



Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

Annual Report to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship 2012



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MINISTER'S REPORT 2012

Overview

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) will complete its fifth term in October 2012. The MMYN continues to advise the government on issues affecting young people from culturally and religiously diverse communities. The MMYN has engaged in a range of activities, consultations, initiatives and projects that have allowed members to discuss and promote understanding within the Network as well as in the wider community. Alongside such activities, the Network's advisory role to Government will continue to be a key focus in 2012-13.



The work of the MMYN in 2011-12 has been exciting, diverse, challenging and meaningful. This work has raised the profile of the Network, within government, among young Victorians and throughout the wider community. It is anticipated that this momentum will continue to build in future years as the Network continues to grow and prosper. It is hoped that all MMYN members, both new and old, incoming and outgoing will maintain an active role and continue to be involved in the opportunities offered through

participation in the MMYN.

The Network, with continuous support from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC), has developed a greater role in providing a link between government and the community in relation to youth, multifaith and multicultural issues.

This Report provides a snapshot of the work and experiences of the MMYN since October 2011.

MMYN Structure in 2012

In 2012, the structure of the MMYN allowed for greater emphasis on the MMYN's role as an advisory body. This meant that the MMYN were given more autonomy in identifying and developing proposals and recommendations on issues decided solely by the group. Research into these issues, content of meetings and consultations on chosen issues was undertaken entirely by three MMYN working groups, formed at the outset of the 2012 term. The chosen topics of interest identified by 2012 term MMYN members were: Education, Mental Health and Youth Justice.

Network Meetings

The MMYN had five meetings in its fifth term. These meetings took place in November and December 2011, and February, May and August 2012. Meetings provided MMYN members with the opportunity to both formulate working groups around identified issues of importance (in the two 2011 meetings), and explore, analyse and discuss these issues during three meetings in 2012. The issues-focused meetings provided a platform for the MMYN to construct and refine recommendations to Government.

The first meeting of the fifth term, was held on 15 November. This meeting provided an opportunity to thank outgoing MMYN members, and to introduce incoming members to the Network. On 8

December 2011, the MMYN met again to workshop and discuss issues they wished to focus on throughout their term. Supported by a facilitator, members used this time to brainstorm issues of importance, and at the conclusion of the meeting, decided on three topics, each with a working group. With the support of OMAC, each working group was responsible for planning and delivering a meeting to explore their issues and present it to the rest of the MMYN. Recommendations and advice on the issues from the MMYN have been submitted to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship throughout 2012.

Meetings also provided an opportunity for the MMYN to meet with members of the community and representatives from government. In 2011-12 the MMYN met with a range of representatives including: VMC Chairperson Mr Chin Tan, OMAC Director Mr Hakan Akyol, representatives from the Flemington Kensington Legal Centre, Deakin University and Monash University. MMYN meetings also gave members a chance to develop friendships, strengthen networks and share ideas.

MMYN Focus Issues and Working Group Meetings

Youth Justice

The MMYN is committed to addressing the issue of racism in our communities.

The MMYN Youth Justice group worked with Tamar Hopkins of the Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre to explore and gain insight into the issue of racial profiling in the police force and racially-motivated violence. On Tuesday 4 September, the Youth Justice Group chaired a meeting with the rest of the MMYN to discuss the complexity and scope of this issue and explore methods of recourse through the legal system and avenues of complaint. During the meeting, the MMYN brainstormed ideas and aimed to form proposals that were realistic, implementable & enforceable and will improve upon the current situation. In summary, the MMYN proposes that the Victorian Government consider:



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- the introduction of a Victoria Police stop and search receipting policy, allowing members of the public to be issued a receipt when they are stopped by police; and the collection of data on stop and search; and
- initiating an inquiry into the extent, potential causes and nature of racial profiling within Victoria Police, and possible linkages to training methods and materials.

Education

On 27 July 2012, the MMYN working group on education hosted a meeting to discuss issues related to the distinct topics of disrupted education of young people from new and emerging communities, and interfaith and intercultural education in Victorian government schools. The meeting invited guest speaker Dr Anna Halafoff, Research Fellow with the Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University to discuss her research on intercultural and interreligious relations and beliefs education in Victorian schools, and her role as a member of the Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia. MMYN member Rama Ahmadi and MMYN General Secretary Nasro Yusuf also shared their thoughts and perspectives on their experience as high school students from refugee backgrounds. As a result of these valuable and insightful dialogues, the MMYN formulated and endorsed recommendations. In summary, they ask that the Government consider:

- comprehensive mandatory training for teachers working with young people of refugee backgrounds who have experienced disrupted education;
- funding a mentoring program that links young people who have experienced disrupted education to young leaders in tertiary education or the workforce to provide support and knowledge and share experiences; and
- advocating to the Commonwealth and influencing Victorian agencies to incorporate relevant topics (culture, belief systems, values and faith diversity) into the new national curriculum.



Mental Health

MMYN members were aware of the mental health issues in Australian society, particularly the lack of awareness about mental health and stigma attached to mental ill-health. The MMYN therefore decided to investigate particular incidences of mental health problems amongst CALD youth. After considering myriad mental health issues facing young people, the group chose to focus on mental health issues experienced by culturally diverse LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer) young people. This was identified as a particularly important topic because

of the various associated issues that can intersect and cause pressure, which can lead to depression amongst young CALD people. Such possible factors include racism amongst the LGBTIQ community, lack of education about the LGBTIQ community, and homophobia amongst CALD communities and the public generally.

On 26 June 2012, the Mental Health Group hosted a meeting with the rest of the MMYN. The meeting included guest speakers Maria Palotta-Chiarolli of Deakin University and writer Lian Low, to provide context and background to the issue, and explored the struggle to balance and reconcile one's multiple identities (including racial and sexual identities). In order to gain input from each MMYN member on the issue, a 'world café' workshop style was used, starting with the issues, and working them through to reach recommendations by the end of the meeting. As a result the MMYN asked the Government to consider:

- exploring the possibility of developing a broad advertisement campaign promoting human rights and anti-discrimination;
- funding community-based programs that emphasise multicultural and multifaith acceptance and understanding within the GLBTIQ community;
- the inclusion of material relating to human rights, GLBTIQ issues and non-discrimination across all subjects in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards curriculum; and
- ensuring diverse representation of ages, cultures and faiths on the Government's new Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Health and Wellbeing.

MMYN Projects

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

MMYN Regional School Tour

A group of current and alumni MMYN members travelled to Ballarat High School for our regional school tour program, with the aim of bringing multicultural and multifaith dialogues to regional secondary school students. The program of the day featured open-minded conversations between MMYN members and students on a wide range of culture and religious practices. There were also inspiring and passionate discussions on the role of faith and science in lives.



Furthermore, MMYN member, Victor Victor delivered a spoken word

performance from the perspective of an aspiring young man from a refugee background. Victor's conviction and optimism won applause and admiration from the students. In addition, students were invited to explore ideas about how to resolve cultural and religious conflicts that may arise. The day-long program received much positive feedback from students which suggesting that they found the program informative and motivating. The MMYN will continue to build on the good reputation of this program and are excited to deliver the Schools Tour Project in future terms.

Ubuntu Youth Stage at Viva Victoria

For the second year running, the Ubuntu youth stage was again part of the Viva Victoria celebration, held at Federation Square, on 25 March. The term Ubuntu comes from the South African phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which means that a person is a person through other people. Ubuntu is a philosophy based on common humanity, oneness and the belief that our external differences sometimes disguise our internal sameness.

The concept of Ubuntu was created by former MMYN members, who wanted to see a youth-led initiative incorporated into the Viva Victoria celebration. The Ubuntu stage was not only created by



the MMYN but is also planned and delivered by MMYN members.

The Ubuntu youth stage hosted 12 diverse acts in 2012, continuing its previous success. The stage closed with the same message it was founded on, leaving Melbournians with a reminder of our shared values despite religious, cultural and physical differences.

"You and me, we're the same,

really." = UBUNTU

Owning Racism - Can We Talk: Symposium at the Immigration Museum

The Immigration Museum's Owning Racism –Can we Talk? Symposium was a two day event held on 23 and 24 August 2012, which brought together an array of interested groups to explore the contentious issue of racism in Australia. The youth breakout session was hosted and delivered with the participation of four MMYN members who planned and facilitated a series of discussions. The discussion explored the concept of structural racism encountered by visible migrant Australian youths in Victoria. The session identified and spoke to the manifestations of structural racism experienced by young people in Victoria. The panellists discussed how we, as Australians, engage with the concepts of faith, race, discrimination and the interplay of these factors within the context of Victoria as experienced by youth. The MMYN's participation in the symposium invited participants and observers to challenge our attitudes on an uncomfortable and rarely spoken about conversation on racism in Australia that is a reality for visible minorities in Victoria.

Training and Skills Development

MMYN members took advantage of a range of training and skill-building opportunities in 2012. The sourcing of training opportunities was informed by feedback from MMYN members during their initial consultation meetings late in 2011. As a result of discussion and time spent identifying the anticipated needs of the MMYN in 2012, training in Media and Communications and Interfaith and Intercultural Awareness was made available for all members of the MMYN.

Cultural Sensitivity and Interfaith training

On 12 April 2012 MMYN members were afforded the opportunity to undertake cultural and religious sensitivity training. InterAction, a youth organization operating to promote cultural and spiritual diversity through leadership and empowerment of young people, conducted a full day of training consisting of four workshops on the following themes: **Religious Literacy**, an exploration of **cultural & religious identity** and what it means to us personally. Participants developed an action plan for their ongoing learning about diversity. **Shared Values**: the workshop explored core values of the participants and finding shared values in the group through open discussion. Also **Dialogue Facilitation**: where participants developed dialogue skills, covering basic conflict resolution and how to address challenging or resistant attitudes and behaviours in everyday life. **Making Change**: in this workshop the participants explored their vision for a better world and learned about the mechanisms for taking their vision and making it a reality.

This day was a great success and MMYN members learnt a lot about cross cultural compatibility and the shared values between people of diverse races and religions, practical methods of conflict resolution and how to act in accordance with your long term vision.



Media and Communications Training

In August and November 2012, five MMYN members participated in Media and Communications Training, alongside members of Victorian faith and cultural community groups. The aim of the Media and Communications Training was to equip up-and-coming and established leaders from diverse faith and cultural communities with the skills and knowledge to constructively engage local and national media outlets, and to effectively represent their respective communities to the media and the wider

community. MMYN members attended the training which provided practical skills interviewing and responding to the media and helped build on participant's theoretical knowledge on how the media works, how to use media to advance their organisational and community interests, and how to effectively represent and promote their community to the media.

MMYN Events and Ambassadors

Representatives of the MMYN have been actively involved in a range of activities and events over the past year as ambassadors for the MMYN. Some of these activities include:

Places of Worship Tour

On 14 December 2011, three MMYN members attended a Places of Worship tour, facilitated by the Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong. The Tour involved a visit to the Albanian Islamic Mosque, the Sikh Gurdwara Sri Guru Granth Sahib, St John's German Lutheran Church and the Cambodian Buddhist temple Wat Buddhangersi. Not only was the tour an informative experience, it also provided grounds to meet and interact with members and representatives of diverse faiths. A highlight of the day was MMYN member June's first ever television interview for a program that was subsequently aired on Channel 31.



Premier's Gala Dinner

The annual Premier's Gala Dinner was held on 17 March 2012 at Crown Palladium with more than 100 tables of government, corporate and various cultural and faith group representatives in attendance. Described by Premier Ted Baillieu as the "best night of the year", the dinner was a fabulous celebration of the different stories, art and traditions that now call Victoria home. Bollywood dancers, German knee-slappers and the Melbourne Whirling Dervishes were amongst the amazing line-up of entertainment for the night. Mr Chin Tan, Chairman of the VMC, and Minister Kotsiras spoke, as did the Premier and opposition leader Hon. Daniel Andrews, who found there was at least one thing they agreed on - the importance of cultural diversity and the role Victoria has played in making that a societal norm. With plenty of time for networking, dancing and dessert, the night was one to remember and a fantastic start to Cultural Diversity Week 2012.

Victorian Multicultural Commission Youth Commissioner

MMYN Member Yasmin Hassen was appointed as the first VMC Youth Commissioner on 25 August 2011. As an active member of the MMYN, it is hoped that Yasmin's appointment to the role will raise the profile of the MMYN and allow her to act as a valuable conduit between Victoria's youth the VMC and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship. Yasmin herself is actively involved and committed to promoting multiculturalism in the community, particularly with youth. She was born in Ethiopia and, having initially arrived in Victoria as a refugee, is a member of the Oromo community. She has substantial experience working in the youth and interfaith sectors.

The progress of the MMYN over the last year has been significant. MMYN members look forward to future consultation, projects and an increased advisory focus, and are preparing to welcome new members in November 2012. This will also include farewelling some outgoing members. A huge thank you to all 2012 MMYN members for your work and dedication throughout the year!