

17 February 2011

Dear Editor,

**Multiculturalism is a reality**

I have worked with young people from a huge range of cultural backgrounds for over twenty years and I'm continually astonished by their resilience, positivity and adaptability. I have seen how skillfully they negotiate the often competing demands of their past, present and future.

I see young Muslim women playing soccer in Dandenong, Young Kareni refugees using comedy to break through cultural barriers in Melton and young Sudanese boys building their community in Sunshine. These examples and more prove to me that multiculturalism is alive and well in Australia and will thrive under the leadership of our young people.

25% of our young people are from a culturally diverse background. There is no getting away from it – we are a multicultural society and a successful one at that. We need to give our young people the opportunity to show us how to build new identities, strong, supple identities with multiple-cultural influences. That's why the government's newly announced multicultural strategy is so important.

To reiterate what Chris Bowen said in his announcement, multiculturalism doesn't say "here you go, do what you like and we won't bother you" it doesn't just preach tolerance and respect. It is a dynamic way of recognising that culture is essential to a person's wellbeing, sense of belonging and identity. It is a way of facilitating a connection to culture whilst orientating to a new one.

The young people we come in contact with are testament to the success of multiculturalism. They are proud of their heritage mixed in with their new Australian identity. They are not afraid to speak their minds and they are able to sit just as comfortably in a mosque, a lecture theatre, a boardroom or a newsroom.

They have friends from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds.

They are able to forge dignified multiple-cultural identities that allow them to wear a hijab to soccer practice or sing rap music in Kareni while also barracking for Australia in the cricket, because that's what it is to be a young Australian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Carmel Guerra  
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