



SUBMISSION to JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION:

INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

April 2011

1. Introduction

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)

The MYAN is a nationally recognised policy and advocacy body that represents migrant and newly arrived young people, in order to advance their rights and interests. The MYAN is comprised of representatives from each of Australia's states and territories. These representatives are involved in multicultural youth issues at the policy or program levels in their respective states and territories.

The MYAN was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a coordinated national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues. The issues and needs of multicultural young people are often overlooked as they are a sub-group of both the broader youth and multicultural sectors and underrepresented in the policy and advocacy work of both the government and non-government sectors.

The MYAN is dedicated to promoting the ideals of multiculturalism. These ideals celebrate diversity. They support the concept that a strong society is built on the strengths of every single one of its residents. The MYAN acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the first peoples of Australia, and constitute the primary cultures of our nation. The MYAN acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the first peoples of Australia, and constitute the primary cultures of our nation

While the MYAN has a focus on newly arrived young people, particularly those from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds¹, the term 'multicultural' includes international students and young people who were born in Australia to parents who settled in Australia as migrants or refugees².

The MYAN has identified 8 policy priorities, including: Education, Employment, Mental Health, Youth Settlement, Unaccompanied Minors, and Racism and Discrimination. The MYAN considers these to be the current priority areas for multicultural young people living in Australia.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding. (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007:7) However, this group of young people face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities. These barriers include language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes, racism, and discrimination. These factors can place multicultural young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation.

The MYAN believes that a targeted response at both the policy and service delivery levels is necessary to support their sustained participation and engagement in Australian society and believes that a national Multicultural policy framework is essential to achieving this.

¹ That is, those arriving in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program.

² Often this group of young people are referred to as 'second generation' migrants.

2. About this Submission

The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia. This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. Given the focus of the MYAN, this submission will respond to the following sections of the Inquiry Terms of Reference:

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda.

Settlement and participation

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society; and

3. Response to Inquiry Terms of Reference

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda.

The MYAN considers that multiculturalism (as an articulated policy framework) has a fundamental role to play in a meaningful social inclusion agenda. The MYAN considered the absence of multiculturalism – the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity and how this impacts on disadvantage and social inclusion - to be a key flaw in this agenda.

We believe that the incorporation of multiculturalism in the Government's social inclusion agenda is critical to addressing disadvantage and achieving a vibrant and strong society where all can participate in social and economic opportunities.

Multiculturalism is central to a meaningful social inclusion agenda – one that celebrates Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity as strengths, and understands the importance of this to belonging and national identity for all Australians.

Young people's sense of belonging and identity in multicultural Australia is critical to their social inclusion – the capacity to access economic and social opportunities and participate fully in Australian society. For young people from multicultural backgrounds, identity formation is influenced by a sense of belonging in terms of nationality (and importantly, government agendas around nation-building like Multiculturalism), cultural identity and family, and by the response from the broader society to themselves and to their community (Francis, S. and Cornfoot, S., 2007:24).

The People of Australia – Australia’s Multicultural Policy

The MYAN welcomes the Federal government’s recent announcement of a new Multicultural policy, including the principles underpinning the policy and its various initiatives. We consider this new policy to be a significant step in building social inclusion and cohesion through embracing the culturally, religious and ethnically diverse nation in which we live.

The MYAN endorses the view that multiculturalism is about “Australia’s shared experience and the composition of its neighbourhoods (and) acknowledges the benefits and potential that cultural diversity brings” (Australian Government, 2011:2). It is a dynamic way of recognising that culture is fundamental to a person’s wellbeing, sense of belonging and identity. The young people with whom we are in contact are testament to the success of multiculturalism. They are proud of their heritage mixed in with their new Australian identity.

The MYAN welcomes the various initiatives proposed under the policy, including the *Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program*, the *Multicultural Arts and Festivals Grants*, and development of a *National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy*. These are important to fostering multiculturalism and strengthening participation and social inclusion.

The MYAN also notes the importance of policy and legislative frameworks across jurisdictions, in addition to the federal government’s multicultural policy framework, in supporting a socially inclusive, multicultural Australia.

Settlement and participation

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society;

The MYAN believes that settlement programs supporting the full participation of young people into the broader Australian society must:

- Be youth-specific, designed and delivered in response to the particular settlement needs of young people³;
- Be underpinned by strengths-based and youth participation approaches (acknowledging that young people have unique experiences and knowledge, are best placed to articulate the issues impacting on their lives and to identify appropriate solutions);
- Provide targeted support to young people to access services and programs (e.g. health, education, arts and culture, social and recreational);
- Provide opportunities for young people to actively participate and engage in the community and;
- Address racism and discrimination⁴.

³ The MYAN has welcomed the youth focus in the recent funding round for the delivery of the Humanitarian Settlement Support program. This new youth focus, with the requirement of all HSS to develop Youth Plans, will ensure that the needs of humanitarian young people are more adequately met through the settlement system at the point of arrival.

⁴ The experience of racism and discrimination can also be a key barrier to social inclusion, as it can diminish a young person’s sense of connection and belonging to their community and broader society, can create a sense marginalisation and isolation and diminish participation in education, employment or recreational activities. (Mansouri, F.et.al.2009:7).

In particular, the MYAN advocates for the following:

- School and community-based programs that promote positive images of culturally diverse young people and combat racism and discrimination.
- Community-based leadership or mentoring programs with a focus on the development of skills and networks.
- Group-based opportunities to engage with other young people from diverse backgrounds to explore multiculturalism, identity and belonging in Australia.
- Continuity of support (established in the development of the new settlement framework) for young humanitarian entrants across all stages of the settlement services system. This includes a discreet focus on young people in the Settlement Grants Program. This would provide refugee and newly arrived young people with more comprehensive support within the first 5 years of arrival in Australia in order to participate and contribute to life in Australia.
- Programs and activities that bring families together to discuss Australian laws, customs, rights and responsibilities.
- Initiatives that build the capacity of the youth and family sectors to (i) support families to negotiate parenting in a cross-cultural context and (ii) support young people (in the context of family relationships) to navigate cross cultural identity.
- Adequate and targeted support to Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors.
 - The MYAN is concerned about the quality of care and lack of national consistency in the delivery of the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor program. We believe that the current model/s is not meeting the settlement support needs of this particularly vulnerable group of young people, and therefore not adequately supporting their participation in the community and broader Australian society.
 - The MYAN would like to see a review and evaluation of existing models of care with a view to developing a more coordinated national policy and legislative framework for the delivery of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program. This may include the implementation of a national pilot.

Examples of good practice in innovative youth-specific settlement programs

Below are several examples from across Australia of good practice in innovative settlement programs for young people.

- **Multicultural Youth Northern Territory (MyNT)**

MyNT is a dynamic, growing youth for youth organisation that seeks to unify youth (aged 15-30 inclusive) of *all* backgrounds and empower them to turn their ideas reality. MyNT is run by youth for all young people, as a voice for our issues, a support network to make our ideas a

reality and have fun making a positive difference to our community. Since MyNT was founded in 2007 it has been a site where active young people from diverse communities have come together to work collaboratively and create positive change within their communities. The principle aim of MyNT is to provide spaces for young people from diverse backgrounds to work together, have fun, and get active. Within these principles MyNT has two major components: (i) Youth issue focused advocacy - MyNT is a platform from which young people can articulate their voices on youth issues, and (ii) Youth Engagement and Development - MyNT engages and supports young people to lead youth activities for other young people.

MyNT isn't about receiving a service, it is about being active on your own terms within the Australian community.

- **Building Relationships Initiating Change (BRIC) Centre for Multicultural Youth, Victoria**

BRIC is a unique mentoring program that builds the capacity of emerging youth groups from newly arrived and culturally linguistically diverse communities. Mentors are carefully selected to offer on going knowledge and skills development. The mentors are matched with youth groups to enable them to set and achieve their goals. Whether it be strengthening leadership, confidence and social networks or developing stronger group processes and organizational structures, the mentors utilize strengths based, participatory approaches that are dynamic and engaging. The groups can be as diverse as those developing social and support groups such as music or sports teams, through to those seeking to play a role in the environment and social change.

- **Multicultural Youth Voices (MyVoices), Tasmania**

In Southern Tasmania a multicultural youth group "MY Voices" meets on the first Friday of every month. This group is convened by the Migrant Resource Centre Youth Program in collaboration with Colony 47 and provides an opportunity for young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to meet together, have fun and express themselves. The group fosters a sense of place and belonging for multicultural youth through engaging in activities that they might identify with or consider useful in their everyday lives and settlement in Southern Tasmania. Minutes from MY Voices 2010 are documented on a blogsite www.myvoiceshobart.blogspot.com

MyVoices were also key organisers of a statewide Multicultural Youth Forum in March 2011. This event was designed to celebrate and increase awareness of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds living in Tasmania. It provided an opportunity for multicultural young people living across Tasmania to come together and explore their strengths, as well as the challenges they face in settling and establishing a sense of place and belonging. It also provided an opportunity for policy makers and service providers to hear directly from young people about issues of importance and strategies to address challenges.

Strength to Strength - Afghan Mothers & Daughters Project, NSW

The Strength to Strength (STS) program operated as a partnership between Relationships Australia and the Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre. This program supported the delivery of the **Afghan Mothers & Daughters Project**, a partnership project with Auburn Youth Centre designed to raise awareness among young women on health issues within Afghan community. A number of events were held and 45 mothers and their daughters accessed the project, to explore women's health issues, including sexual health. This was a particularly innovative

project as it worked with both young people and parents and did so out of a youth-specific organisation.

4. References

Australian Government, People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy, 2011

Francis S. and Cornfoot S. (2007) Multicultural Youth in Australia: Settlement and Transition. Melbourne. Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues.