



youth affairs network qld

“A MULTICULTURAL FUTURE... FOR ALL OF US” - A REVIEW OF QUEENSLAND'S MULTICULTURAL POLICY

**RESPONSE FROM THE
MULTICULTURAL YOUTH NETWORK OF QUEENSLAND (MYNQ)**

**“A Multicultural Future... For All of Us”: A Response from the Multicultural Youth
Network of Queensland (MYNQ)**

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On Behalf of the Multicultural Youth Network of Queensland (MYNQ)

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ABOUT MYNQ

The Multicultural Youth Network of Queensland (MYNQ) is primarily a network for service providers, not for young people themselves, although one purpose of MYNQ is to empower culturally and linguistically diverse young (CALD) young people to advocate for themselves.

MYNQ is a community-driven statewide network which began its life as a Youth Affairs Network Qld (YANQ) working party in 1992 to improve quality of life for CALD young people at local at state levels by promoting issues pertaining to CALD young people and enhancing their access to services and resources. Today MYNQ continues to identify and develop actions on issues and policy affecting CALD young people through its strategic core placement within YANQ.

The network is composed of organisations, services and service providers committed to multiculturalism and improving opportunities and outcomes for CALD young people in Queensland.

MYNQ is currently convened and resourced by YANQ. MYNQ's values statement is as follows:

MYNQ believes that all people are important, no matter what country, culture or religion they are from, or what language they speak. We believe Queenslanders and policies affecting Queenslanders should respond to and be accountable to the enormous diversity of young people in our community. To do less would be unjust.

We are particularly committed to promoting equitable access and participation (and through this, equality of opportunity) in all areas for young people from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities. MYNQ values difference and the positive contributions that Queensland's diverse young people can offer to our society.

MYNQ recognises Aboriginal people as the permanent custodians and Aboriginal cultures as the primary cultures of Australia. We will strive to respect Aboriginal people as we work towards building a society which is inclusive of all, from ancient custodians to new arrivals.

ABOUT YANQ

The Youth Affairs Network Queensland, Inc (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, we promote the interests and well-being of young people across the State by:

- Disseminating information to members, the youth sector, and the broader community
- Undertaking campaigns and lobbying
- Making representations to government and other influential bodies
- Resourcing regional and issue-based networks
- Consulting and liaising with members and the field
- Linking with key state and national bodies

- Initiating projects
- Hosting forums and conferences
- Input into policy development
- Enhancing the professional development of the Youth Sector

We advocate on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people to government and the community. We promote and support cultural diversity. We encourage the development of policies and programs that respond to the rights and needs of young people.

ABOUT THIS RESPONSE

When the State Government released the discussion paper “A multicultural future... for all of us” in October 2009, a response sheet was included to cover some central points. As MYNQ is focussing its response on the needs and values of CALD young people, a number of specific issues have been identified that do not correlate with the response sheet.

The response has been compiled by the Multicultural Development Officer at YANQ using information made available to YANQ through its own research and consultation with members and the youth sector. It is supported and enhanced by information and specific case studies from individual service providers in MYNQ, and is endorsed by the MYNQ network.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

The following issues have been identified by MYNQ as central to the needs and priorities of CALD young people in Queensland.

Language Barriers And Interpreters

Many aspects of life for young people from CALD backgrounds are affected by language difficulties. From accessing health services, education and employment, through to building relationships within the broader community, language barriers can cause significant problems.

The ability to understand, and to be understood, can mean not only the difference between a happy life and an unhappy life, but also a safe life and an unsafe life. For example, child services are limited in their use of interpreters due to available costs. The premier’s directive in October 2008 that all Department-funded services be reimbursed for the use of interpreters acknowledges the importance of engaging with professional interpreters when working with children and families from non-English speaking backgrounds. As is currently the case, however, interpreters are not being engaged due to a lack of sufficient funding under the “child-related costs” cost centre. Furthermore, having the funding for interpreters come from “child-related costs”, means interpreter services then detract from other services a child might receive. This is a very dangerous situation. Further, this is no chance that Queenslanders will ever receive equitable access to services when the funding of interpreters detracts from other

resources or services which would otherwise be allocated to them.

Language barriers are a significant problem for young people in schools, and this is addressed in the next issue.

For the purposes of this review, MYNQ makes the following **recommendations**:

- *That equitable access to interpreters be promoted by the Multicultural Policy as a primary requirement for services working with people from CALD backgrounds, and that the process for accessing and paying for interpreters be streamlined across departments so that clients receive the same smooth service and access to interpreters wherever they visit.*
- *Working with interpreters is a skill that requires training. The Multicultural Policy should promote the use of training and infrastructure so that workers do not feel intimidated by new or uncertain processes.*

Education And Schools

There are a number of processes in place within various community organisations to help young people feel a part of the broader community. These include sporting and social activities and various clubs. What community organisations can't do is make a strong impact in schools. School yards tend to quickly become segregated, and can be isolating for newly arrived young people, leading to disengagement with the schooling process. Schools and school staff (principals and teachers) should be provided with the training and resources necessary to make their schools inclusive and multicultural.

School curricula are generally aimed towards the majority of students. In many cases, this means that young people from CALD backgrounds, being members of a minority group, are automatically at a disadvantage. A multicultural policy should work across all government departments and ensure that education policies are inclusive and support all young people. Initiatives such as encouraging cross-cultural studies and raising awareness of different educational styles and backgrounds could help young people from CALD backgrounds feel more engaged with learning.

It is common for young people who have lived in refugee camps to have a very disrupted schooling history. Often they will be unfamiliar with computers, and unused to sitting in classrooms for long periods of time. Once schools and teachers are familiar with the potential issues that these young people face, more appropriate teaching methods can be introduced. Bridging schools like Milpera State High School can make an enormous improvement in long-term engagement with education for young people from refugee backgrounds. Queensland's multicultural policy should support the work of such schools, and help them to work with mainstream schools to facilitate smooth transitions for students.

Language can be an enormous problem for young new arrivals in Australia. In some cases, young people will have had no opportunity to learn English, and have to begin once they arrive in the country. This can be an extremely alienating process, particularly as different members of their family will be learning at different paces, and the family will continue to speak their first language at home.

English competency can be a concern not just for newly arrived refugees, but also for young people from areas such as the Pacific Islands, who generally speak English quite well, but may have differing levels of written literacy. These students are often neglected, as it is assumed that their spoken English competency reflects their written English competency. They fall behind in their work as a result, and often end up becoming disengaged with school and the education process.

This submission makes the following **recommendations**:

- *That the Multicultural Policy work in conjunction with the ESL Policy to support young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in schools in ensuring that their needs are properly assessed and met, regardless of their apparent competency.*
- *That the multicultural policy support an ongoing and flexible approach to learning English, combined with a comprehensive program of access to interpreters. An appreciation of on-site bi-cultural workers in schools will help raise awareness of these problems.*

Housing And Homelessness

A disproportionate number of homeless young people are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In some areas, the problems have stemmed from visa issues. Pacific Islanders who come to Australia via New Zealand do not have access to services such as Centrelink under their visa status. This allows disadvantaged young people to get caught in a cycle of unemployment and homelessness.

In many areas in South East Queensland it is common for Pacific Islanders coming from New Zealand to work in the manufacturing industry. With the recent economic downturn, many have been losing their jobs, and as a result, they have to move in with relatives, as they can no longer afford their rent. This can lead to two or three families living together in one house. Real estate agents, upon discovering that one house has twelve to eighteen people living in it, are quick to evict all tenants. In these cases, this submission would **recommend**:

- *That real estate agents be required to undertake cross cultural competency training as part of their accreditation, and that they continue to learn about the multicultural aspects of the community in which they work, so that they understand the issues facing families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.*

Homelessness ties into so many other issues. It is nearly impossible to find employment if you are homeless. Organising yourself to go to a job interview, when you don't have suitable clothes to wear, somewhere to get showered and dressed, and facilities to produce a resumé and job application, can be an overwhelming task. Homelessness affects education in a similar way. Becoming disengaged with schooling is a natural first step when one does not have a regular and safe home environment.

In cases like this where homelessness is a direct result of issues relating to visa status for Pacific Islanders coming through New Zealand, this submission makes two **recommendations**:

- *That the Policy promote the strong need for a broader education and awareness raising strategy, so that Pacific Islanders are completely aware of the restrictions of their visa status. It is often due to this lack of awareness*

that such problems arise.

- *Steps should to be taken to begin changing the restrictions of these visas, so that Pacific Islanders arriving in Australia after living in New Zealand have the same access to services as immigrants and other residents.*

Children And Families

Young people arriving in Australia often feel torn between their original culture and the new culture they are trying to fit in to. This can cause intergenerational conflict within the family, as older generations see themselves as 'outside' of mainstream Australian culture, and don't understand the young person's need to fit in, often at the expense of their original culture. The process of helping all Australians recognise the true nature of multiculturalism will go a long way towards creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for new arrivals. To aid those families in this situation, MYNQ **recommends**:

- *That the Multicultural Policy promote and support health services for families from CALD backgrounds including ongoing counselling for families and young people struggling with issues of displacement and belonging in a new community.*

The recently published National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009) is completely silent on issues concerning culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families. CALD families and children face a number of challenges in accessing support and services, and these challenges place families at a higher risk of tertiary-level involvement with Child Safety Services.

MYNQ makes the following **recommendations**:

- *That a multicultural policy unit be implemented within the Department of Communities Child Safety Services to provide leadership and drive in addressing cross-cultural training, liaise with multicultural agencies, identify the needs of CALD communities, and provide on-going support and professional development to the sector*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support such units across all government departments to coordinate and promote the development of policies that support all Australians, including those from CALD backgrounds.*

Violence And Racial Conflict / The Justice System

A recent MAQ-funded study overseen by a reference group comprising individuals from Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ), Praxis Community Co-op, Brisbane City Council (BCC) and the University of Queensland (UQ), produced interesting findings on perceived racial conflict among young people of CALD backgrounds in Brisbane. The report showed that areas considered 'trouble spots', such as South Bank station and Parklands area, were actually suffering mainly from public perception, rather than actual conflict. In fact, there was a distinct *lack* of racial conflict or violence in these areas. The report went on to examine the disparity between public perception and the reality of the situation. Having spoken with young people over a period of several months, the authors of the report suggested that young people from CALD backgrounds who socialised in these areas suffered from strained relationships with the police and private security workers, rather than with each other. This suggests a need for greater discussion and understanding between these two groups.

MYNQ makes the following **recommendations** for the purpose of this review:

- *That young people from CALD backgrounds be informed and empowered to teach their friends and colleagues about their rights and responsibilities as young Australians.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support the Queensland Police Service in allocating greater resources to the Police Liaison Officer program, particularly in areas of cultural diversity.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support a whole-of-government approach to instituting cross cultural competency training for all staff, including those in the Queensland Police Service, and particularly any who have contact with young people from CALD backgrounds.*

What Is "Multiculturalism"?

In recent times, the term 'Multicultural' has come to mean something akin to 'people of ethnic background'. More accurately, multiculturalism is an ideal, an understanding that each and every member of a community is important, and has something to offer. Rather than 'accepting' people from different backgrounds, the concept of multiculturalism should encourage us to embrace them, and learn from each other.

In Australia, the principles of multiculturalism should encompass every single person, not just refugees and immigrants. We are a modern nation built on immigration. A multicultural policy needs to recognise and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the primary cultures of Australia, with British, Greek, Italian, Irish, Serbian, Croatian, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Burmese and every other culture that has arrived since 1788 as those contributing to a multicultural society. White/Anglo culture is not the 'true' culture of Australia. It is simply the largest by population.

A multicultural society also needs to be recognised as more than a multi-ethnic one. It is also multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-traditional, and more. It is made of many different stories and backgrounds, not just different colours. Therefore a multicultural society not only embraces each person's skin-colour, but also their religious practices, their household traditions, their cultural interrelationships, and their languages, no matter how different and intimidating these may seem a first. Members of a multicultural society look forward to learning new things about new arrivals, rather than making them conform to the majority. They encourage people's rights to practice their religion without fear of persecution, and they understand that different cultures have different viewpoints on politics, gender roles, and responsibilities.

MAQ's Multicultural Policy should reflect the broader meaning of 'multiculturalism', and not just address the needs of refugees and immigrants. Particularly high-need groups such as refugees, newly-arrived immigrants, and indigenous Australians, should have their issues addressed within the broader context of multiculturalism, rather than being the only point.

To this end, MYNQ makes the following **recommendation**:

- *That the definition of "multiculturalism" be clarified in the Multicultural Policy, to highlight the truer nature of the concept, and not the everyday application.*

- *That the meaning of “multiculturalism” be promoted throughout Government as a leading ideal that should inform all policy development, not just those policies relating to immigrants and refugees.*

What Is Working Well?

The existing activities established by community services are supported by reports that show that sport can be a very successful medium for forging friendships between young people from different cultures, and helping new arrived young people feel connected with the broader community. The processes involved in creating a successful sporting and recreation environment can also result in higher engagement with the broader community, and a stronger engagement in education leading to further study and employment.

Bridging schools such as Milpera State High School are another initiative that support the concept of a multicultural society. Young people who engage in bridging schools have much better outcomes when they progress to mainstream schools, as they have had opportunities to strengthen their English language skills, and forge the skills necessary to create friendships in a culturally diverse community. CALD communities in regional areas have tried, without success, to establish bridging schools outside of Brisbane.

With these points in mind, MYNQ makes the following **recommendations**:

- *That the Multicultural Policy support successful initiatives and encourage ongoing funding and resources so that these projects may continue to build upon the good work they have already done.*
- *That successful initiatives be promoted as models of best practice, and utilised as the basis for new projects.*

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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- *Working with interpreters is a skill that requires training. The Multicultural Policy should promote the use of training and infrastructure so that workers do not feel intimidated by new or uncertain processes.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy work in conjunction with the ESL Policy to support young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in schools in ensuring that their needs are properly assessed and met, regardless of their apparent competency.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support an ongoing and flexible approach to learning English, combined with a comprehensive program of access to interpreters. An appreciation of on-site bi-cultural workers in schools will help raise awareness of these problems.*
- *That real estate agents be required to undertake cross cultural competency training as part of their accreditation, and that they continue to learn about the multicultural aspects of the community in which they work, so that they understand the issues facing families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.*
- *That the Policy promote the strong need for a broader education and awareness raising strategy, so that Pacific Islanders are completely aware of the restrictions of their visa status. It is often due to this lack of awareness that such problems arise.*
- *Steps should to be taken to begin changing the restrictions of these visas, so that Pacific Islanders arriving in Australia after living in New Zealand have the same access to services as immigrants and other residents.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy promote and support health services for families from CALD backgrounds including ongoing counselling for families and young people struggling with issues of displacement and belonging in a new community.*
- *That a multicultural policy unit be implemented within the Department of Communities Child Safety Services to provide leadership and drive in addressing cross-cultural training, liaise with multicultural agencies, identify the needs of CALD communities, and provide on-going support and professional development to the sector*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support such units across all government departments to coordinate and promote the development of policies that support all Australians, including those from CALD backgrounds.*
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- *That young people from CALD backgrounds be informed and empowered to teach their friends and colleagues about their rights and responsibilities as young Australians.*
- *That the Multicultural Policy support the Queensland Police Service in allocating greater resources to the Police Liaison Officer program, particularly in areas of cultural diversity.*

- *That the Multicultural Policy support a whole-of-government approach to instituting cross cultural competency training for all staff, including those in the Queensland Police Service, and particularly any who have contact with young people from CALD backgrounds.*
- *That the definition of “multiculturalism” be clarified in the Multicultural Policy, to highlight the truer nature of the concept, and not the everyday application.*
- *That the meaning of “multiculturalism” be promoted throughout Government as a leading ideal that should inform all policy development, not just those policies relating to immigrants and refugees.*
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