



Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

Mid-Term Report to the Minister



Please consider the environment before printing this document.

Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

Overview

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) entered its third term in October 2009 with eleven members continuing their term and 14 new members joining from a wide range of cultural and faith backgrounds.

The MMYN have been busy in 2010, engaging in a range of activities, consultations, initiatives and projects that have allowed members to discuss and promote understanding within the Network and in the wider community. Alongside such activities the Network's advisory role to Government will continue to be a key focus throughout 2010.

The work of the MMYN in 2010 has made for an exciting time, resulting in a raised profile for the Network: both within government and the community. It is anticipated that this momentum will continue to build in the remainder of the term and all members will maintain an active role. Looking forward, the Network with assistance from the VMC will seek to develop a bigger profile within government and the community.

This Report provides a snapshot of the work and experiences of the MMYN in the first half of its third term (October 2009 to June 2010).

The Network

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) has had three meetings in its third term: October 2009, February and April 2010.

We were also fortunate to have an opportunity to meet with the Premier on the 4th November 2009. These meetings have provided the MMYN with the opportunity to discuss issues and initiatives that affect young Victorians from diverse backgrounds with each other and with senior government representatives. They also provide a chance to develop friendships and strengthen networks. The role of MMYN Chair and co-Chair continue to be rotated between members providing us all with an opportunity to develop leadership and communications skills.



Key Issues

The MMYN's first meeting of its third term on the 23rd of October 2009 at the Melbourne Town Hall presented an opportunity for a broad discussion around issues impacting community harmony in Victoria. We were pleased to be able to present a range of issues to you as Minister for Youth and Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs at this meeting.

During the course of the subsequent three meetings, MMYN members have highlighted a range of other issues that are pertinent to them. Identifying these issues has assisted in forming greater direction and focus for future MMYN meetings and possible projects.

Police, violence and young people

The MMYN is aware of issues around increasing police interaction with young people, especially those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. While acknowledging that significant steps have been taken in the past 10 years and there has been an increase in proactive policing and community engagement, issues around the cultural sensitivity of police and the level of training in cultural awareness and competency remain a concern.

Mental health, drugs and alcohol

Too often today we are seeing headline stories of youth negatively portrayed in the media for use of drugs and alcohol. There is a lack of recognition and sympathy in the wider community about mental health issues experienced by young people which might be a symptom or cause of this behaviour. There are a growing number of young people who are suffering from mental health related issues. The MMYN is concerned about mental health issues endured by young people and the challenges they face including labelling, bullying and stigmatisation which continue to have a negative impact on their personal growth and development.

Refugee and New Emerging Communities

Issues facing refugee and newly arrived communities are at the heart of the MMYN, with some of its members either representing these communities or working with them. The MMYN will continue to advocate for equality and social inclusion amongst all Victorians and in particular, young people.

Racism

The MMYN is concerned by the Foundation for Young Australians' report *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians* which concluded that over 80% of participants from non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds reported being subjected to some form of racism. The MMYN is committed to addressing these issues with policy makers and will continue to be involved in grassroots projects, such as the MMYN Schools Tour, to improve cross-cultural understanding and address poor attitudes towards diversity.



Social Equality

Also raised during MMYN discussions has been the issue of whether Government multicultural policy could do more to address social inequality and disparities. It has been raised that a prominent focus on ensuring community harmony may have overtaken a focus on addressing other systemic issues. To further strengthen the impact of Multicultural policy in Victoria, members of the MMYN recommend that community harmony and cohesion be addressed through the enhancement of social welfare, increased access to services, and closing socio-economic gaps experienced by marginalised and minority cultural groups.

Alongside this, some MMYN members have noted that diversity in the Victorian public sector could be more reflective of the general population and that strengthening this diversity could ensure that Government policy and services are formed and delivered with the knowledge, understanding and sensitivity to effectively respond to the needs of all members of the Victorian community.

Policy and Advocacy

The MMYN will continue to take an active role in advocating their views to Government. The members of the MMYN will submit a range of policy considerations to Government in their final report in late 2010. The MMYN hope that by doing so, issues identified through MMYN meetings, discussions and

consultations will feed into tangible policy objectives and outcomes on the issues of concern to young people and diverse ethnic and religious communities.

International Students

The MMYN have identified issues faced by international students in relation to personal safety at night, on public transport and in public spaces. Other challenges faced by international students include housing, employment, transport and racism which have an impact on their rights and livelihoods of international students in Australia. The MMYN aims to further consider and consult on this issue and deliver advice to government on ways to ensure the safety and welfare of international students living in Victoria.

MMYN Projects

The MMYN have been involved in a range of initiatives and projects which have seen members participate in many ways to further voice the importance of interfaith and intercultural dialogue and addressing issues of concern to young people.

2010 MMYN Schools Tour

The second MMYN Schools Tour was held in May 2010 in Bendigo. Organised and facilitated by nine members of the MMYN, the tour was held in partnership with the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. The tour provided an opportunity to engage in dialogue about diversity in faith and culture in the context of human rights at a regional school.

Approximately fifty Year 9 and 10 students from Bendigo East Secondary College participated in the program and listened to MMYN members talking openly about their faith and cultural backgrounds. The Network encouraged questions and engaged in open dialogue with the students over the three sessions on faith, culture and human rights.



Feedback from the day was collected, confirming the success of the program, with many students calling for the program to be implemented in schools everywhere.

Diversity in Health Conference

In June 2010, members of the MMYN were invited to present a paper on Multifaith Issues at the Centre of Culture, Ethnicity and Health's Diversity in Health Conference 2010.

Three MMYN members spoke openly on their personal experiences and how they engage with their respective faiths. Specifically they spoke about:

- Engaging in faith-based practices such as meditation to improve mental health and well-being;
- Using messages from faith traditions as a basis to advocate for social justice and upholding human rights; and
- Issues and challenges facing local and international students.

Their address was well-received and provided valuable insight into the attitudes and perceptions of young people from various faith communities and experiences.

Swan Hill Youth Forum

As part of National Youth Week 2010, the Swan Hill Youth Forum was an exclusive event for young people to discuss issues around the theme Identity and Place. The forum was held in partnership with the Office for Youth, the Victorian Indigenous Youth Affairs Council and The Ministerial Youth Advisory Committee.

Representatives from each of these organisations worked collaboratively to plan, organise, implement and facilitate the Forum. It was attended by over 60 young people and provided them with a rare opportunity to come together and speak about what's important to them. Participants walked away with a feeling of empowerment and knowledge that they could voice their concerns without fear of intimidation and that they would be listened to.

The Forum provided a great networking opportunity for participants, particularly between people from regional and metropolitan areas. It was successful in providing a space where young people could learn more about each others' similarities and differences and break down barriers between young people and adults.

Young People and Violence Forum

In February, MMYN members participated in the "Impact of Violence on Young Australians" Youth Forum which formed part of the Violence and Young People Parliamentary Inquiry, conducted by the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth. The forum explored issues around perceptions and causes of violent behaviour among young people.

Violence was identified as something that effects young people right from primary school age, through to university and beyond in the form of bullying, peer pressure, greater use of technology, family problems and insecurity. Recommendations made by participants included stronger government focus on social cohesion programs, and interventions to reduce violence in all arenas including schools, workplaces, households, and public spaces.

Consultation

Victoria Police consultation

In April 2010, Commander of the Victoria Police Operations Coordination Department, Ashley Dickinson, and two Multicultural Liaison Officers, gave an overview of their roles and the history of proactive policing and police community engagement strategies in Victoria.

Members of the MMYN acknowledged and applauded these steps but wanted to outline perceptions of police that some young people share including:

- Issues around racism and the need for more targeted cultural training of police;
- Police presence, particularly on public transport and in areas of high criminal activity;
- Public perceptions of international students, and violence in Melbourne; and
- Addressing the needs of young people in contact with the juvenile justice system.



The MMYN hopes to remain a consultative body on issues around young people and perceptions of police to Victoria Police, and the Victorian Government.

MMYN Ambassadors

Representatives of the MMYN have been actively involved in a range of activities and events over the past eight months including:

- *Parliament of the World's Religions*. A number of MMYN members both attended the Parliament in December 2009, and were representatives on the Parliament Youth Committee and acted as Youth Patrons of the Parliament.

- *Premier's Gala Dinner.* MMYN members were invited to attend the Premier's Gala Dinner during Cultural Diversity Week in March. This was a great honour for the members to be invited to celebrate Victoria's diversity with cultural and faith leaders in Victoria.
- *Viva Victoria.* Representatives from the MMYN volunteered at the Viva Victoria Festival in March. The showcasing of cultures and splendid performances highlighted the richness of diversity in Victoria.
- *Buddha's Day Forum.* The Buddha's Day Light Festival took place in May to celebrate Buddhism in Victoria. Members of the MMYN were represented on a forum panel where young people from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds shared their views on faith.
- *Swinburne Punjabi Club.* To encourage cultural understanding among different communities Swinburne's Punjabi Club held Vaisakhi festival celebrations in Hawthorn in May. MMYN representatives attended the celebrations to help promote and support the Punjabi and international student community.
- *White Lion Youth Justice Forum.* MMYN members attended the White Lion Youth Justice Forum: Bail Me Up or Bail Me Out in May. Issues faced by young people in the Youth Justice system were raised. Debates that examined the benefits to the community of 'locking up' troubled youth versus rehabilitating them back into the community were extremely insightful.
- *Centre for Multicultural Youth Forum: Violence through the Eyes of Young People* MMYN representatives were involved in organising and participating in the Violence through the Eyes of Young People Forum in May. It provided an opportunity for young people from diverse backgrounds to express how they are affected by violence and explored issues and solutions with representatives from the media, justice and education sectors.
- *Australian Youth Representative to the UN General Assembly.* Members of the MMYN participated in the Victorian consultations for the 2010 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations in June. Issues around Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, climate change mitigation, housing affordability, student income support and educational access, bullying in schools, religious freedom and discrimination and civics education were explored and will be tabled in a report to the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

Future Focus

The progress of the MMYN over the first half of this term has been enormous. New members have brought a renewed energy and new dimension to the Network, which will be looking to address issues outlined in this report in 2010/11.

It is anticipated that the MMYN will further explore issues around:

- The experiences of international students;
- Refugee and new and emerging communities;
- Mental health of young people; and
- Drugs and alcohol

The Network will continue to undertake and participate in a range of initiatives and activities in 2010 and will submit a detailed Annual Report to yourself and the Premier in November 2010, along with evaluations of the 2010 MMYN Schools Tour and the MMYN as a whole.