

YOUTH CONSULTATION REPORT

UPDATING VICTORIA'S YOUTH POLICY

Youth Consultation with Culturally and Linguistically
Diverse (CLD) Young People

March 2006

Introduction

On Thursday 23rd February, the Office for Youth and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) co-hosted a consultation forum with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

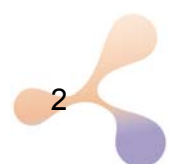
The forum attracted over 50 young people from a wide variety of backgrounds, including 'newly arrived' young people who had been in Australia for less than 3 months.

This paper presents the results of that consultation.

The paper firstly outlines background information about the young people who attended on the day.

Secondly, it examines the four discussion areas outlined by the Office For Youth, presenting the themes and ideas that the young people raised and discussed.

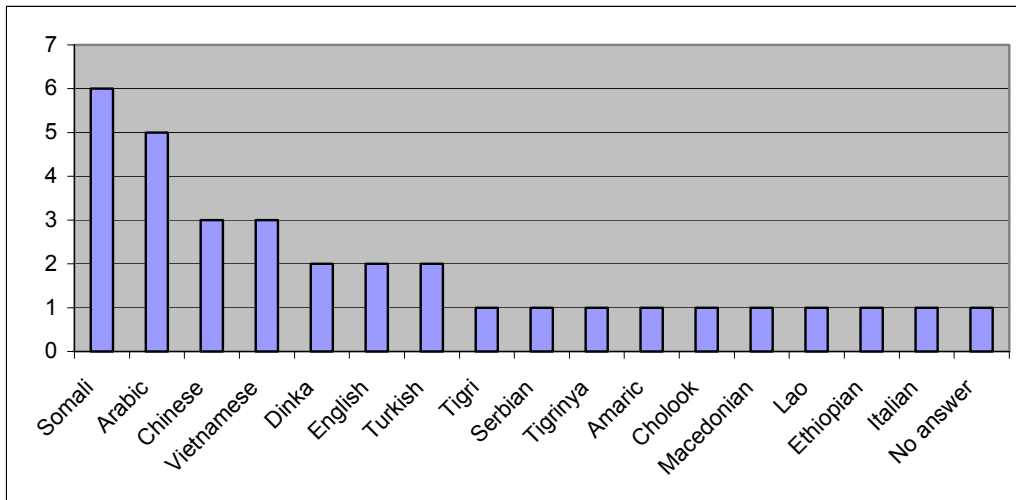
In concluding, the paper looks at broad themes that emerged across the four areas.



Demographic Information

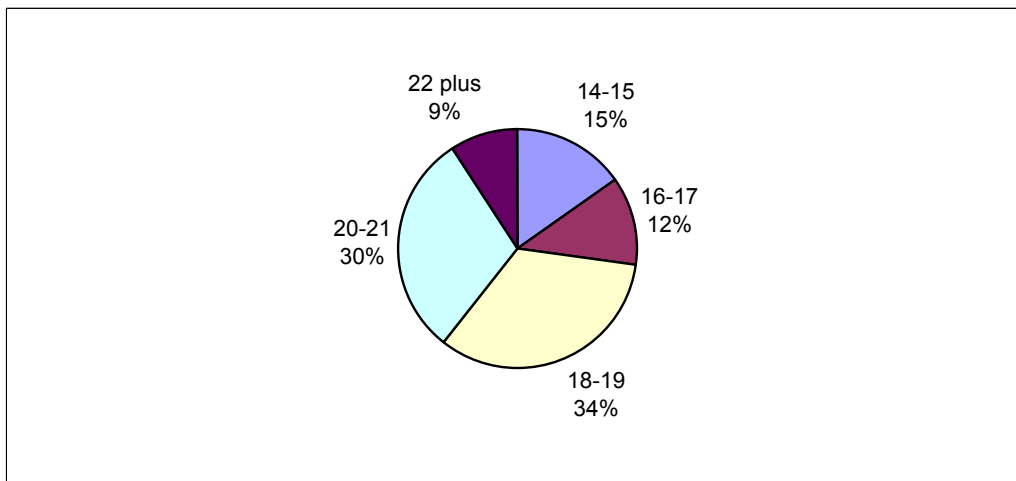
There were a wide variety of cultural backgrounds represented among the young people who attended. The following graph illustrates the diversity within the group. Participants identified that they spoke 16 different languages at home with highest numbers being Somali and Arabic.

Figure 1.1: Cultural Backgrounds of Participants



In addition, there was diversity in the ages of the young people with participants ranging from 14 years old up to 23 years old. *Figure 1.2* illustrates that the highest numbers were clearly in the 18-21 year old range which mirrors CMYI's program experience with newly arrived and refugee young people.

Figure 1.2: Age Range of Participants

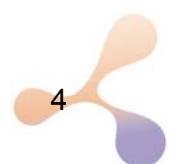


Data was also collected on the participants in relation to work and study with results showing 100% of participants engaged in study with the majority being full-time. There

were four participants (12%) who were studying and working, in one case both studying and working full-time. Finally the gender breakdown was recorded and reflected 21 male participants (64%) and 12 female (36%).

Discussion Areas

There were a range of questions provide by the Office For Youth to guide discussion but due to language barriers and lack of experience of the young people with some of the more official use of language, these questions were re-worded and grouped together into four discussion areas. Consultation results are presented below in relation to each of these four areas.



Discussion Area 1: What is important to you?

"That I belong"

Safety concerns

Safety concerns were perhaps the most prevalent theme in this discussion area with many young people describing not feeling safe on public transport, on the streets "during the night" at parties and when at school. Participants identified "bullying" and "teasing" as particular problems for them in their school environment. Participants who raised the issue of bullying were clear that this was based on being a "different colour" or different religion.

Importance of family, friends and community

Participants identified the importance of family and friends. This was described by some as "living in a familiar community" including having the capacity to "speak your own language". By others it was more directly described as "talking to friends and family" about safety concerns, the importance of family "to understand and support you", and just the simple statement "that I belong".

Sports

Sports were also identified as important. Access to appropriate sporting opportunities as well as having more sport on offer with less cost involved. General health and fitness were also identified as important including: exercise, "going to the gym", healthy eating and walking.

Importance of culture

This was described by several of the participants through responses such as "living in a good community" and the importance of "having something to believe in, faith". Also alluded to were the practicalities involved in achieving this such as being able to find familiar or traditional food. This aspect also posed a challenge for some of the participants with comments about "family expectations" impacting on their ability to achieve their potential.

Discussion Area 2: Having a say

"Youth is our future"

Overview

Overall this discussion area saw young people identifying that it was important to them to have a say, to be able to make a difference in their community and to have input into decision making. A small number identified this as less important to them, but the majority were clear that it was highly important. Comments reflected that some participants felt they had opportunities to have a say but many did not feel heard: "don't feel like anyone is listening".

Ownership and direct participation of young people

This was a concept that was mentioned throughout this discussion with young people using the term "ownership" to describe the importance of true participation to them. Some comments relating to how programs for young people should be funded were quite direct, such as the suggestion to "give the young people the money and the responsibility to decide on what they will do". Other comments related to the importance of seeing themselves reflected in programs and centres aimed at young people: "young people as workers".

Awareness of how to have a say

For many of the participants, although they were very interested in having a say they felt they did not know where or how to go about doing this. Comments reflected this aspect "need to know who to go to be heard" and "want to volunteer in my community, but need someone to help – what choices are there?". Participants wanted to have input into government decision making but again didn't know what opportunities there were for them to do this and suggested "having a phone number to ring for input – a youth line".

Importance of Cross-cultural understanding

Another theme that emerged through this discussion was the importance of cross-cultural understanding. As soon as the question of whether it was important to them to make a difference in their community was raised comments such as "bringing different cultures together" and for youth participation to be "bottom up" were made. This was echoed through the discussion including the suggestion that "Youth Centres could host debates –

between cultures" as a way of increasing understanding and inclusion of young people from CLD backgrounds.

Coordination of youth groups

The importance of specialised (or ethno-specific) youth groups was acknowledged, but participants noted that greater coordination between such groups would lead to greater capacity for CLD young people to have a say. Comments related to there being "strength in numbers – need to link up small communities into larger bodies, like African communities" and "specialised youth groups but linked to a bigger group of representatives from smaller culturally specific youth groups".

Importance of the media

Young people also identified the importance of seeing themselves reflected in the media to making them feel included and heard: "media is important to having a say".

Participants identified shows like *60 Minutes* having some CLD young people on talking about their experiences as well as the importance of ethnic media, radio in particular in advertising available services and how Australian systems work: "advertising so people know where to go".



Discussion Area 3: Transition Support

"we need people to understand and not judge"

Overview

This discussion was guided by asking the young people to identify 'hard times' and to then reflect on 'what helps'. In this way both the key transition stages in their lives were recorded as well as what they identify as important supports to better manage these times. It is important to note that life transitions for CLD and newly arrived young people may impact on their lives much more adversely, in comparison to their broader community peers, due to the added stress of their migration and refugee experience as well as greater inter-generational conflict.

More support to understand Australian systems

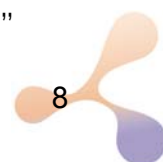
This point was made by young people in relation to transitions such as "coming to Australia", "looking for a job", "problems with family" (which stemmed from moving between cultures: family to school), and "problems with Centrelink" (which included not understanding the details, expectations and issues such as debt). The participants identified that having more help with language was important in managing the major transition of settlement in Australia. There were also comments about the importance of showing "people around and show services".

Awareness raising within Australian systems

As well as raising their desire to gain a better understanding of Australian systems or getting a better "orientation", participants also expressed their desire to *receive* understanding *from* those systems. The sorts of comments here included: "police think young people are bad" and "need better publicity about youth to promote the good things young people do".

Several examples were given here of Australian systems where the young people wanted *both* a better understanding themselves as well as to receive greater understanding.

- **Centrelink** was identified as a clear example of a system that CLD young people did not understand. They didn't understand waiting times and that there was "too much paperwork". However, they also felt that Centrelink staff did not understand *their* needs, including needing "more help to fill in forms"



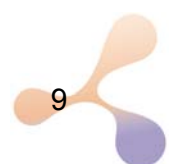
and for there to be “more understanding about it not being possible for young people to pay debts”.

- **Police** were identified as another system which the young people themselves did not understand “need to get legal help” but also that needed to be more responsive to their needs “need more African or multicultural police”.
- **Employment** systems were also discussed by many participants who identified wanting to understand the “easiest way to get a job” but also noting that employers needed to understand that “women who wear *hijab* are good” and need to “change attitude about speaking with accent – I have more skills in languages”.

Intergenerational issues

Finally a consistent theme in this discussion area was that of intergenerational issues: “family don’t like when you look more Aussie”. The challenges of the transition from adolescence to adulthood were also alluded to “young people want independence – not good for family”. Interestingly comments related to the role of the young person here: “get young people to think more carefully about leaving”.

The issue of family also related to times when family support was not enough or not there “when family can’t help much – need extra help, especially when no adults”. In relation to much of this the importance of school counsellors was noted. Participants suggested young people should “talk to the counsellor” and that “teachers can help people feel more comfort about talking to counsellor” and added the need for “more culturally diverse counsellors”.



"Go to young people"

Overview

Generally it was identified through this discussion that the young people participating were not accessing youth services because they were unaware of them and that they were interested in mixed cultural groups rather than individual communities. From CMYI's experience a response that is not integrated and that does not operate in collaboration with a number of services will fail the diverse needs of CLD young people.

Lack of knowledge of services

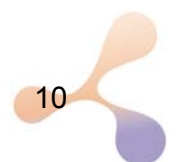
When asked about whether they had accessed a youth service before, none of the participants indicated that they had. Comments reflected this a lack of knowledge about services: "some young people believe that because they are not citizens" they are not eligible for assistance. Suggestions were made such as "a database of all CLD youth associations" and that this would need to list Elders as well as youth leaders. However, one of the key responses to this need was that programs and workers need to "go to young people" explaining that consultation is best done where young people are already, for example when they are playing "sport".

Links and networking

Word of mouth was identified as a significant way that CLD young people find out about the support services available to them. Comments reflected the importance of links and networking "having the right links to the right people from CLD communities" and "through networks ... within the community". Participants also identified the potential for written information but noted it should be "pamphlets in English for young people and in other languages for parents and communities, especially for young women". One participant even suggested having "a team of volunteers to pass on information to other young people. The issue of using existing networks such as schools and community centres to distribute information to young people was also raised.

Use of media and advertising

The use of media to raise awareness was mentioned in this discussion group. Comments included the need for "advertising on radio – SBS", "media to be used in the student's own language", and to also use "mainstream channels". Some participants suggested "a



youth services kit" and that the information in this kit could be distributed through schools, "local newspapers, radio and ethnic media."

Services need to reflect youth culture

Participants clearly identified that the things that would make a youth service more comfortable for them are those things that are important to them: "sport", "music", "parties". They wanted to hear current music "hip hop, rap, r&b" and they wanted to have the opportunity to play sport noting that access to youth services might be better "through sports events". Again mentioned in this discussion was the importance of having "young people working in the agency" and for those young workers to be from a "multicultural background".

The results of this consultation process both confirm CMYI's previous experience as well as raises new themes. Participants identified consistently the desire to actively participate in youth services and in decision-making processes. In fact some participants were quite clear that they would ideally like to have a significant say over the development of programs targeted to meet their needs. They also identified across the discussion areas the desire to see more young people as workers or volunteers in agencies and to have their own space whilst acknowledging the important role of Elders in their communities. This included greater working together of youth groups.

CLD young people clearly rate sport as important part of their life, it represents inclusion, success and self esteem and a way to tackle a range of issues. There were comments throughout each discussion area about the usefulness of sport as a strategy for accessing youth services, health and wellbeing, and even having a say with suggestions that workers and government would ideally consult CLD young people by going out to them.

On a theme of working together, the desire to be involved in multicultural groups and programs and in some cases to actively address what they perceived as misunderstanding and ignorance within the broader youth population. This theme may have been particularly strong at this point in time given the heightened state of anxiety related to terrorism and recent clashes between young people from CLD and mainstream Australian backgrounds. The participants in this consultation clearly wanted to address this proactively among and with their peers.

Knowledge and awareness of supports remains an area that needs greater attention. The participants in this consultation echoed CMYI's experience broadly with CLD and newly arrived young people and greater work needs to occur in responding to the need for orientation and familiarisation with support services early in the settlement process.

Finally, the consistent mention of the use of media, in particular ethnic radio channels to distribute youth information as well as the desire to see positive images of young people reflected more broadly across mainstream media may reflect the importance of visual media within youth culture. This is certainly noteworthy as an important strategy in addressing some of the broader issues of inclusion, diversity and access and equity that must be included in an updated Youth Policy for Victoria.

