



Community Relations Commission  
*For a multicultural NSW*

# Community Relations Symposium 2006 Report

## Engaging Communities

## **Community Relations Commission “*For a multicultural NSW*”**

The Community Relations Commission of NSW is dedicated to promoting a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society based on mutual respect and responsibility.

The Commission continues to facilitate meaningful dialogue and collaboration between the government and our culturally diverse community to promote community harmony, maximise the benefits of cultural and linguistic diversity, and encourage the participation of all people in NSW in public life.

Each year, the Community Relations Symposium brings together experts and leaders from across New South Wales to address emerging issues and showcase the latest initiatives in multiculturalism.

### **Community Relations Symposium 2006: Outline of the day**

“Engaging Communities” was the theme for the 2006 Community Relations Symposium, which took place on 23 August 2006 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Parramatta. Nearly 200 delegates participated in the event.

Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian AM, Chair of the Commission, opened the day with a welcoming address, which was followed by a program of five concurrent workshops addressing the following issues:

- Maintaining cultural heritage through language
- Connecting communities: interactions between ethnic communities
- African communities
- Improving the understanding of communities
- Succession of community leadership

Workshop reports detailing the emerging themes of the day are provided below.

A lively performance by *Island Beatz* preceded the Symposium luncheon and keynote address by Dr Ian Paterson, Principal of St Bishoy Coptic Orthodox College, Mt Druitt. A transcript of Dr Paterson’s address is available at:

[http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/Projects\\_and\\_Activities/symposia/2006\\_symposium/documents/dr\\_ian\\_patterson\\_keynote\\_speech](http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/Projects_and_Activities/symposia/2006_symposium/documents/dr_ian_patterson_keynote_speech)

The day concluded with a high-powered debate between teams from the University of Technology Sydney and Macquarie University on the very topical issue, “The statements of leaders enhance community harmony. Yes or No?” The lively debate was won by the UTS team, who argued forcefully for the negative that leaders were failing to give the leadership their communities demanded.

In closing the symposium, Mr Kerkyasharian thanked the participants for their contributions and noted these will be extremely valuable in guiding the Commission’s work for the next year.

## **Emerging themes of the day: workshop reports**

### **Workshop 1: Maintaining cultural heritage through language**

Facilitator: Commissioner Michael Christodoulou

**Mr Albert J Vella, President, NSW Federation of Community Language Schools**, delivered a presentation on the role of the NSW Federation of Community Language Schools and outlined the benefits of community language schools joining the Federation.

**Mr Len Ball, NSW Community Language Schools Programme, NSW Department of Education and Training**, presented on the role of language schools from the point of view of a government funding programme.

Emerging themes of the workshop:

- Language is not the only way of maintaining culture, but it is a vital part of the process.
- Cultural heritage is more than just food, clothes, celebrations, religion, music and language – it also underlies how we relate to each other: knowing how to say and do the right thing in the right way in the appropriate situation.
- Language maintenance is usually carried out by organisations. The organisation – and language teaching - needs to be supported by the relevant community.
- There needs to be a major change in mind-set within the ethnic communities, and throughout the NSW community as a whole, to recognise that languages are an asset which should be built on for the future, not merely a means of keeping alive (sometimes in a fossilised condition) the old traditions and home-land ways of doing things.
- The workshop group was critical of the current devaluation of languages other than English in the curricula of Australian schools, and noted that Denmark, for example, requires its young people to undertake the study of four languages.
- It needs to be more generally recognised that the range of languages spoken in NSW is a major economic asset, more so as we move from a primary resources- and manufacturing- based economy to a service economy. And there is a need for languages so that we can sell these services overseas.
- It also needs to be clearly understood that learning other languages is not necessarily an “extra burden” on students –especially when undertaken at an early age. Language learning not only strengthens the learner’s understanding of English, but enhances academic performance by introducing wider ranges of thinking processes.
- Providers of community language courses, and teachers, need to recognise that old methods of teaching are inadequate, and programs, courses and lessons must be contextualised to the current Australian situation. This has particular flow-on to the development of appropriate, localised and modern learning materials.
- Addressing the last need involves cost, which places a demand on both Government and the communities to provide better and more efficient funding.

## **Workshop 2: Connecting communities: interactions between ethnic communities**

Facilitator: Commissioner Wajiha Ahmed

**Dr Armen Gakavian of the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University**, presented on the findings of a national research project “Building Neighbourhood Harmony: Strategies for Local Government”, conducted in partnership between Macquarie University and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs through the Living in Harmony grants programme. The project aimed to develop a 'toolkit' of strategies local councils can deploy to improve relationships between communities.

**Ms Soraia Rocha e Sousa of Parramatta City Council** presented on Harmony Day and the Journeys of the Spirit Exhibition. Both these events attempt to create linkages between the local indigenous communities and migrant and refugee communities and to engage these groups to create a sustainable dialogue of unity and understanding.

**Julie Ross of the Beverly Hills Intensive English Centre and Nell Lynnes, NSW Department of Education and Training**, presented on a cultural exchange programme developed between BHIEC and Menai High School in response to the racial unrest in Sutherland Shire at the end of 2005. The project aims to foster understanding among students about Australia’s diversity, the cultures of Australian teenagers, and the role of the media in shaping public opinion.

Emerging themes of the workshop:

- Need to promote existing resources;
- Need to promote cross-cultural awareness between local business owners and community;
- Need to promote mutual respect and find ways to share cultural knowledge;
- Need to deconstruct media stereotypes;
- Need to break down cultural barriers and build bridges between cultures;
- Encourage young people to continue to work started by older generation;
- Young people have a different relationship to ‘difference’ than their parents.

## **Workshop 3: African communities**

Facilitator: Commissioner Ezel Jupiter

**Bridget Sarris of the Evans Intensive English Centre Blacktown, and Christine Tiekle and Greg Maguire of the Multicultural Programs Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training**, spoke on what young refugees and humanitarian entrants from African countries identify as barriers to their success in education. Participants listened to students’ views as recorded on DVD and examined the recommendations of *Making up for lost time: young Africans in schools*, the report of a research project conducted by the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney.

**Cristina Fica of The Smith Family** presented a paper on a pilot programme of Music Therapy Workshops for refugee survivors of torture and trauma. The pilot program was initiated by the Inner West Community Settlement Services to explore ways in

which music could be used to facilitate the healing and growth process for a group of predominantly Sudanese clients.

**Irene Ross of Walia Corp (former manager of Blacktown MRC) and Faustino Aboka, Vice-President of the Equatorian Community and Welfare Association** addressed the issue of volunteering with African refugee communities. The ‘Sudanese Community Model’ of working with the police, which led to the development with Blacktown City Council of the Blacktown Emerging Communities Action Plan (BECAP) Committee, was presented as a good practice example of community volunteering. The presenters also outlined some of the barriers to volunteer work and stressed the importance of maintaining volunteer initiatives once they are established.

Emerging themes of the workshop:

- The diversity of African communities was emphasised throughout the workshop;
- The need for pooled funding across government departments was identified;
- The need to integrate services and community consultative mechanisms was identified;
- Participants would like to see working models for engaging African communities promoted and built upon. The promotion of working models on government websites (CRC or Premier’s Department) was recommended.
- The need to move beyond ‘crisis’ responses to settlement needs the ‘secondary phase’ of community support was emphasised. The recruitment of bi-lingual workers (bi-lingual speakers of emerging African languages) was suggested as an important part of this secondary phase.
- Promoting access to technology for emerging communities
- Facilitating easier access to ‘entry point’ local services, especially in locations where MRCs are not easily accessible;
- Recruiting interpreters in new and emerging languages, especially in regional areas. The NSW Health initiative in this respect was acknowledged.
- Harnessing existing cultural resources and talents, as demonstrated in the example of music therapy for trauma survivors.
- Increased access to childcare was identified as an important need, especially for parents who also volunteer for the communities. Government grants for playgroups were suggested as a possible way of addressing the issue.
- Participants identified the need for a costed argument demonstrating the long-term benefits of early intervention programs;
- Need to raise awareness of existing resources amongst new arrivals;
- Urgent need for increased Commonwealth funding for ESL provision to new humanitarian entrants;
- Mentoring/orientation support should be on the agenda for the Commonwealth in developing measures to improve settlement outcomes;
- Funded support for volunteers and workers for services, like counselling support, which keep volunteers engaged;
- The CRC Youth Leaders Day (the day preceding) was deemed highly successful – the CRC Symposium should also encourage the participation of young people.

#### **Workshop 4: Improving the understanding of communities**

Facilitator: Commissioner Marta Aquino

**Professor Andrew Jakubowicz of the University of Technology Sydney**, presented on “Making Multicultural Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, a prize-winning educational website documenting the controversies, issues and history of how modern Australian cultural diversity came to be the way it is. The MMA website contains over 3000 pages of research materials, hundreds of images, audio clips and videos. Prof. Jakubowicz encouraged communities to play a part in building the NSW component of the website to more fully reflect the complexity and excitement of the state’s engagement with cultural diversity.

**Rabbi Zalman Kastel and Ms Ola Elhassan**, Jewish and Muslim community leaders, presented on the Goodness and Kindness Campaign in which leaders give talks to school children and organisations on their experiences and the need for understanding between religious faiths.

**William Purcell, Chair of the NSW Council for Pacific Communities**, presented on the establishment of the Council, its membership, and its role as the peak representative body for Pacific communities in NSW.

Emerging themes of the workshop:

- The group highlighted the need to acknowledge commonalities which exist across religious and cultural differences, to promote the unity underlying diversity;
- Young people need a greater voice – there was a strong focus on generational differences in experiences of diversity and the need for greater communication across generations;
- Whose voices get heard? Whose stories get told? The group noted there are competing narratives within communities and identified the need to listen to a more diverse range of narratives reflecting difference experiences within communities;
- Increased NSW content for the MMA website in terms of resources and narratives was encouraged;
- The group noted current tensions surrounding concepts of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘assimilation’ and highlighted the need for governments to acknowledge and promote the benefits of multiculturalism;
- The different experiences and particular needs of ethnic communities in regional areas as compared to metropolitan centres was a point of focus for the group;
- Greater collaboration between organisations and better promotion of existing projects;
- Concerns were raised about the sustainability of community organisations and the need for sustainable funding;
- The group noted similarities between issues confronting the emerging African communities and those encountered by Pacific communities.

### **Workshop 5: Succession of community leadership**

Facilitator: Richard Acheson, Director, Community Relations Service

**Mr James Tuitavuki from the Pacific Youth Network Committee (PYNC)** presented on the establishment of PYNC as a subcommittee of NSW Council for Pacific Communities and outlined some of its plans for the future, including the Pasifika Day event to celebrate Pacific youth culture in Darling Harbour.

**Ms Christina Radburn from Bankstown City Council** presented on the NESB Women's Leadership Project, a partnership between Auburn, Bankstown and Canterbury Councils to promote leadership among women from non-English speaking backgrounds through leadership training and mentoring programmes.

Emerging themes of the workshop:

- There was a strong focus on the need to foster youth leadership in ethnic communities;
- Concerns were expressed in the group that young people today may not have the same passion for community work witnessed in their parent's generation;
- Women leaders should be encouraged to lead on issues relevant to the whole community, men and women, and not just lead on women's issues alone;
- The PYNC model was discussed at length as a model for engaging young people and developing their leadership skills.

### **Outcomes of the 2006 Community Relations Symposium**

In summary, the Commission achieved the following outcomes through the Community Relations Symposium 2006:

- Good participation from a wide range of community, religious, academic and government institutions.
- Fifty-four delegates provided written feedback on the symposium, 85% of respondents rating the Symposium as good or excellent.
- Community representatives, workers and leaders were brought together to talk about issues that were considered by the Commission and delegates to be priority issues.
- Workshop groups canvassed a range of strategies for community organisations and the government to consider when dealing with issues of concern.