

The Cultural Partnerships for Harmony Project: a multicultural skating program in the East

Key words: skateboarding, refugee youth, partnership and innovation

Background

The Cultural Partnerships for Harmony project (which CMY is a part of) was funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to identify and address issues of racism and intolerance that are experienced by newly-arrived refugees in the eastern region. In order to better understand their perspective, a reference group of fifteen newly-arrived young people living in the area was recruited through the local Migrant Information Centre networks.

One of the issues raised by the reference group was their experience of racism at and around Ringwood Skate Park and Ringwood train station. The reference group members specifically referred to being spat on, having beer cans thrown at them, and verbal abuse. They believed that the young people that socialise at the Skate Park were the same young people who are at the train station. The reference group members suggested running a skating program with the young people at the Skate Park to create an opportunity to develop relationships between people using the space and young people from refugee backgrounds.

A six-week program was developed involving young people using the Skate Park and young refugees.

The program

The project was developed as a partnership between the Migrant Information Centre in the East and Simply Skateboarding, who have recently opened an indoor skate ramp and store and are interested in developing the role of skateboarding in addressing various social issues. It consisted of the following components:

- Recruitment of trainers: Simply Skateboarding hired four young people (aged 17 – 25 yrs), influential in the local skateboarding community, as trainers. The trainers were all Australian-born. Out of the twelve participants in the program, ten were from refugee backgrounds (Chin, Karen and Sudanese) and two were from Anglo-Australian backgrounds. The idea behind this was to create opportunities for cross-cultural relationships both between the trainers and the participants from refugee backgrounds, and between these participants and the Australian-born participants.
- Training the trainers: The young trainers attended a three-hour workshop facilitated by CMY. The workshop provided information on the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds and created a space to talk about racism. The trainers found it very useful, with comments such as 'I didn't realise how full-on their lives were and how much they give up to be here'.
- Visit: The trainers and young refugees went on an excursion to the Ringwood Skate Park. This provided a safe opportunity for the newly-arrived young people to meet other young people who use the Skate Park and to become more comfortable in the space.
- Event: Together, the trainers and participants organised an 'Australia Day Event' on 28 January. The event celebrated the completion of the six-week program and provided an opportunity for friends of the trainers and the participants to come together. It included a skateboarding

CMY Multicultural Sport Case Study

demonstration, a screening of the Talking Difference short film (an online media project designed to facilitate dialogue about cultural difference and to promote diversity), and an exhibit of photos taken during the program.

Benefits of the program

There was high demand for the program: of the people that were accepted, 100% attended. All of the participants stated that the program helped to increase opportunities for cross-cultural friendships; they felt *'comfortable and accepted'* and other participants were *'friendly'*. The visit to the Skate Park was a success, thereby meeting one of the project's key objectives: *'To increase social inclusion of refugee young people among the broader skateboarding community'*.

All participants said that they would feel comfortable going to the Simply Skateboarding Centre because *'now (they) have been there before and know people'*. Participants also had a membership and discounted entrance fees to the centre.

Challenges

There was less interaction between the two Australian-born young people and those from refugee backgrounds than was hoped for. While they mixed well during the 'getting to know each other' activities prior to the workshop, the participants did not anticipate continuing these friendships outside of the program as they did not think they would come into contact with each other again.

All participants enjoyed the program, reporting that it was *'really fun'*, *'awesome'* and *'cool'*. In regard to continuing skating the feedback was more mixed, with two participants stating that they would continue skating after the program, four that they would 'maybe' continue skating and two that they would not continue skating. A number of reasons were given including lack of parental support, preference to continue 'scootering' (which they felt more competent at) and not having a *'place where I can ride it'*. The girls also cited lack of confidence as a reason - *'I don't know how to skate'*, *'I might break my arm'*.

Next steps

The project is still exploring ways to support the young people's continued involvement in skateboarding. Ideas include: providing an increased number of training sessions, spacing the training sessions out over a longer period of time, further subsidising the entrance fee or providing an increased number of subsidised entrances

The photos from the program will continue to be displayed in the Simply Skateboarding Centre. This sends the message that the space is welcoming of difference and diversity. The video will be available on the 'Talking Difference' website and hopefully can continue to encourage conversation around the role of skateboarding in creating spaces that are accepting of diversity.

For more information contact:

Sarah Harmer – sarah.may.au@gmail.com

0403 721 478

Dure de Winter – ddewinter@miceastmelb.com.au

(03) 9285 4868

Talking Difference website: <http://museumvictoria.com.au/talkingdifference>



A.B.N. 27 084 251 669