
Premier's Report: Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) is made up of many passionate young people with similar interests who have come together to promote understanding both within the group and in the wider community

Marcelle Disanayake, Jesse Marshall, Jessica Taft and Demetrio Zema on behalf of MMYN

1. Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

Inaugural meeting.

The first meeting of the network was conducted on 28 September 2007. Twenty young people were chosen by the Premier and Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs from a range of faith and cultural backgrounds.

The presence of the Premier and other dignitaries provided momentum and a sense of great encouragement that we, as a group of young Victorians, could contribute and make a positive difference to the wider community.

In this meeting, an agreement was put together that had to be applied to ourselves and could be offered as a framework for future networks. This agreement consisted of a code of conduct, a quorum, and the provision for a rotating chair and deputy chair.

Rotating chair

A rotating chair and deputy chair is designed to ensure that the diversity of the group is represented, and gives everyone a chance to have a leadership role in the group.

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is based around ways of communicating and guidelines to interpret what others have said. This includes basic understanding and respect, refraining from discriminatory language and stereotypes, and avoiding racist and offensive behaviour.

2. Faith and Culture Youth Forum 2007:

The Forum was held at Melbourne Town Hall on 9 December 2007. It provided a chance for young people from all over Victoria to engage with the wider youth community on Multifaith and Multicultural issues.

Planning working group

Members of the MMYN were invited to work with the VMC and OFY on the planning working group for the forum. We played an advisory role in planning the event, such as selecting speakers and designing the format of the day. Prior to the establishment of the working group, we refined and expanded themes from the 2006 Youth Forum which were later used as the basis for five workshops held at the forum.

Community accord

Members of MMYN along with participants of the forum and community and faith leaders signed the community accord which signified their involvement. The community accord is a written undertaking to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities and contributes to the political and social stability of Victoria.

Recommendations

The MMYN found this to be a valuable experience and believe it should continue to be staged on an annual basis. The forum allowed us to engage with the wider youth community of Victoria in a dialogue about what was important to them.

3. Youth-Led Initiatives Pilot:

The five workshops from the Faith and Culture Youth Forum, which the MMYN were involved in developing, formed the basis for the five Youth-Led Initiatives. The Youth-Led

Initiatives were a recommendation of the 2006 Youth Forum. These initiatives will offer opportunities for young people to lead the development and execution of projects that relate to young people and their experience in the following key areas of priority:

Media – to plan a forum for faith/ethnic groups and the media with the aim of encouraging greater understanding between the two

Employment– to develop resources and approaches to inform and assist employers about the benefits of a diverse workplace.

Sport – supporting young people to play sport – ideas include organising sporting activities and developing a state wide code for equality in local sporting clubs.

Education – to develop greater multifaith multicultural understanding and acceptance in schools. Ideas included a Student/Youth Representation Network for schools.

New migrants – to develop a youth specific and culturally sensitive information pack that is provided to young people soon after they arrive in Australia.

The MMYN believes we need to improve understanding in these areas to reduce racism and discrimination in the wider community.

4. MMYN Ambassadors

- The MMYN was presented with the Ambassador’s Award at the Victorian Multicultural Awards for Excellence.
- Representatives from the MMYN also attended, and are scheduled to attend; 2020 Youth Summit, Police Multifaith Advisory Council, Premier’s Gala Dinner and Australian Council of the Arts, both part of Cultural Diversity Week, British Council Forum for Making Creative Cities, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) as Youth Ambassadors, Combating Racism in Sport meeting, and Premier’s Multifaith Leaders Forum. Four members of the MMYN have been selected as Patrons by the Parliament of World Religions, to be an integral part of the community and youth organisation of the Parliament which is to be held in Melbourne in December 2009. The Patrons will represent their communities and the wider youth at the parliament.
- MMYN members have drawn on the support of members of the group to help enhance their own religious and cultural activities. This includes events such as the Peaceful Vigil, Buddha Multicultural Festival Day (up coming), Empowered 08 (up coming) and World Youth Day.

5. What went well

These are some views and perspectives from members of the MMYN on what we feel has gone well thus far:

- The sense of respect that is present in meetings, which facilitates more honest and constructive discussion.
- Opportunities to meet other young people, from different religious and cultural backgrounds, and learn about their perspectives and values.
- Members are kept up to date with community events and are encouraged to attend each other’s activities.

- Acknowledgement and support by the VMC and OFY in liaising with all members and allowing us to conduct meetings with professional support.
- The MMYN appreciate the continuing presence and commitment of the Premier and the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth, James Merlino MP. This shows that there is a genuine commitment on the part of the state government to hear and execute the advice of the MMYN.

The MMYN are not only engaging professionally, but also interacting socially at events such as the Melbourne International Comedy Festival in which one of the members had a direct involvement.

6. Future

- The MMYN has proposed to reach out for the involvement of other young people in the wider community. This could include members of the MMYN or other youth representatives visiting rural and regional schools, for the purpose of promoting awareness and understanding.
- Members of the Network will continue to take the spirit of the discussions back to their own communities.
- The MMYN discussed the possibility of having a dedicated youth area in the government precinct, where Victorian youth groups can meet and display achievements and awards.
- The MMYN will have a proactive role in conceptualising and running the Youth-Led Initiatives over the coming months.
- Communicating and going to each others events, such as the Buddha Day. This is one example of the MMYN hoping to promote greater discussion and understanding between monotheistic and non-monotheistic faiths.
- MMYN recommend that the Government continue through the VMC and OFY to contact members to speak and advocate on Multicultural and Multifaith youth issues.