

A Cultural Diversity & Social Cohesion Multicultural Youth Programs Forum

Report

April 2009



Contents

Report.....	1
April 2009	1
Introduction.....	3
Background.....	3
Presentations	4
Presentation 1 <i>Voices of Young Australians</i>	4
Project description	4
Program model	4
Emerging issues	4
Youth-led projects	5
Presentation 2 Under the Radar	6
Project background	6
Aims of the project	6
Outcomes — case study	7
Challenges	9
Presentation 3 Connections: Culturally Diverse Youth Development	10
Project background	10
Aims of the project	10
Project strategies.....	10
Success factors.....	10
Key Learnings.....	12
Discussion.....	14

Introduction

The aim of the Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion Multicultural Youth Forum was to provide an opportunity for the three youth projects funded by the Scanlon Foundation to present the findings of their projects to date.

At the forum, the projects reported on emerging issues, trends, and practical ways in which they were addressing the concerns of young people. The session included key learnings from the projects and initiatives used, such as mentoring.

The forum provided an opportunity to inform people from philanthropic, government and community sectors who are interested or engaged in working with young people, particularly those from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The forum was designed to give participants a better understanding and a feel for ways they could be involved in the future.

The forum also aimed to conceive a practical and accessible tool that would incorporate the learnings from the three projects. The tool would be shared with philanthropic, government and community organisations working with young people.

Background

The Scanlon Foundation has funded three youth projects over three years from 2007–2010. The three organisations running the projects are Multicultural Youth South Australia, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (Victoria), and St George Youth Services (New South Wales). These organisations are undertaking projects that aim to develop leadership skills in young people from diverse cultures and so help them to develop greater confidence and capacity to positively contribute to achieving social cohesion within their communities. The program is currently at the end of the second year of funding.

Presentations

Each of the three projects presented to the forum. The audience was invited to ask questions at the end.

Presentation 1 *Voices of Young Australians*

Centre for Multicultural Youth (Victoria)

Caitlin Wilks, Menasik Dewanyang, Sonal Nayak

Project description

The aim of the three-year project is to foster social cohesion between young people from diverse backgrounds and the community. There are three phases to the project. Each phase involves anti-discrimination leadership training and youth-led projects.

To date, the project has been delivered in the local government areas of Hume and Whittlesea (2007–08) and Melton (2008–09).

Program model

The program model incorporates:

- initial scoping and recruitment, which involves identifying the local area and schools where the program will be delivered and recruiting students
- anti-discrimination leadership training, where students learn about other cultures, leadership skills including conflict resolution, communication, team-building, values, issues, stereotypes, racism and discrimination. Other sessions deal with the media, public speaking, social cohesion, project management, and include creative workshops and an interfaith tour
- a graduation forum, where ideas for youth-led projects are developed
- youth-led projects, which are developed during the leadership training when project partners and mentors are identified and engaged.

Emerging issues

Issues that have arisen during the program include:

- media representation: how the media often inaccurately represent events
- stereotyping and judging: predominant ways of thinking among youth. Before the interfaith tour the young people were apprehensive about visiting a mosque and a church. After the visit, the young people realised that sheikhs who attend mosques are as complex and diverse as any person
- concept of Australia: a theme right across the program, which is highlighted in schools where cultural diversity is quite new. It is important in terms of one's own

identity and how people identify others. For example, how many generations of my family need to live in Australia before I am considered Australian? The program challenges the concept of an Australian as a white, thong-wearing ‘Aussie battler’.

Youth-led projects

During the leadership training, the youth leaders formed groups and developed a project that they would implement. These projects had two phases.

Phase 1

- Youth Dialogue Forum
- ‘Is it ‘cos I is different? Youth against Discrimination’: an anti-discrimination comedy event
- Youth Multifaith Forum
- ‘Hands with a Voice’: an anti-racism school charter and mural
- ‘Today’s World – Tomorrow’s Leaders’: a youth radio show

Phase 2

- Youth Forum: Tackling Racism and Discrimination
- Multicultural Youth Camp
- ‘Cultural Runway’: a multicultural fashion show
- The Amazing Race
- Multicultural Youth Website

Presentation 2 *Under the Radar*

Multicultural Youth South Australia (MYSA)

Helena de Anstiss and Maylin Superio

Project background

The project was developed to respond to the needs of the most socially disengaged and marginalised young refugees (a sub-population within the broader refugee youth population).

The target group was young males aged 14–30 years. The following lists the features of the typical client profile:

- dropped out of school and not currently employed
- separated from usual sources of support, including family and community networks
- engaged in socially undesirable and/or offending behaviour
- mental health issues
- anger management issues
- authority issues
- rejected or ostracised by own ethnic community
- general lack of life skills
- drug and alcohol issues

Aims of the project

The aims of the project were to:

- equip young people with the information, knowledge, skills and resources to change their situations and take control of their lives and futures
- provide policy makers, service planners, service providers and refugee community leaders with a comprehensive knowledge from which to develop appropriate and relevant responses to areas of identified need (research and service experience)
- use project learning to inform a best practice resource that could build the capacity of service providers to respond to areas of identified need (research and service experience).

The project is being implemented over three years and has three main components:

1. Research (completed)

The research aimed to understand the key issues leading to disengagement and problem behaviour. Research methods included questionnaires and focus groups. Investigations

focused on social, behavioural and mental health problems (questionnaires), reasons for problem behaviour (focus groups), and current issues and needs (focus groups).

2. Direct service delivery (ongoing)

Direct service delivery has included:

- boot camps and adventure activities
- life-skills training program (anger and conflict management, police–youth relations, drug and alcohol misuse, personal and interpersonal skills development, maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing, coping with cultural identity and self-esteem issues, general youth issues)
- future pathways program (identifying personal strengths, gifts, abilities, potential, interests, goal setting, educational pathways, employment pathways, and skills development for job-readiness)
- mentoring program (20 mentors have been recruited and trained to work closely with 26 young people)
- intensive support program (information, referral and individualised support to help young people access community services, resources and support).

3. Mainstream agency capacity building

Based on research findings and key project learnings, a toolkit will be developed for service providers, schools, police and other stakeholders to help them work more effectively with young people. The toolkit will include:

- key issues affecting young people
- tips and pointers for engagement
- advice about program development
- ways to address problem behaviours.

Outcomes—case study

MYSA shared a case study of a young man who participated in the project soon after the project started. For the purpose of this case study and for confidentiality reasons, the young man will be referred to as John.

John arrived in Australia four years ago as a refugee from an African country, under the Humanitarian Program. He arrived here without his parents and accompanied only by his older brother and younger brother. John and his brothers did not engage with the African community here in Australia, as they came from a different tribe and were unable to communicate with people from their own country. However, the three brothers were very close.

Sadly, soon after arriving in Australia, John's older brother unexpectedly died, leaving John and his younger brother to fend for themselves. Being the older of the two boys, John felt pressure to sustain the family and the household. However, the death of his older brother profoundly affected him, and he was unable to cope. John became depressed, and he isolated himself from the community—even from his younger brother. He stopped attending school; he was in Year 12 at the time. He also stopped replying to Centrelink correspondence, and so lost his Centrelink payments. This led John to lose the tenancy on their rental house; the two brothers became homeless. As a result, John and his brother separated. John was homeless for nearly three years: he slept in the streets or in parks, he couch-surfed at friends' houses (or at friends' of friends), and sometimes he was fortunate to stay in emergency short-term accommodation in a shelter.

Unfortunately, during this difficult period, John was unaware of any services available to help him. His grief for his older brother, the guilt he felt about disappointing his younger brother and his worsening depression led John to seriously abuse alcohol and drugs. At times he found employment, but he was unable to hold on to his jobs for long. He later told MYSA that he had experienced racism within the workplace, which led to him being assaulted and unfairly dismissed; this added to his stress. As John did not have any support networks, he made friends with other at-risk youth and, although only for minor offences, they were often in trouble with the police. MYSA was first alerted to John's situation through a referral made by the young men's homeless shelter to the *Under the Radar* program.

Engaging with John presented a challenge for MYSA. Not only was John disengaged, he was a very angry young man and was simply not interested in getting any help. However, MYSA spent a lot of time with John, trying to build rapport and trust. MYSA linked him up through the casework service, and youth workers had to actively seek John out to encourage him to participate and get to know MYSA better. Once John could sense that MYSA genuinely cared and wanted to help him, he eventually opened up to MYSA. One of the first things MYSA did for John was to secure accommodation for him and advocate for the reinstatement of his Centrelink payments. The men's shelter where John was staying provided only temporary accommodation, and MYSA actively motivated John to help him find secure housing. As well as providing casework services, MYSA also involved John with the research component of *Under the Radar*, inviting him to the boot camps, the workshops, the sport and recreational activities, and linking him with a mentor through the mentoring program. Over time, John warmed to MYSA and the staff and actively sought MYSA's help to get his life back on track.

John has been receiving assistance from MYSA for more than a year, and through the support of the Scanlon Foundation funded project, John has achieved great outcomes. He:

- recently sat and passed a Special Tertiary Admissions Test, was offered placements at universities and TAFE SA, and is now enrolled as a student at Flinders University
- has part-time employment
- has re-engaged with his younger brother, and is rebuilding their relationship
- has secured a private tenancy and has maintained this successfully for eight months
- has developed independent living skills, and help with budgeting and cooking skills
- is no longer using drugs or alcohol, and is attending drug and alcohol counselling
- no longer associates with troubled acquaintances, and is no longer in trouble with the police
- has extended his informal networks, met new friends, and has begun interacting positively with peers
- has participated in many other MYSA programs, and has shown great leadership potential
- volunteers in the wider community (his mentor is a surf lifesaver, and John began work experience with Surf Life Saving)
- has identified personal goals.

Throughout his participation at MYSA and the Scanlon Foundation funded project, John has shown great potential. He has become self sufficient and independent, and he actively accesses services.

Challenges

Challenges faced by the project were:

- overcoming mainstream agency resistance to engaging young people with complex needs
- managing community politics. Community leaders lack the capacity and/or willingness to help the young people but exclude and resist external players. It is not only politics within agencies that creates challenges but also politics among leaders and African leaders, which makes it difficult to talk about solutions to youth issues. Bringing together young people, leaders and police is difficult, unless there is discussion, respect, willingness to overcome cultural barriers and readiness to give young people the right to speak.

Presentation 3 Connections: Culturally Diverse Youth Development

St George Youth Services Inc. (NSW)

Valentina Angelovska

Project background

The project was established following the December 2005 race-related beach violence in the local area.

A local needs analysis highlighted a need for cross-regional cross-cultural educational work.

The young people suggested ideas to improve social cohesion through educational strategies and workshops.

Aims of the project

The aims of the project were:

- to increase social cohesion among young people from diverse cultures
- to facilitate leadership skills for young people from culturally diverse backgrounds
- to build awareness of the right to cultural identity, to enhance and promote community harmony and to reduce racism.

Project strategies

The strategies used in the project include:

- youth leadership training and support program
- community education and skills development strategies; for example, an anti-racism forum and workshops
- broader community capacity building, including networking, advocacy, media work and cultural diversity training.

Success factors

Youth leaders

- Youth leaders were recruited from diverse cultural backgrounds from two key adjacent regions.
- The youth leaders organised the anti-racism forum for their peers.
- The youth leaders participated in skills training to help them in their role as leaders.
- The youth leaders co-facilitated workshops at the forum (with mentors and with each other).

Twenty-two youth leaders from 12 diverse cultural backgrounds took part in the skills training. The youth leaders had diverse experience and skills and different motives for participating. The training modules included communication, public speaking, leadership, group facilitation, anti-racism, project management, and media skills.

The youth leaders focused on the anti-racism workshop activities for the forum. They planned the anti-racism forum, including guest speakers, role models, performers, venue, catering and promotions.

Popular culture

Popular culture can be a great tool for social change. The project drew on popular culture in interactive, creative games and arts-based activities, which included potato stereotyping, balloon popping myths and facts, bilingual rap songs, and trivia competitions and prizes.

Collaboration

The project collaborated with services, local area governments, businesses and funding bodies.

Sustainability

Long-term sustainability was built into the project.

Anti-racism forum outcomes

- One hundred and thirty-four students participated in the anti-racism forum, including 70 females and 64 males from 30 different cultural backgrounds.
- Thirteen schools were involved.
- Members of 11 organisations from the Sutherland and St George regions were involved.
- The forum received media coverage, including articles and air time.

Key Learnings

Youth participation

Youth participation is essential for social change.

Allowing youth to organise the activities made the projects more relevant to the youth. For example, the youth-led projects in the Centre for Multicultural Youth project (*Voices of Young Australians*) and in the anti-racism forum in the St George project (*Connections: Culturally Diverse Youth Development*) gave youth the opportunity to develop their ideas and activities. In the process, they developed relationships with each other and a greater understanding of different cultures that they may not have engaged with previously. It allowed them to understand that they share similar issues and needs.

The projects have highlighted the energy and creativity of young people and how they can look at issues in fun ways without losing sight of the serious nature of those issues. They have ideas about how to engage others, and they are tomorrow's leaders.

Diversity of participants

Diversity of participants is important when tackling barriers to social cohesion.

Barriers to social inclusion is an issue that affects not just one group; it is a community-wide issue. When young people talk about issues with other young people of different cultures, they discover that they share similar concerns. As they implement their projects, the young people are modelling social cohesion.

Diversity of participants is particularly important when cultural diversity is a new experience. Some of these young people had not previously mixed with people of different cultures, and they had little understanding of other cultures.

Partnerships

Partnerships are very important, because social cohesion cannot occur without input from others. There is a need to build bridges and relationships. For example, with *Voices of Young Australians* the partnership formed with Melton Youth Services was important not only in implementing the program but also in enhancing the project's sustainability. The partnership has created potential for more opportunities once the Centre for Multicultural Youth completes the three-year program.

Partnerships also allow for sharing of resources and skills and for wide dissemination of project outcomes.

Built-in sustainability

It is important to build in sustainability by developing resources such as training manuals, successful models, and a media profile.

Flexibility

There is a need to be flexible and to consider factors such as school, sport, work, friends and family. To achieve the best outcomes from the project, it is important to allow enough time for relationships to develop—relationships between the young people and relationships with the stakeholders. Although the Centre for Multicultural Youth went to the project with their own planning and structures, it was the young people who brought the skills, talents and ideas.

Engaging family

Having family involved in the project is important, particularly with transporting young people to events, attending the graduation, getting involved in the youth-led projects, and for wider dissemination of knowledge and learning. The parents see their children in a different light.

Popular culture

Using popular culture in relevant and practical activities is an appealing and fun way for young people to develop skills and knowledge.

Discussion

After the three presentations, there was a 30-minute discussion with the audience to consider how organisations could benefit from the learnings of the three projects.

The audience commented on the importance of learning from the three projects, particularly around issues that they confront such as sustainability of projects, assessing young people and developing and building their trust, overcoming barriers, and working with local businesses.

The audience discussed the importance of using the findings from the projects to identify any gaps in educational pathways and to find solutions.

They were interested in learning about using mentors—how to find appropriate mentors and how to assess them.

The audience wanted to know the best ways to get other organisations involved, such as libraries and sporting clubs.

Recommendation

The discussion recommended the development of an interactive website, which would include ongoing work and grant opportunities. The website would allow for new material to be added and for the sharing of ideas with other agencies.

Final recommendation

A way to implement the recommendations from the forum is to develop an interactive website. This could be achieved through the Inspire Foundation who have been contracted to look at the North Melbourne Interactive Website to extend their contracted work to include development of an interactive website for the three projects. Inspire could speak to each of the three organisations to identify how their tools and resources could be presented.