

Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network – 2014 REPORT



This report was compiled by Annto Hassen: MMYN General Secretary, with the assistance of the MMYN 2014 team.

MMYN Report 2014

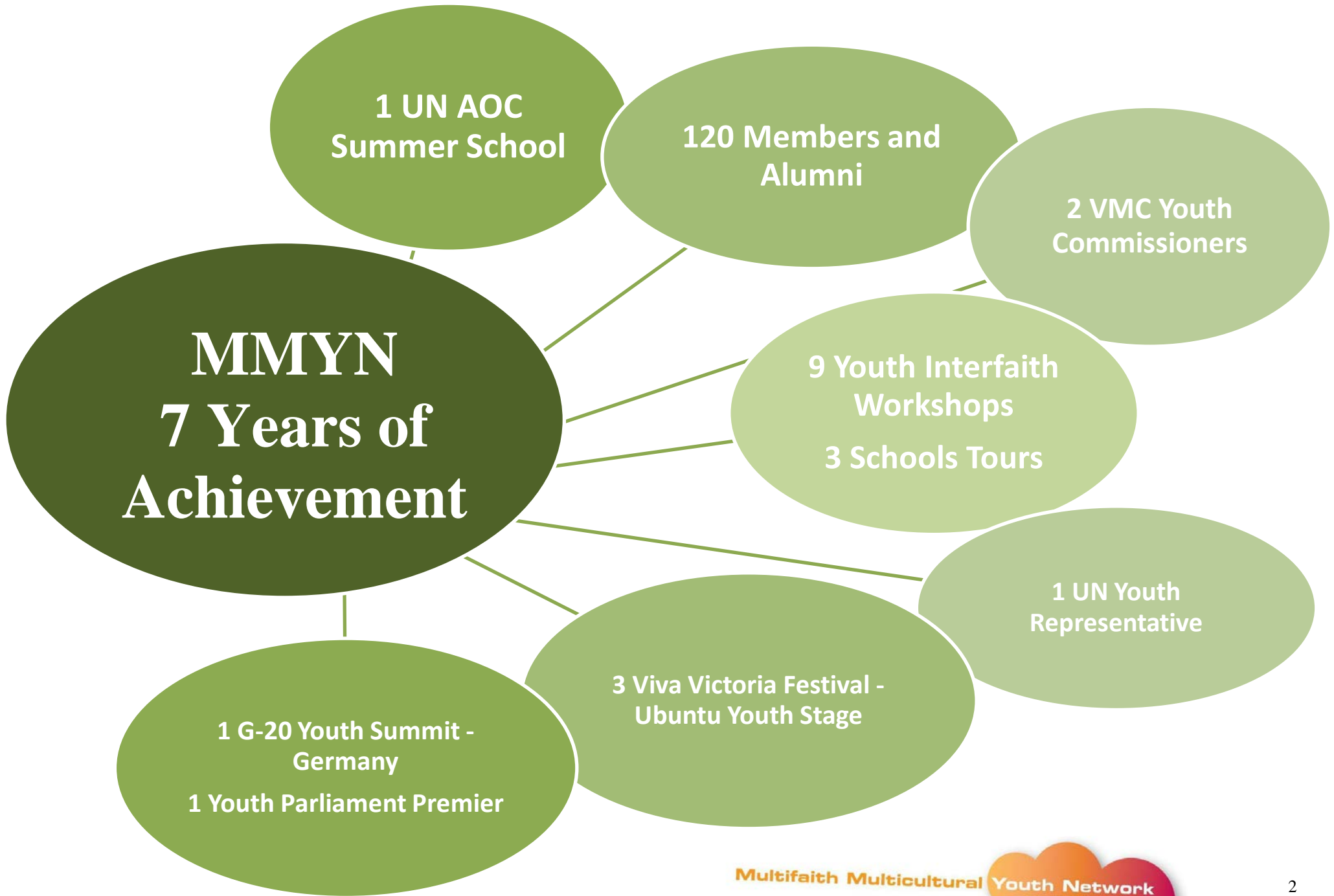
The Multicultural Multifaith Youth Network (MMYN) will complete its seventh term in November 2014. The MMYN has been advising the Victorian Government on key issues affecting young culturally and religiously diverse people since 2007. The MMYN has been engaged in a range of activities, consultations and initiatives that have allowed members to foster understanding and respect within the Network's membership, as well as the wider community. Alongside these activities the MMYN maintains its advisory role through the publishing of an annual report.

The MMYN experience is exciting, diverse, challenging and meaningful. The work that members have produced has increased the Network's profile within the Victorian Government and the wider community. Each year new members join the Network bringing with them fresh ideas, passion, enthusiasm and a genuine desire to effect change. MMYN has been providing young diverse Victorians with the opportunity to become more involved in the Government's decision making process.

With the continuous support of Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC), the MMYN will continue to bridge the gap between the Government and Victoria's multicultural and multifaith young people. The MMYN will continue to advocate on priority issues identified by its members and other young Victorians, and work to increase understanding between Victorians from different faiths and cultures.



MMYN Members talking with the ABC's Australia Network about multiculturalism in Victoria (March 2014)



What we've been up to:

Training

MMYN members took part in two training sessions throughout the year that will be of significance to them in their futures as engaged community members. The first training session was *Interfaith 101* hosted by *InterAction*. It was an introductory workshop that outlined what it meant to live in a religiously rich society and examined why interfaith cooperation is more important than ever. The second session was *Working in Teams* training hosted by Ian Laing. The training aimed at developing management and leadership expertise for participants and emphasised the basic stages of how groups progress and function throughout projects. Both training sessions were valuable as members learnt transferable skills that they will be able to incorporate in many environments.



MMYN members learning about interfaith dialogue (February 2014)

Youth Leadership and Community Engagement

Regional Interfaith Workshops:

The Geelong, Shepparton and Wodonga workshops that MMYN members participated in were very insightful as members were exposed to young people's experiences from new and emerging communities outside metropolitan Melbourne. The MMYN delivered workshops to young people from Afghani, African, Bhutanese and Burmese backgrounds and introduced concepts of youth leadership and diversity

of religion and cultures in Victoria. Through interactive activities, the MMYN presenters explored ideas around diversity and identity, as well as sharing personal experiences about being a young person in Victoria.



MMYN members presenting in Geelong and showing participants the different styles of wearing Muslim coverings for women (March 2014)

Victoria University Interfaith Workshops:

The MMYN continued to deliver workshops to social work students at Victoria University, an activity that began last year at the invitation of the university course co-ordinator. It was an enriching experience for everyone, offering an opportunity for the students to ask questions about working with diverse young people, and allowing the MMYN to hone their presentation skills and become more comfortable in sharing their own spiritual understandings.

'Working with tertiary organisations both affirmed my experience of multiculturalism and spiritual knowledge, and allowed me to provide dimension to the work of future specialists in counselling and community service. Beyond that, I was able to hone skills in presentation and leading discussion. I felt our group brought real diversity to the understanding of the group and the feedback was that it really opened their eyes.' - Brodie



Young performers showcasing their skills at the 2014 Ubuntu Youth Stage

Cultural Diversity Week

UBUNTU Youth Stage: The Viva Victoria Festival was an exciting and eye-opening experience for the new MMYN members. They participated in the UBUNTU Youth Stage established by a former MMYN member and which we understand is the first of its kind in Victoria. UBUNTU is a youth led initiative that has been incorporated into the Viva Victoria celebrations and has for the past three years been a success.

Premier's Gala Dinner: This year ten MMYN members were invited to attend the Premier's Gala Dinner during Cultural Diversity Week festivities.

Representatives from across government and the private sector and diverse faith and cultural communities were in attendance. The dinner was a fabulous celebration of the different stories, art and traditions which are now part of Victoria.

Conferences and Talks

This year, MMYN members have been invited to attend conferences and talks on issues which interest them.

'At the Media and Cultural Respect Luncheon (hosted by the Australian Intercultural Society) I got an opportunity to speak with volunteers and workers from a wide range of interfaith organizations across Melbourne. It was great to see the passion that existed in the ethnic and multicultural space,

and Jon Faine's lecture provided an expert voice on the portrayal of faith and ethnic issues by the Australian media.' - Ronnen

This year MMYN members were fortunate enough to meet and engage with the Youth Representative to the UN, Laura John. Laura is also a former MMYN member. The meeting was inspirational and challenging as they discussed the direction of Australia's future for young people. This meeting was unique for members as they were aware that all thoughts and feelings were being formalized into a report that would be presented at the UN Headquarters in New York.

'I represented MMYN at The Multicultural Network Meeting at the Immigration Museum in June. It was an amazing opportunity to network with members of the community who are involved with youth and the media. The theme was on young people and the media so I had an opportunity to input my ideas and findings from our working group during open discussion.' - Celia

'From the 26th to the 29th of May, religious and cultural leaders from all around the world gathered at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Victoria for the International Theological Conference: Interfaith Dialogue. As a Zoroastrian, MMYN gave me this opportunity to meet with leaders from different religions on an international scale where I was able to discuss and debate the interconnectedness of my religion with renowned experts while giving a youth focused perspective to current concerns.' - Zuben

The MMYN had the opportunity to present 2014 research findings at an Interdepartmental Group meeting to the heads of different government departments. The areas of research and the research findings enabled the attendees to gain a different perspective by discovering what young people are currently reflecting on. Through more meetings such as this, young people's concerns can be incorporated into the decision making process.

MMYN members attended the second *Can we talk? Language: The great divide Symposium* at the Immigration Museum. The one day event explored what it means to be a multilingual society and how Australia identifies as a multicultural country. It delved into topics such as community language, citizenship, rights, education and services to profile best practice across sectors.

One MMYN member had the opportunity to participate in a focus group hosted by the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University. The half-day session was part of an evaluation of multicultural programs across Victoria. It was a chance for members to meet other network representative who had years of experience working in the Victorian Interfaith space and the challenges they have faced promoting religious diversity.

New Approach Explained:

This year the structure of the MMYN has allowed for a greater emphasis on the MMYN's role as an advisory body. MMYN members were given more autonomy to identify and develop proposals on issues decided solely by the group. Research into these issues, content of meetings and consultations on the chosen issues was undertaken entirely by the four working groups: The themes this year were: Freedom of speech, Youth Employment, Media stereotypes and Social Media.



Reports:

Youth Unemployment:

The group identified youth unemployment as a significant concern for young people in Victoria and have considered the impact for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, financial difficulties and poverty. The group has posited:

- that increasing the amount of opportunities to gain professional experience is imperative to allow youth to develop skills and establish an identity thus reducing these impacts.
- implementing a model that they have produced to address the problem at a grassroots level.

Freedom of Speech:

The group dedicated their research into legislation, lack of education and the abuses of freedom of speech that have contributed to obstacles for multicultural and diverse spiritual groups in Victoria. The group has identified:

- an opportunity for the government to circumvent these issues through the development and delivery of freedom of speech training programs in Victoria's education sector for young people.

Media Stereotypes:

The group focused on the misrepresentations and the misconceptions of the minority groups within the media and develop young people's capacity to critically analyse the

media. The team divided the minority groups into three categories: Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Indigenous Australians and Religious Groups and identified how they were being portrayed. The group has recommended:

- that more funding should be given to media education programs in Victorian schools to improve the quantity and quality of existing programs after their evaluation
- the establishment of more networks between young journalists and minority groups.

Social Media:

The group dedicated their research to how Social Media contributes to isolation and the unification of various ethnic groups within the greater Victorian multicultural society. They concluded that Social Media has been catalyst for many positive social justice campaigns creating mass participation in combating social issues but as its usage grows at a rapid rate it is becoming a more dominant source for spreading hate speech in Victoria. The group endorses a solution which includes:

- more resources are dedicated to enforce hate speech laws on social media
- public education campaigns that use social media to promote diversity should be sponsored by or co-ordinated directly by OMAC.

MMYN Looking Forward!!

The MMYN is getting ready for another exciting and energetic year! There are opportunities for members to develop youth-led projects focusing on employment, media and newly arrived young people. The MMYN will be more active in promoting interfaith understanding and are looking forward to sharing their faith and culture with more Victorians. Thank you to everyone who participated in the projects for this year and your dedication for making this happen!!!

2014 Members

2nd Year:

Oussama Abou-Zeid
Asha Acouth
Maharous Wagdi Ahmed
Asia Eltayeb
Annto Hassen
Zixuan He
Joel Kuperholz
Zuben Rustomjee
Hanisha Sharma-Luita
Celia (Bich-Ngoc) Tran
Nafisa Yussf

1st Year:

Safa Almarhoun
Alycone Alphonse
Jacob Chacko
Justin Chua
Rachael Davies
Monica Forson
Ishleen Kaur
Julian Koval
Ronnen Leizrovitz
Catherine Long
Tony Luo
Brodie Paparella
Shabnam Safa
Farzana Shariffe