13 June

Four MMYN members took part in the Youth Empowerment and Leadership Workshop organized by the Interfaith Centre. This was a one-day, non-religious, apolitical, free workshop facilitated by the Venerable Chang Ji, a Buddhist nun. The Workshop is about youth from all backgrounds and the common fears and stresses that inhibit their potential leadership.



## Multicultural Youth Roundtable

Friday 29 May

Alongside the university and school engagements, the biggest success of the year was the organisation and facilitation of the Multicultural Roundtable with the Minister of Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Robin Scott. This event brought the MMYN together with representatives from the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC), the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and other local youth leaders around the state. The discussion was around the top three issues:

- i) identity and sense of belonging for CALD youth;
- ii) education and awareness; and
- iii) enhancing health and wellbeing for CALD youth.



Participants highlighted the intergenerational gap within CALD communities, the management of dual identities, the role of the media and access to education and health care as areas of key concern. Throughout the discussion, they also identified racism and social cohesion as recurring themes which impacted the ability of CALD youth to participate in Australian life and community.

The roundtable was an opportunity for the Minister to hear the honest opinions and perspectives of concerned young people around the state. The occasion was very well received by the minister and other government representatives in attendance and it is hoped that the information gathered will be used to inform decisions made by the State Government for the benefit of the Victorian multicultural community.

## Office for Youth Consultation meeting on Youth Policy Framework

Wednesday 7 October

The MMYN participated in the consultation process for the development of the Office for Youth's Youth Policy, to ensure that the issues CALD youth are well represented. The key areas of concern were education, employment, training, mental health and transport with a secondary emphasis placed on alcohol and drug (abuse), discrimination and housing. A range



of other topics were also discussed that focused on supporting young people from refugee backgrounds to successfully resettle in Victoria.

The Youth Policy will focus on strengthening young people's engagement in the design and implementation of government policies and programs that affect them. Engaging in the consultation process guarantees that CALD youth have a space within the framework that safeguards their needs and concerns during the decision making process. The Youth Policy is set to become a vital part of how the Victorian Government will target future investment in youth services and programs. The MMYN's participation will ensure CALD youth are not overlooked.

## **Bendigo Interfaith Council Meeting**

Thursday 8 October

The MMYN was invited to attend the Bendigo Interfaith Council (BIC) meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. Given the social tension that have arisen this year in regards to the anti-Mosque campaigns in the town, the BIC was looking to increase greater knowledge and understanding between faith communities. The MMYN was invited to talk about their approach and experience in sharing interfaith knowledge with young people. BIC and the MMYN are looking to collaborate on three school forum to discuss interfaith issues in 2016.

## **Reports**

This year, MMYN members undertook research on a variety of issues of significant importance, to multicultural and multifaith young people across Victoria. The members also provided recommendations to these issues that have the potential to create a greater sense of community and belonging amongst Victorians.

## **Environments**

Group Members: Rachel Davies, Phillip Liberatore, Megan Liew, Tony Luo, Thilini Meemanage.

The group identified the environment and the effects of climate change as an area where people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have limited knowledge. They realize that educating CaLD communities about the environment has the potential to unify the community. As all members of the Victorian community have a vested interest in the maintenance and survival of the environment, the creation of a goal which focuses on preserving the environment is a positive way to create harmony within the community. The group recognised the potential that caring for the environment had in helping migrants develop a relationship with Australia and the Australian landscape, it can assist with the resettlement process as connections, a greater sense of purpose and belonging are created.



Initiatives that will help both migrants and locals connect with the environment are an opportunity to explore new intercultural relationships within communities. The group has recommended that education, settlement and intercultural relationship building as areas to promote environmental sustainability cross-culturally.



## **Refugee Sexual Health**

Thursday 23 April

Group Members: Monica Forson, Francis Ha, Shabnam Safa, Alcyone Alphonse, Lucy Williams, Ronit Travers.

The group dedicated their research to the accessibility of sexual health resources for refugee youth. Sexual health awareness and access amongst the refugee population needs to be prioritised as there are very few programs operating at a youth level to engender sexual health literacy and understanding. The group believes that it is important to prioritise sexual health education in Victorian schools. It has been posited that education will encourage open discussion around sexual health in multicultural and multifaith communities. Sexual Health promotions should be directed at secondary school aged children and it should be made a key issue on the public agenda. The group would also like to see the Minister for Multicultural Affairs advocate for greater funding and support for sexual health initiatives around community-based peer-education.

## **Beliefs and Value Education**

Tuesday 25 August

Group Members: Rida Aleem Khan, Naima Hassen, Priya 'Sash' Lal, Arif Hazara, Sagar Gandhi

The group identified the issue of bullying on the basis of one's religious and cultural belief system in schools. As such they have proposed a comprehensive program that is centred on interfaith dialogue among youth, catered to secondary students (Years 7, 8 and 9) to tackle this form of bullying. The objective of the Beliefs and Values Program is to confront the root



cause of intolerance by identifying millennials as the target audience currently dealing with issues such as bullying, identity crises, negative media stereotypes. The program intends to positively influence thousands of Victorian secondary school students.

## **Social Cohesion**

Tuesday 25 August

Group Members: Justin Chua, Matin Ayubi, Priya Serrao, Farazana Shariffie, Vincent Giuliani, Madeleine Calleja

The group dedicated their research to the topical issue of social cohesion, with a focus on its role in preventing and countering violent extremism. The group proposes that the medium of storytelling and the creation of alternative narratives has the potential to reduce social divisions and isolations of minority communities and help deter at risk individuals. In order to foster a strong sense of social cohesion there needs to be avenues where stereotypes and misconceptions built around certain communities can be countered. It is through the power of constructing alternative narratives that is key in creating a cohesive society that would nurture a collective identity of a diverse and unified Australia. The intent behind alternative narratives is to increase awareness and improve dialogue within the Victorian community. The group recommends that state government develop public and political narratives through social media campaigns, public forums and government participation in religious and multifaith events.

## **Special Guests/ Guest Speakers**

### **Mark Duckworth**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, Special guest Mark Duckworth (Chief Resilience Officer, Community Resilience Unit [CRU]) spoke about the work of the new CRU which supports the implementation of the Government's work in social cohesion, community resilience and countering violent extremism.

This presentation was particularly timely as one of the MMYN working groups focused their interest on social cohesion in Victoria. As a result, this group was able to engage with the CRU and invite them to be part of their presentation at a following meeting.

### **Therese Robinson and Paul Waite**

Two members of the CRU were invited by the social cohesion working group to describe the current background to the social cohesion initiatives of the Victorian State Government. They also presented a draft of the strategic direction for the CRU and asked MMYN for feedback.



The relationship between MMYN and the CRU has also strengthened with the appointment of current member Rachel Davies and alumni Zuben Rustomjee, Oussama Abou-zeid and Safa Almahourn to the advisory group which provides advice to the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce on current and emerging issues related to social cohesion and community resilience.

## MMYN 2016

The MMYN is looking forward to another passion fuelled year as there will be opportunities for members to develop youth-led projects focusing on what they believe is important to multicultural and multifaith young people across Victoria. The MMYN will be more active in promoting interfaith understanding and are looking forward to sharing their faith and culture with more Victorians. Thank you to everyone who participated in the projects for this year and your commitment for making the year a success!



**MMYN Members 2016:**

2<sup>nd</sup> Year Members

Alcyone "Ally" Alphonse  
Justin Chua  
Rachael Davies  
Monica Forson  
Tony Luo  
Shabnam Safa  
Farzana Shariffe

1<sup>st</sup> Year Members

Matin Ayubi  
Madeleine Calleja  
Sagar Ghandi  
Vincent Giuliani  
Francis Ha  
Naima Hassen  
Arif Hazara  
  
Rida Aleem Khan  
Priya "Sash" Lal  
Philip Liberatore  
Megan Liew  
Thilini Meemanage  
Mary Nega  
Priya Olivia Serrao  
Ronit Travers  
Lucy William  
Elesha Williams