

Catalyst Youth Summit

Inspiring Our
Future Leaders

a catalyst for change

ORGANISED BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

2021 REPORT

Acknowledgment of Country

MYAN WA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land. We are situated on the land of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation and pay our respects to their Elders: past, present, and emerging.

This report was prepared by Fatema Shalemie and Ashton Kealy.



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About MYAN WA and the Catalyst Youth Summit

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network of Western Australia (MYAN WA) provides a voice to the unique issues faced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and a forum for members to network, share information, and address sector issues. MYAN WA undertakes a range of activities to bring together multicultural young people, sector representatives, and key decision makers from government, with the understanding that strong collaboration leads to better outcomes for young people. Since 2014, MYAN WA has been hosted by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA).

One of MYAN WA's key events has been the Catalyst Youth Summit, biennial event that brings together young leaders from diverse culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities to talk about the issues and challenges affecting them and propose community-driven solutions to an audience of key decision makers and government officials. Catalyst is a unique event, based on MYAN Australia's FUSE National Multicultural Youth Summit in that it is developed and delivered by young people, for young people, and this report details our findings from the third Catalyst Youth Summit.

In 2021, Catalyst was funded through the Department of Education, Skills & Employment via a grant hosted by MYAN Australia. The funding provided support for youth leaders to undertake consultation and capacity building training, as well as running a one-day event in September 2021. The Summit was held at Curtin University, in partnership with the Centre for Human Rights Education. A total of twenty CaLD delegates and 8 youth leaders attended; all were from the WA metropolitan area and were aged 18 to 25 years.

In preparation for the event, the Catalyst Youth Leaders spent time discussing key topics as a group and more broadly with their peers and communities. A variety of topics were explored, and Youth Leaders were able to vote to finalise the topics, which were mental health, discrimination, sense of belonging, and access to opportunities.

The program was designed to bring together delegates in a short amount of time, and provide them with inspiring, engaging topics that would inform their presentations to key stakeholders later that afternoon. The day commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country led by Jayden Boundry, followed by a Catalyst Pictionary icebreaker, a keynote by Kosta Lucas, and Mason Rothwell led an Advocacy 101 session. From late morning onwards, Youth Leaders facilitated conversations with delegates in their topic groups, which focused on defining the challenges, impacts and solutions.

Later that afternoon, delegates presented on their topics to key stakeholders, including the Minister for Youth, Dave Kelly, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Colin Petit, the Director General of the Department of Communities, Mike Rowe, and representatives from the Office of Multicultural Interests, the Mental Health Commission, the WA Police Force and representatives from MYAN WA's Executive Group. Guests and delegates were invited to attend a networking afternoon tea after the presentations, to share their experience and discuss the solutions proposed earlier in the day.

This report outlines the topics from the day, with a specific focus on the challenges experienced by CaLD young people and the meaningful solutions they have proposed.

The Issues

Mental health

Lack of culturally sensitive services

When CaLD young people seek mental health services, they often experience a lack of diversity from service providers, resulting in an inability to understand cultural barriers and can make it challenging to form a trusting relationship.

Stigma

There is ongoing stigma among the CaLD community regarding mental health. This manifests in CaLD young people being judged or seen as having a weakness and receiving discouragement from their communities.

Lack of awareness

Young people in CaLD communities may not be able to access mainstream resources, including mental health campaigns, as they are not targeted or relevant to CaLD audiences. This can result in a lack of awareness around the importance of prevention and early intervention, leading to longer term challenges for both individuals and their families.

Solutions

- **Prioritise recruitment and training:** We need to see an increase in CaLD practitioners across allied health professions, particularly psychologists and counsellors. We can do this by targeting CaLD practitioners through deliberate, culturally appropriate recruitment drives and prioritising the intake and support of CaLD individuals in allied health studies and graduate roles.
- **Fund specialist services:** We need to make sure CaLD young people can access appropriate services, which are often considered to be specialist services. This can be done through prioritising additional funding for CaLD-specific mental health services. There is also a need to support CaLD organisations increase their capacity to successfully apply for funding, as they may not have the resources or experience of larger organisations.
- **Involve CaLD communities in decision making:** We need to ensure CaLD communities, including young people, are involved in decision making that affects them. Embedding CaLD youth representation onto formal advisory groups, together with engaging communities where they feel safe, and have already created their own governance structures, such as community groups, would both be meaningful solutions.
- **Increase preventative education:** We need to increase the engagement of CaLD young people in preventative services and campaigns. At present, these campaigns are more universal and CaLD young people may not feel they are included in these. CaLD specific campaigns would support a reduction in stigma, and increase in proactive help-seeking behaviours.

Discrimination

Workplace discrimination

Microaggressions in the workplace was a widespread experience, and individuals felt that they couldn't call it out and that they had limited meaningful recourse for action, as there was little understanding of what the process involved, or they were unsure whether leaders in the organisation fully understood the impact of microaggressions. Some individuals had also experienced blatant discrimination from customers and were not adequately supported in these situations.

Representation in the media

There are ongoing issues with CaLD young people being misrepresented in the media, with negative stereotypes and villainization common. This has dual impact, negatively impacting CaLD young people's sense of self and community and causing increased negative perception across the broader Australian community and falsely justifying incorrect stereotypes. This can result in increased microaggressions and discrimination.

Misconceptions

Delegates had experienced a range of misconceptions, including assumptions that they didn't speak English, that they were uneducated, or they weren't born in Australia, largely based on their appearance. These assumptions often fed into problematic rhetoric which devalues CaLD communities, including ideas such as 'migrants are stealing Australian jobs'.

Solutions

- **Increase awareness of discrimination:** Promoting workplace awareness of discrimination, including meaningful training on how to call it out, using evidence-based techniques and programs. Proven programs involve buddy systems, which increase understanding of discrimination, reduce the bystander effect, and focus on relationships as a mechanism to understand others' perspectives.
- **Challenge incorrect stereotypes:** We recognise that it is difficult to hold the media to account, however we can increase the general public's cultural competency to challenge this negative reporting. We should prioritise CaLD representatives talking about their community issues and encourage a best practice where CaLD representatives are involved in any public conversation involving their community.
- **Increase public awareness:** We can encourage stronger, more meaningful relationships through fostering community conversations that break down stigmas and barriers, providing an opportunity for questions to be asked and insight to be gained. There are good examples of campaigns, such as the ABC's 'You Can't Ask That' which help to destigmatise marginalised communities and refute common stereotypes.

Access to Opportunities

Education

Many CaLD young people face additional barriers accessing higher education, due to exorbitant upfront fees that are required for students who are unable to access government loans or scholarships, often tied to their visa or residency status.

Employment

The delegates noted there was often a lack of transition support into the workforce, including developing young people's capacity to successfully apply for roles. For young people from migrant or refugee backgrounds, it is often difficult to break into the job market as they don't have the same networks or understanding of opportunities that other young people have.

Solutions

- **Enable cost-effective pathways to education:** Supporting CaLD young people to access scholarships and deferred, low-interest loans (similar to the current HECS-HELP structure) would enable young people to fulfil their professional ambitions.
- **Implement CaLD-specific networking and mentoring programs:** Supporting the access to professional networks and development of meaningful mentoring programs would ensure a more equitable approach that supports young CaLD professionals build their early career pathways. A number of proven approaches already exist in this space (eg. Circle Back Initiative & Kaleidoscope Initiative), and these could be tailored to young CaLD professionals, and rolled out across WA. Supporting organisations to better understand the unique needs of CaLD young professionals and building organisational capacity would be a critical component of this.



Sense of Belonging

What is belonging?

Belonging is difficult to define and is a complex idea that is fundamental to all human experience. Recognising the challenges around defining belonging was important for the group to acknowledge, as it is difficult to quantify and thus difficult to propose broad solutions.

Identity crisis

53.5% of Western Australians have at least one parent who was born overseas, and yet Australia's national identity continues to be defined as white & middle class, which does not necessarily reflect reality. CaLD young people were identified as "third culture" youth, and delegates noted that this led to a complex, multifaceted understanding of identity which includes layers such as race, culture and sexuality. This can lead to confusion around where they 'belong'.

Lack of representation

Young people from CaLD communities often feel disconnected from their local communities, including accessing universal services such as hospitals or local government services. Often, this is because CaLD community members don't see themselves reflected in media campaigns and when visiting local services, and there may be cultural barriers that make engagement harder. This means that CaLD communities may not think a service is for them, or appropriate for their needs, and is a missed opportunity for engagement and support.

Solutions

- **Increased cross-cultural awareness:** Increased cultural awareness across schools and workplaces would ensure all Australians, regardless of ethnicity and upbringing, have an understanding of different cultures, and value diversity. It is important this is done early and often, in order to embed this understanding as we grow and move through the world.
- **Increase representation across local community services:** More diverse staffing to reflect the multicultural nature of our communities would support young CaLD people to feel more engaged and welcomed into services funded to support them. Additionally, there is potential to influence local government through CaLD advisory groups, and supporting CaLD community members, particularly young people, to nominate for local council.

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