



youth affairs network qld

**INCREASING
YOUNG PEOPLE'S
PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE NESB
YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK**

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1.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It has long been recognised that issues relating to young people cannot adequately be addressed or even identified unless young people participate in the process. The need for youth participation is not something that has escaped the attention of the NESB Youth Issues Network (NYIN) but has been difficult in achieving within the present structure. The proposal to AYPAC to fund the position of the NESB Youth Participation Project Officer was initiated in response to the increasingly identified need for young people to be involved in NYIN. AYPAC acknowledged the importance of such a project and funded the nine week position of the NESB Youth Participation Project Officer.

1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

My position as the NESB Youth Participation Project Officer can be seen as consisting of two interconnecting components. The first included consulting with young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and mapping any NESB youth specific groups identified. Consultation was then undertaken with the aim of discussing appropriate networking models between NYIN and young people. After consulting young people, I met with members of the NYIN Steering Committee to obtain a clear understanding of what level and form they perceived youth participation should take within the Network. Several models of participation appropriate to NYIN were then recommended.

1.3 AIM OF THE PROJECT

The goal of this project is to ensure that the NYIN is representative of young NESB people and of the needs and issues which effect their lives. It has been acknowledged that this can only be achieved by directly involving NESB young people.

1.4 YOUNG PERSON AS THE PROJECT WORKER

It was decided that the person employed would be a young NESB person. This has meant that I, as a young person can often relate to the issues and concerns raised by the young people being consulted. It was also acknowledged that young people generally feel more comfortable and less intimidated talking to someone who is of a similar age to them. Throughout the project I was supported by John Bamborough, the NESB Policy and Network Officer at the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ). As John works closely with NYIN he was able to assist me in achieving the goals of this project.

2.0 PROCESS/ METHODOLOGY

2.1 HOW CONSULTATION WAS ACHIEVED

Consulting with young people and obtaining their opinions and views was central to this project. Initially I planned to hold a forum in which young people from a variety of community groups could meet and discuss youth participation models. However after speaking to various young people I felt that it was more appropriate for me to go to them. This proved to be useful in a variety of ways. It ensured that the young people I met with were in surroundings which were familiar to them. The fact that consultation was in *their* space rather than *mine* helped to ensure that young people were comfortable when participating in the consultation process. It also meant that transportation was less of an issue, as they were not going out of their way to meet with me. I also felt that smaller groups where the people already knew each other were more appropriate for this project. This was especially the case as often the young people discussed issues such as racism, a subject they probably wouldn't have felt as comfortable talking about in front of a larger, more unknown group of people.

Before consulting with young NESB people my first task included identifying young NESB groups. This proved harder than first expected as I came to realise that NESB young people do not access mainstream youth services and quite often don't access those services made available through ethno-specific organisations. I became conscious of the fact that NESB young people seem to fall into a gap in terms of service provision. The fact that there seems to be no clear communication or support networks between NESB young people and community organisations is important to note for two reasons:

1. This has meant that there are not many youth specific groups, thus adding to the difficulties related to NYIN developing links with young people.
2. Those young people's groups that did exist were often (but not always) separate from community organisation and were therefore difficult to identify.

When trying to connect with young people outside of the Brisbane Metropolitan Area obvious difficulties were faced, as I was unable to establish any kind of direct relationship with the young people involved. Unfortunately this has meant that most young people involved were from the Brisbane/ Sunshine Coast area.

2.2 SUMMARY OF EACH GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED

As has already been stated it became evident early on that there were few youth specific NESB groups in Queensland.

Key groups that were identified are:

- The **Multicultural Youth Support Group** located at the Goodna Peace Centre. The group is primarily a social group and was set up in order to give young NESB people a place where they could meet peers and socialise. Every Sunday evening a group of about 20 people meet. Sometimes guest speakers are invited along to discuss with the group specific issues they are interested in.
- **Nambour State High School ESL Unit** has students from a large demographic region who come specifically to access this service. While this is not a young people's group many young people access this unit and as such it was a useful way to meet young NESB people on the Sunshine Coast.
- An **El Salvadorian youth group** which is supported by a religious organisation meets about every second or third week. A **Ukrainian Church** also has a similar group. Unfortunately due to the time limit on this project I was unable to make contacts with either of these groups. Although I was unable to access them there are other similar church run youth groups around Queensland, which have a specific NESB focus.
- A group of **African young people** who meet on weekends to play Soccer. This particular group is a good example of the informal way in which young people meet. They are also in the preliminary stages of setting up a musical band.
- The Youth Worker at the **Townsville Migrant Resource Centre** met with a group of young people. The people involved had made contacts with the support worker through a variety of ways. Some were refugees, some had met the worker through projects run at a local school, while others had been involved in youth groups and various performances over the years.
- **Cairns Graft'n'Arts** is a multicultural community and youth arts centre which has contact with a range of NESB young people. While Graft'n'Arts workers were committed to consulting young people for this project the time frame was not achievable. By the end of August it is hoped that they will have been able to meet with some young people to discuss how they can participate in and with NYIN.
- Other young people not involved in any specific group or connected with any organisation were also informally consulted. Some of these young people were at university while others were at school.

2.3 RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

While each group of people that were consulted raised some different issues there were some key points which most groups raised. These issues were:

1. The need for youth specific groups. The young people I spoke with were often interested in getting involved in social groups with a NESB specific focus and wanted lists of these sorts of groups from me. While the issue of space is particularly important to NESB young people it is important to note that public space is something which young people in general see as an issue.
2. In terms of linking with NYIN the young people felt that the Network could be used as a source of information. They saw NYIN as an avenue in which they could be informed of any changes being made to youth policy and other issues affecting young people.
3. Each group I spoke with had a strong desire to meet with other NYIN young people throughout other demographic regions. There were two main reasons for this. The first was to meet others on a social level while the other was for information and ideas exchange. The importance of linking with other young people was expressed by a variety of people whether as individuals, participants of established groups or within schools. This was found to be the case in all of the targeted demographic regions.

These are the main issues that were raised throughout the consultation process. Other more specific issues, such as racism within schools were also raised. Many of the issues which were discussed are not new and have been identified in past reports.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 MODELS OF NETWORKING

MODEL A

Aim/ Objective of this Model

The longterm goal of this model is to provide a link between NESB young people and specific NESB young people's groups throughout Queensland. The existence of such a network would enable NYIN to access the ideas, views and opinions of various young people from a wide demographic region. This network would be a two way information exchange between NYIN and young people. Model A would work to achieve two main objectives: Young people would be in a better position to link in with NYIN and to discuss issues important to them while at the same time being able to establish connections with other youth specific groups throughout Queensland.

People Involved

Within this model young people have the major role, however at the same time the role of NYIN must not be under-valued. Commitment from members of the Network, that is both the steering committee members and the general NYIN members are essential to the success of this model.

Steps Which Need To Be Taken To Achieve This Model

- Establish commitment throughout the NYIN to achieving increased participation in the Network.
- Tap into the existing NESB youth groups and networks. NYIN members need to then start building relationships with young people.
- Inform young people of what NYIN is and its role.
- As was identified in the Results of Consultation, in some areas there is a need to have a social support group. Endeavor to help young people to set up a social group if this is what they want.
- Continue to consult with young people.
- In terms of young people linking together this could be achieved through established networks, such as the Youth Consultative Network (YCN), which is based at YANQ.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Model

Strengths

- Young people have ownership of the process.
- Young people would better be in a position to link in with NYIN.
- NYIN would have direct links to a range of young people's views and opinions across the state.
- Closely linked to yet independent from NYIN.

Weaknesses

- This model is a longterm goal and would be difficult to achieved in the shortterm.
- Several preliminary steps need to be taken before this model is at a workable stage.
- Monetary resources may be needed to establish this model.

MODEL B

Aim/ Objective of this Model

While model A is a longterm goal NYIN could work towards, it is also important to have shortterm outcome orientated goals. This model therefore focuses on achieving increased youth participation in the short term. To illustrate this model the example of the Multicultural Youth Support Group shall be used. This particular group has been chosen because it is an example of an already established group.

People Participating

As with model A, young people are the main participants. NYIN members play a key role in information dissemination and supporting the young people.

Steps Which Need To Be Taken To Achieve This Model

- Identify key NYIN members who will act as an ongoing link between the young people and the Network. This person would inform NYIN about the issues facing the group and could also act as an avenue through which NYIN could consult with young people on issues relevant to the Network.
- Have an information session at the Youth Support Group designed to give the young people access to NYIN. Increasing young people's awareness of NYIN is the first step to achieving youth participation within the Network.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Model

Strengths

- Short term in its ability to involve young people in NYIN in the near future.
- Relatively simple and achievable goals.
- Not a lot of planning needed.

Weaknesses

- Only getting participation from a small number of young people, i.e. those involved in a specific group.
- There is no linking between different young people's groups.

Youth Participation within an Unestablished Group

While the above model could be applied to any specific group it would need to be shaped to meet the individual needs of each particular group. It must also be acknowledged that there are many young people who are interested in being

involved in a youth group but there is no or limited support in place for this to be achieved. The young people involved in the Nambour ESL unit are one such example. Several of the people here expressed an interest in establishing a young people's group but were unsure of how this could be achieved.

Achieving Youth Participation with Young People not involved in Specific Organised Groups.

Organise a day event in which some NYIN members can meet with the young people. Young people from different regions/ schools/ groups could be invited. This would be useful for a number of reasons. Firstly it would give NYIN a chance to build relationships with young people and secondly it would give young people the chance to establish connections with both NYIN and other young people. This would be an ideal time for information and idea exchange.

When consulting with young people, especially those not involved in specific groups it must be kept in mind that informal settings are often most appropriate. A social event or casual meeting helps to ensure that those involved don't feel intimidated by the process. As such organising a social event cannot be underestimated in its ability to:

1. Establish links with young people.
2. Create a safe environment in which participants feel comfortable discussing specific issues.
3. Give young people the information needed to participate in NYIN.

Summary of Models

Two specific models of networking have been proposed. The first is the broader more long term model that I believe NYIN should work towards. The second, more specific model could be achieved in the short term. While the focus here is on already established groups the example is also given on how NYIN could encourage the participation of young people not presently involved in youth groups. In both models it is important to have a key contact person who is in a position to support the young people involved.

Model A and the two parts of Model B are examples of participation at different stages and different levels, which could be achieved within the Network. Initially, the focus should be on the two more specific examples while all the time keeping in mind the broader more representative model, which is the long term goal.

3.2 Recommendation to be Considered in Future Strategic Plans

As has been acknowledged youth participation is a long term strategy which takes time and constant re-evaluation. To ensure that the findings and the networking models of this project are utilised successfully there ideally needs to be a position made available for a worker for a period of one year. Keeping in line with the goal of increasing youth participation this worker should be a NESB young person

and would be supported by the NESB Policy and Network Officer. This worker would be in a position to establish, evaluate and continue to develop the models of youth participation, which have been suggested in this report.

3.3 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

When looking at youth participation within the Network, broader NYIN issues such as communication must be taken into consideration. At present communication within NYIN seems to be more of a one way process in which the NYIN steering committee send information out to members but there is little communication the other way. There is also limited communication between NYIN members who are not involved in the steering committee. In order for youth participation to be achieved communication needs to be a two way process, not only between NYIN members but also between young people and NYIN. The development of clear and ongoing communication channels within the Network is essential if the goal of youth participation is going to be achieved.

4.0 PROJECT LIMITATIONS

- The greatest limitation in this project was time. Many of the people I was liasing with throughout the state found it difficult (and in a few cases impossible) to meet the time frame of the project.
- Acknowledging the fact that youth participation is a long term strategy and this project is short term.
- This project was based on the assumption that there are specific established NESB young people's groups. While I found that there is a need for such groups I also found that there were few of them in existence.
- The fact that this project was funded at a time when there were several NYIN communication issues that needed to be addressed created some difficulties.

- **CONCLUSION**

Youth participation comes in many forms, from limited to extensive, and the success of participation depends to a great extent on the commitment and motivation of those involved in the Network. Youth participation is not about fitting young people into an adult mould but rather it is about giving young people the resources that enable them to make decisions and judgements for themselves. At the same time it is about trusting young people's thoughts by acknowledging the fact that young people's input is valuable.

This report does not have all the answers, nor should it be seen as a final and conclusive way of linking young people in with the NESB Youth Issues Network. Instead it should be seen as a tool with which NYIN can work towards achieving the goal of being more representative and inclusive of young people.