

Attention: COS, news, youth, social affairs, health & community

MEDIA RELEASE

March 21, 2007

School Students Develop Stronger Voice

Geelong Hosts the *Young Leaders of Today*

Thanks to a partnership developed between The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the Australian Red Cross, Victoria twenty-one young people from diverse cultural backgrounds will this week undergo training to develop a stronger voice in their local community.

The **Young Leaders of Today** program provides leadership skills to year 10 & 11 students from North Geelong Secondary College. The program is strongly supported by Diversitat, a multi-faceted service provider in Geelong, specialising in multicultural communities. The program equips participants with leadership skills that are transferable to their school lives and within their own communities.

Students originate from countries such as Sudan, Iran, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Liberia, the Philippines, Germany, Cambodia and Vietnam.

CMYI promotes social harmony through inclusiveness and provides real choices and opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The partnership with the Australian Red Cross, Victoria has been formed to encourage young people to become more active in their local communities. The Australian Red Cross, Victoria, through programs like this aims to enhance the capacity of the young people to make a substantial contribution to society.

"This program has developed out of a recognition that migrant and refugee young people endure a range of experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared to other Victorian young people," says CMYI Director Carmel Guerra.

According to Tammy Byrne, Project Officer – Education and Leadership Programs, Australian Red Cross, Victoria, the program is immensely valuable because it encourages young people to take on leadership roles in the community, as well as achieve personal goals and address issues of concern.

Commencing as a pilot program in 2001 **Young Leaders of Today** has been a great success with programs delivered on 10 occasions to 270 young people from 38 schools situated in 14 local government areas across metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria.

Successes include Farah Faiq (18) a previous participant in **Young Leaders of Today** who is now a leader in the Hume region organising community projects including a women's festival in Hume and workshops on domestic violence in her school. Farah arrived as a refugee from Iraq only two years ago.

"Our program shows that when you encourage leadership and develop skills within an environment that specifically caters for their needs and draws on their life experience, migrant and refugee young people flourish," says Ms Guerra.

The program has a huge impact on participants. A student from a previous program stated that *"This course could change the way you look at the world... it was an amazing experience I'll never forget ... I now want to follow my dreams no matter what."*

What: Graduation Ceremony of **Young Leaders of Today** Program
Who: Year 10 & 11 students from North Geelong Secondary
Where: City of Greater Geelong Council Chambers, 30 Gheringhap St, Geelong
When: 6pm Thursday 22nd March (we can arrange earlier photos/interviews for media)

Media: Young people participating in the program are available for photographs and interviews. Contact CMYI media advisor Matt Clear of initi8 communications on 0403 229 094 or matt@initi8.net.au or Melissa Sawyer, Australian Red Cross on 8327 7755 or msawyer@redcross.org.au