



# Speak Out<sup>2</sup>

**Multicultural Youth Forum Report  
2007**



An Initiative of Multicultural Youth South Australia Inc (MYSA)



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Office for Youth



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Thank You

### Introduction

This report highlights the findings of the Speak Out<sup>2</sup> Multicultural Youth Forum held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007 at the University of South Australia, City West Campus. The aims of the Forum were to provide an opportunity for young migrants and refugees to voice opinions and concerns on current issues affecting them; participate in skill development workshops; access information on mainstream services; engage with other young people from different cultures and develop support networks; and contribute to the development of strategies and solutions for tackling these issues.

The Forum provided several opportunities for young migrants and refugees to get involved and have their say on key issues identified by them as affecting their lives as young people living in South Australia. This included an open forum where six of the Multicultural Youth Ambassadors shared their personal views on the pertinent question "What issues matter to you as a multicultural young person living in South Australia?" These inspirational speakers were aged between 17 and 21 years from Afghan, South African, Sierra Leone, Croatian, Indigenous, and Sudanese backgrounds. Three workshops were also conducted covering a range of issues determined through consultations with young people including leadership development, volunteering, and employment.

This report will discuss key findings and present the strategies, recommendations and solutions put forward by the participants at the Forum.

### Background

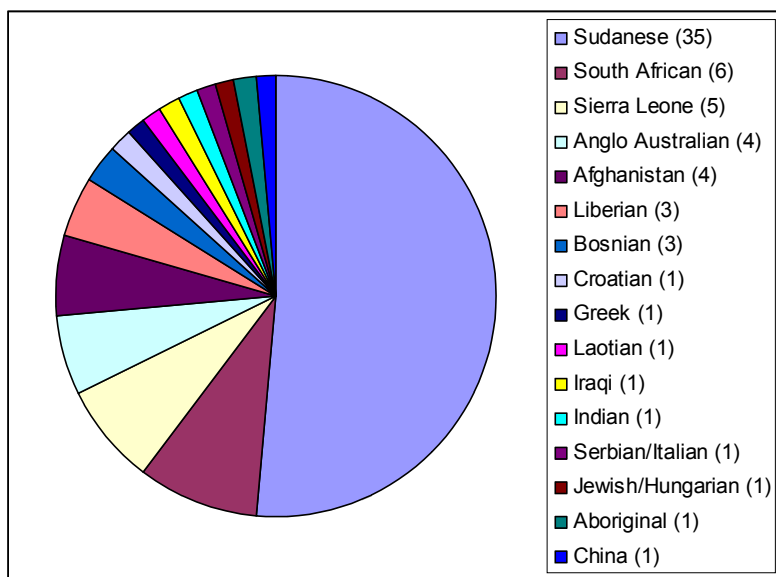
Multicultural Youth SA Inc (MYSA) is the state representative advisory, advocacy and service delivery body for young migrants and refugees in South Australia. MYSA work incorporates direct service delivery, industry support and training, policy and research and capacity building of community groups.

MYSA previously ran Speak Out in 1997 when the agency was a Youth Network. Now 10 years on, MYSA has held another Speak Out Multicultural Youth Forum to give multicultural young people, particularly young migrants and refugees, an opportunity to raise their issues.

The State Government Department of South Australia, Office for Youth provided MYSA with a one-off grant to coordinate the Multicultural Youth Forum as a complementary output to MYSA's current M.Y. Culture Project. The M.Y. Culture Project is funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship under the *Living in Harmony Programme* and aims to promote cultural diversity particularly among young people and the wider community. A key component of the project was the selection and development of Multicultural Youth Ambassadors and some of these Ambassadors were showcased at the Forum.

## Participants

In total, 68 young people aged between 14 and 27 years registered and participated in the Forum. Of these, 38% were female and 62% were male. 78% were refugees who had arrived in Australia since 2001. The chart below provides further details of the cultural backgrounds of the participants.



### Cultural Backgrounds

Sudanese	35	51%
South African	6	9%
Sierra Leone	5	7%
Anglo Australian	4	6%
Afghanistan	4	6%
Liberian	3	4%
Bosnian	2	3%
Croatian	1	1%
Greek	1	1%
Laotian	1	1%
Iraqi	1	1%
Indian	1	1%
Serbian/Italian	1	1%
Jewish/Hungarian	1	1%
Aboriginal	1	1%
China	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100%</b>

In consultations with young people prior to the event they identified the importance of having service providers and policy and decision-makers present to learn about the issues of concern. In total, 32 service providers and policy and decision-makers were present and 11 agencies held information stalls. The total number of attendees at the Speak Out<sup>2</sup> Forum was 110 people.



### Findings and Discussion

This section provides an overview of the experiences and views of young migrants and refugees on the issues affecting their lives. Most participants gave detailed accounts of their issues, experiences and opinions and highlighted a number of key areas of need. Participants also suggested strategies and ideas to initiate change in issues impacting on their lives.

The findings of the open forum, workshops and strategy session will be presented together. Each quotation appearing in the report will be followed by a brief note indicating the background and age of participant. Where particularly sensitive information is presented about a cultural group, identifying information will be concealed.

#### *"What matters to you as a multicultural young person living in South Australia?"*

The main issues raised by participants were (1) racism and discrimination, (2) education and schooling, (3) employment, (4) culture and identity, (5) family and community and (6) leadership.

#### **1.) Racism and Discrimination**

The participants identified racism, discrimination and exclusion as an issue experienced in daily life, particularly in schools, the workplace and in public settings, for example on public transport. Being bullied or picked on whilst catching a bus or waiting a train station. Some young people also reported negative experiences of police and security officers with regards to their responses and interactions with groups of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people in public space, especially 'commercial space'. Many young people spoke of individual, subtle and institutional racism, whilst others had experienced racial vilification and abuse.

*We always get accused of stuff we haven't done. Security guards come up to us and we have to defend and explain ourselves. Female, 17 years old, Indigenous Australian*

Young people of African backgrounds in particular perceived being targeted due to their physical appearance. Young people generally reported being typecast as 'unreliable', 'irresponsible' and 'trouble makers' and for those young people from visible minorities this stereotyping is compounded:

*People see black. People don't want to know or understand me. Female, 17 years old, Sudan*

*We are not trouble our skin is trouble. Female, 18 years old, Sierra Leone*

This being said, it was also highlighted that racism was not always an issue of skin colour and related also to inaccurate assumptions and lack of sensitivity to different cultures. Participants emphasised the need for increased community awareness through education, sharing of culture and customs at events and festivals, and reduced stereotyping and negative imagery about cultural groups, particularly CALD youth, in the media:

*People don't notice or understand subtle racism.... [I don't like it when] people assume I'm just like them. [referring to stereotypes of young Croatians] Female, 21 years old, Croatian*

The participants also raised the issue of ignorance and racism within their own communities:

*Black are also racist to white. We are all racist sometimes. Male, 16 years old, Sudan*

Some young people discussed strategies for dealing with racism and discrimination, such as choosing to communicate, ignore, educate, move away, use diplomacy, protest or label what is happening.

*Yeah I get offended but I think maybe they really don't know or their parents raised them that way. We should just talk to them. Female, 17 years old, Bosnian*

Some young people indicated that they felt angry when subjected to offensive comments. Young males in particular demonstrated a lack of skills and strategies for dealing with vilification and abuse:

*I can't control myself; I have to show him who I am. Male, 17 years old, Sudan*

The participants clearly articulated that they wanted to see change by increasing community understanding of the norms, behaviours, values, beliefs and traditions of the diverse cultural and religious groups in Australia. They argued that increased acceptance and appreciation of diverse cultures would come through diversification of the Australian Studies curriculum in schools to incorporate cultural studies, community education, particularly around understanding the experiences and practices of new and emerging communities, and positive media portrayal of multicultural young people and their contribution to the community.

The impact of negative media portrayal of CALD young people was highlighted as having a strong impact on young people's self-perception and a sense of belonging to the wider community. Many young people perceived that the media played a key role in fuelling community division, deterring community participation by CALD young people, and perpetuating exaggerated and inaccurate stereotyping by the broader community. Some



young people emphasised that negative media representations failed to recognise the diversity of CALD young people and to highlight achievements and strengths.

*One person from the community does it and we all get put in a box. Female, 16 years old, Sudan*

*Hey guys, I don't have any weapons by the way. Male, 18 years old, Iraq*

Several young people commented on the role the media played in the perpetuation of stereotypes in the community.

*The media shows Aboriginal young people petrol sniffing and focuses on negative points like the Gang of 49 and robbery. Not all people are like that. Petrol sniffing is a bad thing and nobody is doing anything about that...its up to the elders...health and education is important too. Boredom and fun is the reason for the high juvenile detention rate...Aboriginal young people need to balance cultures...we need people setting good examples and spreading messages through music and in other ways. Female, 17 years old, Aboriginal*

*Not all Aboriginal people are doing bad stuff. It's important not to judge or stereotype. Female, 17 years old, Sudan*

## 2.) Education and Schooling

Some refugee young people stated that there had been little flexibility in the education system and that upon arrival to Australia they had been placed according to age level and assumed educational background rather than according to fair tests and proven skill level. Many refugee young people have literacy issues due to disrupted schooling and in some cases no previous education. However, the methods used to place young people in schools, particularly assumptions made about their education in their home country and their English language proficiency, were often incorrect and insulted the young people.

*When we first arrive [in Australia] they assume we don't know any English because we are refugees. It's insulting...we feel like stupid people. They make assumptions about our education at home - it is not recognised...it's no wonder we drop out of school. Female, 18 years old, Sierra Leone*

*Not all Africans have a good education, but they 'dress to impress'. Female, 18 years old, Sudan*



*I was struggling maths and the teacher said "that's ok considering your background" I couldn't believe. I said "excuse me, maths is universal".* Female, 15 years old, Sierra Leone

Some young people suggested increased training and support for teachers on working with newly-arrived refugees in a culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate manner. These young people believed that such training would decrease the incidents of teachers perceived labelling and victimising young people based on assumptions about their educational background and capacity to learn.

Several young people raised the issue of racism and discrimination within the school environment, including verbal harassment and bullying from peers, whilst others focussed on the lack of support from teachers when such incidents occurred. Young females from African backgrounds and young Muslim females wearing a hijab were particularly vocal and passionate about their experiences:

*[At school my classmate] asked me to move tables and I said, "Why should I do what you tell me?" Then she said to me "this is white people country, you're taking over our country". Then she said, "You were brought up by bad parents" and started calling my mum names. When the teacher came the girl reversed the story and the teacher helped the Aussie girl. After that I decided to move schools.* Female, 17 years old, Sudan

*After my class watched "Save the last Dance," my teacher said, "black people are not well educated".* Female, 17 year old, Sudan

*I've heard people at school say, "Aids comes from Sudan".* Female, 16 years old, Sudan

Many young people saw the school community and their teachers as a key source of support during the settlement process. Some young people felt that racism and discrimination was rarely acknowledged as such and was not dealt with adequately or fairly within the school.

The young people who made statements about the feelings of isolation and distress arising from racism and discrimination in schools proposed increased support from teachers, increased cultural awareness training for teachers and students, and opportunities to share and learn about the refugee and settlement experiences:

*Australian Studies at school is a waste of time. We have Australian values so we should really look at all other cultures in Australia. People from ethnic backgrounds want to learn about other cultures in Australia.* Male, 17 years old, India

*We don't know how other cultures think. We don't know how to address other people.* Male, 17 years old, South Africa

*[When people say rude things to me] I think you haven't experienced what I've experienced.* Female, 17 years old, Sudan

*Multicultural young people need support in school because they feel bad about themselves. There is a lack of support for multicultural young people to get pointed in the right direction.* Male, 24 years old, Laos.

Some young people reported a lack of understanding about the education system and unrealistic expectations of their education, training and employment achievements from themselves and family. Some young people spoke about the assumption that because they had access to education, training and more employment opportunities they were expected to automatically excel or become Doctors or Lawyers. Many young people spoke of the need for support and guidance when choosing subjects at school and during the transition from school to further study, as well as increased access to tutoring and homework clubs. They expressed interest in learning more about career and education pathways. They also highlighted a need for programs that provided their parents/guardian with an orientation to the Australian education system.

### 3.) Employment

Some young people described barriers to employment including recognition of prior experience in their home country, lack of job seeking skills, lack of awareness of workplace rights, and abuse in the workplace.

*Even the little things like writing a resume or getting interview skills is so hard workers don't always give us time coz they are busy but it is pressure for us we need help with jobs no jobs mean no monies and no one wants to be just on Centrelink.* Male, 19 years old, Liberian

*I had a chance to get a job at a supermarket coz my uncle work there and they wanted me to give a resume with my application. I asked an employment service to help me and I couldn't get an appointment for 6 weeks. I didn't get the job because I had no help to write a resume. Everyone wants us to get jobs but we still need support about the different ways things get done in Australia. Where can I go?* Female, 17 years old, Sudan

During discussion about young people and the workplace, numerous examples of harassment and bullying were raised. One young woman spoke of her experience of unfair dismissal from a casual role in Port Adelaide:

*I was the only black person there... The boss didn't really want me there and I didn't feel comfortable... One day I called them to tell them that I can't make it to work and they fired me. Female, 17 years old, Sudan*

Many young people reported experiencing barriers when looking for part-time and casual employment. Common barriers included language, appearance, cultural background and the fact that their name sounded non-Western. A young Muslim woman described her experiences looking for casual employment.

*I recently started wearing the hijab. When I'm looking for a job I wish they would say they couldn't hire me because of the hijab [head scarf]. It is so obvious that's why... I have a friend whose customers walk away because they see she is wearing a hijab. Female, 17 years old, Bosnian*

*I'd been looking for work for ages and got no interviews or phone calls. I changed my name [to a Western sounding name] and I got offered five interviews! Male, 16 years old, Sudan*

Some young people proposed increased education and accessible information in the area of workplace rights. They also asked for increased support in gaining supported work experience and developing knowledge and awareness regarding future employment and training opportunities.

#### 4.) Culture and Identity

Several young people expressed difficulty managing their own cultural identity in a foreign country and context whilst dealing with acculturation and trying to fit into the wider society. They highlighted significant cultural expectations from family and their community, but were dismayed by the lack of positive role models. Several young people raised culture as an important part of their identity. These young people explained that food, dance and music, are cultural practices and symbols that form the 'tip of the iceberg' when it comes to culture and identity. Some young people went on to discuss values, beliefs, religion, family, relationship to elders and marriage.

Several second-generation CALD young people stated that it was important to uphold traditional cultural norms and expectations. Whilst many newly arrived refugee young people on the other hand expressed great challenges with trying to marry their traditional and newfound culture:

*Young people should be proud and not forget. We are in a modern country but should remember our traditional culture. Male, 17 years old, India*



*That is the way I was brought up. I can't change that.* Male, 24 years old, Laos

*Be proud of where you come from and what your community have done.* Female, 21 years old, Croatia

Some young people described language difficulties as a barrier to cross-cultural communication, particularly when a certain communication style is required with police, security guards and employers:

*When I'm out people say, "Can you repeat that? I can't hear you." That's not true - they just don't try hard.* Female, 17 years old, Sudan

*[Newly-arrived young people] have a huge language barrier when dealing with the police.* Male, 20 years old, South Africa

*You need to have good English to apply for a job.* Male, 21 years old, Liberian

Some young people identified vastly different roles for young males and females as an issue for multicultural young people in South Australia. The young males emphasised changes in their roles and relationships within the family since arriving in Australia, especially the additional responsibility of being an advocate, translator, carer for younger siblings and elders and a contributor to family income. Females spoke of having less freedom, rights and social opportunities, complained of having to abide by strict rules in relation to seeing friends, going out, relationships and clothing.

The African young people highlighted the fact that gender roles are clearly defined in their home country and females and males are taught separate values:

*In Sudan girls and guys have different rights. Girls have less choice, power, rights and freedom.* Female, 18 years old, Sudan

*[In Australia] people judge you by the way you dress but the way you dress shouldn't matter. My mother says if I dress too sexy I will not find a husband because I will be judged.* Female, 17 years old, Sudan

Participants suggested that ethnic community groups needed to work with services to help develop ways to support young people to maintain their cultural identity whilst being considerate of the Australian culture and values as well. The need for safe environments to learn about their culture and that of Australia and develop a balanced approach was highlighted as a potential solution to this issue.

### 5.) Family and Community

Some young people from new and emerging communities emphasised that a number of their traditional beliefs and values, particularly around relationships, were difficult to merge with the norms and behaviour espoused by Australian youth. Many young people stated that intergenerational conflict arose in relation to independence, social activities and relationships. For young women, abstinence from pre-marital sexual relations was highlighted as a very important part of African culture. Accordingly, many young African female participants reported having boyfriends or being sexually active and that they hid this information from their parents:

*Parents are worried that you'll sleep with a boyfriend and then they'll leave you and no one will marry you. Female, 17 years old, Sudanese*

Some young African people highlighted that domestic violence was seen differently in other cultures. The issue was also raised that parents were not provided with coping mechanisms to discipline and undertake their parenting roles in a western context. It was discussed that changing parenting habits required learning and participants were critical that no investment was made in this area:

*When they beat us up that makes us learn. It means they [parents] want them [their children] to grow and learn. Parents want to regain control. Female, 17 years old, Sudan*

*People take it the wrong way. It is for their [children's] own good. Male, 17 years old, Sudan*

*It is not like anyone is helping them [parents] to find other ways to teach us and correct our mistakes maybe someone should look at that for them. Female, 18 years old, Sudan*

*Some people are so quick to get parents in trouble for hurting us but no one tells them what they should do! Male, 17 year old, Liberian.*

Many young people outlined the benefits of getting involved in the community and in volunteering as a way to better learn about Australian way of life. Young people involved in volunteering were particularly enthusiastic about opportunities to do interactive, hands-on learning experiences such as camping, rock climbing, swimming and bush walking. Volunteering was identified as a means of addressing exclusion, which also led to the need for supported opportunities to get young people participating in community life:

*Get involved it has help me!! Male, 18 years old, Iraq*

*Help others by volunteering in the community and school. Male, 17 years old, Sudan*

*The Croatian community is so important to me, not being involved seemed unnatural and bizarre. Female, 21 years old, Croatia*

*I want to get involved but don't know who helps with these things? Female, 17 years old, Liberian*

### 6.) Leadership

The issue of stereotyping, inaccurate media portrayal and lack of acknowledgement of the achievements and contributions of CALD young people ignited the passion of many of the young people. Some young people encouraged their peers to promote and educate others on their culture:

*Our issues bring us together even if we have different issues we can be united in our passion. Female, 18 years old, Sierra Leone.*

*You have the opportunity to do anything you want to do!! It's not easy but we need to get out there and tell people about our culture. Female, 18 years old, Sierra Leone*

*Be confident, have a positive outlook and don't see everything in a negative way. Female, 17 years old, Croatia*

Volunteering was highlighted as a means of gaining new skills, making friends and learning about Australian culture and values. One young person pointed out that the fact that it was free made it accessible. Language barriers, lack of awareness about the job market and ineptitude at networking were seen to be overcome in well-supported, youth specific volunteering programs such as Active8, Foundation for Young Australians and the Duke of Edinburgh awards:

*The best thing [about volunteering] is you don't need money Male, 17 years old, Sudan*

Participants also highlighted disappointment and losing enthusiasm when they are not taken seriously by elders in their community and the public at large. Discussions emphasised a need for increased support and opportunities for young people to take on leadership roles, which was to include education and awareness to older members of the community:



*I'm sick of hearing I am a leader of tomorrow why can't I be a leader of today?*  
Male, 17 years old, India

*They [referring to community leaders] pretend to listen but they think we are too young to have any good ideas they don't take us or what we say seriously at all.*  
Female, 18 years old, Sierra Leone

Participants discussed strategies for counteracting negative perceptions of young people in general including the development of skills including, public speaking, problem solving, conducting meetings, writing and others.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed in collaboration with young migrants and refugees who participated in the Forum to address the issues and needs identified in this report. **It is recommended**

1. That more strategies and programs are implemented to better equip multicultural young people with life skills including conflict and anger management, budgeting, leadership, rights and responsibilities and job seeking skills.
2. That increased initiatives be developed to support and advise multicultural young people during the transition from school to further study, including increased access to tutoring and homework clubs.
3. That programs be developed to assist multicultural young people in career choices and education pathways including supported work placement opportunities
4. That consideration is given to the diversification of the curriculum in schools to incorporate cultural studies, community education, particularly experiences and practices of new and emerging communities.
5. That government support initiatives to increase community awareness to recognise and promote positive images of multicultural young people
6. That increased support and training is provided to mainstream workers including teachers on effectively supporting newly-arrived refugees.
7. That ethnic community groups work in partnership with services to develop ways to support young people to maintain their cultural identity.
8. That parents and carers are provided with advice and support including coping mechanisms to discipline and undertake their parenting roles
9. That multicultural young people receive supported opportunities to volunteer and participate in broader community life.
10. That young people receive increased support to participate in mainstream opportunities including the development of mentor programs.

## Speak Out<sup>2</sup> Multicultural Youth Forum Report

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