

VICTORIAN  
MULTICULTURAL  
COMMISSION  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2015–16





Front cover: Schools Engagement CDW, March 2016  
Photo credit: VMC

#### ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

The 2015-16 Annual Report covers the core work of the Commission and its achievements within the context of its objectives and functions, as outlined in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*.

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This report can also be viewed online at:  
[www.multicultural.vic.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au)

Copies of this Annual Report can be obtained from the Victorian Multicultural Commission:

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Pictured above: Embrace Diversity campaign  
Photo credit: Office of the Premier Victoria

# Letter to the Minister



Robin Scott MP  
Minister for Multicultural Affairs  
Minister for Finance  
1 Macarthur Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Minister,

In accordance with Section 21 of the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, I have great pleasure in reporting on the Commission's operations for the period 1 July 2015 – 30 June 2016.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helen Kapalos". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Helen Kapalos  
Chairperson



# Chairperson's Report



## A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL COMMISSION

Welcome to my first report as the Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) in a year which has marked a very busy and rewarding time.

It has been a privilege to meet so many inspiring Victorians who work tirelessly to promote multiculturalism in our state; those who champion diversity every day. From community leaders to our service providers, it is evident the broad range of needs related to maintaining social cohesion are being met every day with unwavering focus and passion.

Multiculturalism is our state's treasure. Diversity enriches our cultural landscape, it is embedded in our way of life and showcased in every suburb, city, and region across the state. The VMC is proud to be a voice for our culturally diverse communities and the conduit between these communities and government. We proudly promote cultural expression as well as advocating on behalf of our communities when challenges arise. We are here to strengthen our communities in every way.

This year the VMC has welcomed the appointment of six new Commissioners. I have also completed my first full year as Chair. With social justice as our key driver, we believe community engagement is a critical part of identifying issues and solutions. We are here to listen and learn from our communities. Multiculturalism is not an add on. It is the binding force of ensuring a socially cohesive society as our cultural diversity grows. Therefore investing in the ideas and innovations of our young people is a pivotal marker in how that future is shaped. This is why we have intentionally increased our focus on their lived experience, their outlook, their way through.

Pictured above: VMC Public Lecture, June 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios



One question we have asked honestly of ourselves has been how effective is our engagement with communities? Are we truly connecting with the hard to reach, the genuinely disadvantaged and displaced and are we meeting the diverse needs of our communities across the state? We must always be ready to challenge ourselves to get the right outcomes and results.

Significantly, listening to and engaging with diverse communities has enabled us to inform government policy and produce several submissions and reports, including:

- VMC submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, which resulted in VMC being included as a key partner in recommendations and the implementation process.
- VMC Youth report 'Our Youth, Our Future' and VMC Service Providers report 'Meeting Community Needs' provided several policy inputs.
- VMC submission to the Department of Justice and Regulation's 'Access to Justice Review', which resulted in direct engagement with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to provide advice on the needs of self-represented litigants from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- A number of VMC submissions into the review of the Residential Tenancy Act which advocated for the housing needs of multicultural communities, including newly arrived and humanitarian entrants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These documents are available on the Commission's website.  
<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/regional-advisory-councils/rac-publications>



This captures some of the formal reporting, however there are many regular inputs which continue to inform policy development, initiatives and programs.

Settlement has also become a key priority for the Commission as we welcome the additional humanitarian arrivals from Syria and Iraq, displaced by war. The successful settlement of our newly arrived refugees is paramount, and we are working closely with this community to best facilitate pathways to rebuilding their lives here in Victoria.

I hope you enjoy tracking our 12-month journey through the Annual Report, noting that we have not been afraid to try different approaches in the name of getting better results and more robust outcomes.

In closing I would like to especially acknowledge the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Robin Scott, in supporting the work of the Commission and for recognising the important role the VMC plays in strengthening the community. In Victoria we are also fortunate to have bipartisan support for multicultural affairs. This underpins our Victorian approach, and plays a significant role in ensuring we remain the most successful multicultural state in the country.

A special thank you also to the staff of the Commission for producing large volumes of work with grace and vigour every day and for attending to all matters which affect our communities, no matter how big or small.

Last but not least a heartfelt thank you is reserved for our communities, our leaders and advocates who courageously champion our shared diversity, our shared humanity and common values, and in doing so, strive to ensure unity for all.

We believe there has never been a more important time to embrace multiculturalism.

**Helen Kapalos**  
Chairperson



# About the Commission

## OUR VISION

*“Strengthening Victoria’s position as a leader in multiculturalism”*

Victoria has a deep commitment to multiculturalism as set out in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 (Vic)* (the Act). Victoria’s success is due to its diverse citizenship, strong bipartisan support and conscious investment in multiculturalism. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (the Commission) acknowledges the richness diversity brings to our state and to that effect, our vision complements the government’s vision of creating a strong, cohesive and inclusive multicultural Victoria where people and communities thrive.

## OUR MISSION

*“To empower and support all Victorians to meaningfully engage with our diverse communities through shared values, acknowledging everyone’s right to belong.”*

Our state provides freedom and opportunity to all Victorians to preserve and express their cultural heritage; and actively participate and contribute across all aspects of multiculturalism, including social, cultural, economic and political life.

The Commission which was first formed in 1983, is an independent statutory authority established under the Act. The Commission provides independent advice to the Victorian Government that informs the development of legislative and policy frameworks. This empowers Victoria’s culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities by identifying and addressing service delivery gaps and inequity. As an advocate, the Commission undertakes evidence-based research, community engagement and conducts Regional Advisory Councils across the state to connect our culturally diverse communities and the government.

The evolution of the Commission in the last 12 months has witnessed an elevated strategic role in strengthening its capacity to advocate on behalf of culturally diverse communities across all tiers of government. The Commission does this by:

- making community engagement the core of all its activities;
- leading and influencing the development of targeted policies and programs to inform service delivery for culturally diverse communities;
- leading and influencing public discourse on all aspects of multiculturalism;
- advocating with, for, and on behalf of multicultural communities to all tiers of government, both public and private sectors, and the Victorian community; and
- promoting the economic and social benefits of diversity.

## OUR OBJECTIVES

As specified in the Act (s.7), the Commission’s objectives are to:

- a. promote full participation by Victoria’s diverse communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria; and
- b. promote access by Victoria’s diverse communities to services made available by governments and other bodies; and
- c. encourage all of Victoria’s diverse communities to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance and to promote mutual respect; and
- d. promote co-operation between bodies concerned with multicultural affairs and diversity; and
- e. promote unity, understanding and harmony among Victoria’s diverse communities; and





Pictured left: Schools Engagement CDW, March 2016  
Photo credit: VMC

- f. promote a better understanding of Victoria’s diverse communities; and
- g. promote interaction between individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds; and
- h. promote the social, cultural and economic benefits of diversity; and
- i. promote the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as a unifying force that strengthens our diverse multicultural community; and
- j. promote community service as a principle that builds a stronger society.

- ii. determine the needs of Victoria’s diverse communities, including any needs covered by a report prepared by the Minister under Section 28, and
- e. promote the objectives of the Commission; and
- f. develop and maintain partnerships between community organisations in providing assistance in settlement support and service delivery for diverse communities; and
- g. develop and maintain harmonious community relations between all relevant groups in the context of Victoria’s diverse communities.

## OUR FUNCTIONS

As specified in the Act (s.8), the Commission’s functions are to:

- a. ensure that the objectives of the Commission are met to the maximum extent that is practicable; and
- b. research, report and advise the Minister on systemic community issues relating to the objectives of the Commission -
  - i. that are identified by regional advisory councils or through other community consultation; or
  - ii. that relate to the adequacy of government services, settlement support or service delivery for diverse communities; and
- c. investigate, report and make recommendations to the Minister on any aspect of multicultural affairs referred to it by the Minister; and
- d. advise the Minister on factors inhibiting the development of harmonious community relations and on barriers to the participation of Victoria’s diverse communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria; and
  - i. undertake systematic and wide-ranging consultation with bodies and people to-

## OUR ACTIVITIES

During the year, the Commissioners attended nearly 400 events and consultations, organised by over 200 community groups. These ranged from small cultural events coordinated by local community groups through to major multicultural events drawing thousands of participants. Commissioners delivered 75 speeches in metropolitan and regional Victoria, as well as chairing 24 Regional Advisory Council meetings across the state.

The Communication and Events team, and the Research and Coordination team, provided support to our Chairperson and Commissioners by preparing nearly 180 event briefs and over 100 speeches throughout the year.

The following expenditure breakdown is a combination of the Commission and operations.

Salaries and on cost	1,780,384
Operating Expenses, including RACs	1,361,723
Community Support Fund	112,560
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,254,667</b>

# Our Commissioners

By virtue of the Act, the Commission comprises 12 Commissioners, including the Chairperson, Youth Commissioner and Community Representative Commissioner. All Commissioners are appointed for a four year term, with the exception of the Community Representative Commissioner and Youth Commissioner, who are appointed for two years.

During 2015-16 seven new Commissioners, including the Chairperson, were appointed as a result of the expiry of the terms of previous Commissioners. Shortly after his appointment, Mr Peter Khalil resigned to pursue a career in politics. The Commission is comprised of:

Commissioners appointed until 30 August 2017, with the exception of the Chairperson:



**Ms Helen Kapalos**  
**Chairperson**

Current term: 17 August 2015  
to 17 August 2019  
First appointed:  
17 August 2015

An accomplished journalist, presenter, executive producer and filmmaker, Helen Kapalos is a proud Greek Australian who is passionate about supporting Victoria's culturally diverse communities.

Since taking up her role at the Commission, Helen has led a series of new initiatives – specifically around re-defining all forms of community engagement, establishing new platforms for youth leadership, the implementation of culturally specific family violence initiatives, championing better settlement outcomes for Victoria's new arrivals and elevating the discourse around issues of identity politics and inclusion in our ever-evolving multicultural society. She is a passionate advocate for equality in the multicultural sector and leads a team of 11 Commissioners to champion various community causes.

Commissioner profile photos Photo credit: Paul Jeffers

Helen has also worked in a number of philanthropic roles including Director at the Heart Foundation, Director of Federation Square, Ambassador for the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation, and Ambassador with Community Languages Australia. Her successful media career has included working for all three Australian commercial television networks and the two public broadcasters.



**Mr Ross (Spiro) Alatsas**  
**Deputy Chairperson**

Current term: 31 August 2013  
to 30 August 2017  
First appointed:  
1 September 2011

Mr Ross Alatsas has a long and impressive history of involvement in the Greek and wider Victorian communities, having been the General Manager of the Greek Media Group since 1997. He has been involved with various committees and advisory councils promoting Victoria's cultural diversity, including the Steering Committee for the AFC Asian Cup 2015. Ross assisted in the establishment of the first 24 hour Chinese Radio station, 3CW and also served as a member of the Business Advisory Council for community television station, C31.

Ross was Acting Chairperson from 11 April to 16 August 2015 until the appointment of Helen Kapalos.



**Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan**  
 Current term: 31 August 2013  
 to 30 August 2017  
 First appointed:  
 1 September 2011

Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan (known as 'Sriini'), has worked in the IT industry in Australia, India, Japan and USA for more than 32 years. He brings a variety of skills, empathy, knowledge and experience in the areas of technology, community and business (including small business) as well as volunteering for a charity. Sriini has successfully worked in cross-cultural business and social contexts, thanks to his proficiency in multiple languages including English, Tamil, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali and Sanskrit. He has been a long standing supporter of cultural activities in the community.



**Mr Grahame Leonard AM**  
 Current term: 31 August 2013  
 to 30 August 2017  
 First appointed:  
 1 September 2011

Mr Grahame J Leonard AM has been actively involved with Victoria's diverse faith and ethnic communities for some 20 years, including the roles of Chairperson of the human rights organisation B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission, President of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Grahame is also a volunteer director and former honorary CEO of the Australian chapter of the global anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International. Grahame has experience in the field of interpreting and translating as a board member of the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS). He is a lawyer, chartered accountant and professional director.



**Dr Teresa De Fazio**  
 Current term: 31 August 2013  
 to 30 August 2017  
 First appointed:  
 1 September 2011

Dr Teresa De Fazio has extensive experience in the fields of languages, cross-cultural communication, leadership, teacher education and intercultural education with many publications to her name. Teresa has worked on various initiatives with organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Association and the Western Region of General Practitioners Association. She has also lead a number of different programs for international students and migrants and has, herself, studied both overseas and in Australia.



**Dr Sundram Sivamalai  
 (Community Representative  
 Commissioner)**  
 Current term: 27 October 2015  
 to 30 August 2017  
 First appointed:  
 27 October 2015

Dr Sundram Sivamalai is a current board member of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) and has been nominated by the ECCV as the Community Representative Commissioner. Sundram has extensive board membership and community and government advisory experience, including as the current Chair of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. He has published widely on rural, Indigenous and multicultural capacity building and public health, and is of Indian heritage.

Commissioner profile photos Photo credit: Paul Jeffers



**Miss Tina Hosseini  
(Youth Commissioner)**

Current term: 27 October 2015  
to 30 August 2017  
First appointed:  
27 October 2015

Miss Tina Hosseini is the current Chair of the Red Cross Victorian Youth Advisory Committee and was the Youth Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. Tina is an active member of the Iranian Women's Association and was also a member of the Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network.

Commissioners appointed until 30 August 2019:



**Mr Tsebin Tchen**

Current term: 27 October 2015  
to 30 August 2019  
First appointed:  
27 October 2015

Mr Tsebin (Bin) Tchen, of Chinese background, has extensive community, public sector and political experience in a Victorian context and has previously served as a Senator for Victoria from 1999 to 2005. Bin has over 40 years voluntary community involvement, and demonstrated extensive links with community organisations, acting as an advisor to 20 Chinese community associations. Bin is an Adjunct Professorial Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Investment and Philanthropy, Faculty of Business and Law, Swinburne University of Technology.



**Ms Sonia Vignjevic**

Current term: 27 October 2015  
to 30 August 2019  
First appointed:  
27 October 2015

Ms Sonia Vignjevic has significant knowledge of, and experience with, migration and settlement issues through a wide range of positions in the community and quasi-judicial sector. She has strong leadership, strategic and stakeholder engagement skills; and a proven track record in developing and maintaining effective partnerships. Sonia was appointed as Acting CEO at South East Community Links (SCAAB division) in August 2015. Previously she was the Principal Advisor of Operations at Anglicare Victoria, and before that role was the National Manager of Community Migration Programs at Australian Red Cross.



Pictured above: Unveiling of the Multicultural Chair, May 2016  
Photo credit: Gleneagles Secondary School

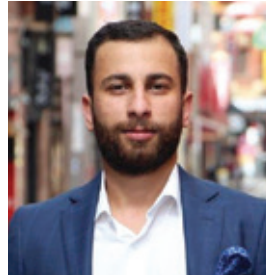




**Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts**

Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2019  
First appointed: 27 October 2015

Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts, born and raised in Cameroon, is a lecturer in Community Health at the College of Health and Biomedicine at Victoria University. Mimmie is an expert on refugee and minority group health and has published widely in the areas of health and cultural and linguistic diversity. She is proactive in the migrant and refugee community, and currently sits on the Board of Directors for AMES Australia.



**Mr Sam Almaliki**

Current term: 22 December 2015 to 30 August 2019  
First appointed: 22 December 2015

Born in Iraq, Mr Sam Almaliki arrived in Australia in 1997 as a refugee. Passionate about inclusion and diversity, Sam is currently the head of Community Engagement at Cricket Australia and the Secretary of the Australian Cricket Diversity Council. He also sits on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Advisory Council, the Special Broadcasting Service Community Advisory Committee, and is a member of the Australia India Business Council and the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Sam previously served as a Commissioner for Multicultural NSW.

Pictured right:  
VMC Public Lecture, June 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios



Pictured below:  
VMC Public Lecture, November 2015  
Photo credit: Paul Jeffers



# Community Engagement

*...the heart of what we do*

‘During a radio interview this year, I was asked to describe exactly what community engagement means. The question was not meant to confound or confuse, instead it was asked for the purpose of providing clarity to what ‘engagement’ means in the context of multiculturalism, and in turn how does community engagement achieve outcomes to improve social cohesion.’

– Helen Kapalos



For the Commission’s purposes, community engagement is an opportunity to build capacity and social capital in local communities through involving them in the process and considering their particular needs. In that sense, it is the communities themselves who are invested in the co-design of policies and programs that better meet their specific needs. This is often referred to as ‘direct citizen participation’ – which is the idea that people should be directly involved in the decisions that affect them.

Our approach to community engagement ranges from consultation, strengthening community participation, information sharing and connecting with communities to encourage their contribution to informing decisions. It provides an opportunity for us to share stories and have conversations to strengthen relationships in day-to-day interactions. We believe in genuine grassroots engagement that empowers communities in achieving active participation and outcomes that best meet their needs.

Over the past 12 months our Commissioners have led the way in engaging closely with local communities and their leaders. This has enabled consultations to take on many forms, such as a youth roundtable with the Pasifika community in Sunshine with the Minister for Youth Affairs. Those participating were able to have a direct and open conversation with the Minister on issues which directly affect them. Similarly, a consultation between young people from a number of African-born communities and several Ministers and a local Member of Parliament also participated in an information sharing session.

Pictured left:  
Women’s group in Melton West, 2015  
Photo credit: VMC



Pictured below: Community Forum, Narre Warren South  
Photo credit: Office of Judith Graley MP



Pictured below: VMC Public Lecture, June 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios

The Commission in leading successful place-based community engagement requires being flexible and responsive to community needs. Recent community conversations with a group of South Sudanese mothers in a lounge room in Melton West enabled us to relate these findings to an earlier consultation with young people from the South Sudanese community. The knowledge we have gathered from these consultations has informed the development of policies and programs administered by other government departments and agencies.

Our approach to community engagement has also enabled the Commission to sit on several Ministerial committees and taskforces, fulfilling our remit as an advocate for our communities.

Our representation on a number of committees and taskforces included:

- Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce,
- Family Violence Steering Committee,
- Chief Commissioner’s Human Rights Strategic Advisory Committee,
- Social Services Taskforce,
- Ministerial Advisory Council for Multicultural Affairs, and
- Multifaith Advisory Group.

Examples of a number of inputs into policy development included:

- Developing community resilience indicators in collaboration with VicHealth,
- regular engagement with Islamic Council of Victoria on matters impacting young people,
- Victorian Law Reform Commission roundtable on the review of Victoria’s adoption laws,
- providing advice to Foster Care Association of Victoria on the importance of maintaining/learning about a child’s cultural heritage,
- assistance to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse on consulting diverse communities, and
- providing assistance and support to the Office of Prevention and Women’s Equality on consulting women from multicultural backgrounds.

It is clear we are a voice at the table for our diverse community members in a wide variety of policy areas.



Pictured left:  
Jewish African Communities Friendship  
Dinner, May 2016. Photo credit: VMC



# Settlement



Pictured left: VMC Public Lecture, June 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios

Following the Federal Government's commitment to a one-off increase of 12,000 permanent humanitarian places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Australia, the Commission was requested by the Premier to lead the settlement coordination of Victoria's humanitarian intake in 2016-2017.

Victoria attracts the highest proportion of refugees and asylum seekers nationally, with our state welcoming around:

- 33% of Australia's annual intake of refugees over the last five years (equating to 4,500 people out of 13,750 annually), and
- 40% of Australia's community based asylum seeker population (11,000 people).

We also expect to settle additional refugees and see changing settlement drivers including:

- 1,600 additional refugees annually settling in Victoria as a result of Australia's annual humanitarian intake increasing to 18,750 places,
- 4,000 new arrivals as a result of the Commonwealth Government's one off increase of 12,000 permanent humanitarian places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and
- movement of refugees and asylum seekers into regional Victoria, including as a result of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) Scheme.

Our state is a prime settlement location due to a range of factors including (but not limited to) our:

- inherent diversity, with Victorians originating from more than 200 countries, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 130 faiths,
- relatively well dispersed settlement locations, with communities established across metropolitan areas and into regional centres,
- commitment to supporting strong and engaged multicultural communities, including through a genuine community engagement approach and access to the Victorian Government's substantial multicultural community grants program,
- well established settlement, multicultural, education, health, non-government and charity sectors which work together to provide support to refugees when they arrive and to asylum seekers living in our community, and
- whole of Victorian government approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers as demonstrated by the 2016 State Budget allocation of \$38.3 million over five years to strengthen outcomes across the multicultural affairs, health, education and employment portfolios.

As a starting point, the Commission has been engaging with newly arrived refugees in Victoria, as well as co-convening formal partnerships with both state and federal government departments and service delivery agencies to develop and implement tailored policies, programs and services to facilitate successful settlement outcomes.



Pictured above: VMC Public Lecture, November 2015  
Photo credit: Paul Jeffers

The key indicators for successful settlement include:

- community readiness – welcoming communities,
- settlement supports – language, welfare, social services,
- affordable housing and transport,
- employment,
- education,
- health, and
- community (i.e. sports, the arts, culture).

The Commission is proud not only to welcome these refugees to Victoria but will also play a pivotal role in ensuring they are fully supported in their settlement journey.

Many of the humanitarian arrivals in Victoria will have fled war, conflict and persecution. They will likely be traumatised by their pre-arrival experiences and will need extra support to ensure that they and their families get the best start to their new lives in Victoria.

This will require the joint effort between all tiers of government to ensure best practice on the delivery and outcomes of settlement services.

Long term service delivery and support is pivotal in building the capacity of newly arrived communities to effectively settle into Victoria. Settlement is a fluid process and we understand that the settlement experience differs from one individual to another.

Newly arrived refugee families tend to feel a duty to their extended family members in their country of origin, who may be displaced or living in refugee camps.

We also know many young newly arrived refugees have specific needs and face difficult challenges, such as adjusting to new social and community norms whilst also wanting to retain their cultural identity. Meeting these challenges will require great social investment.

At the Commission, we recognise the value that our refugee communities bring. This includes their diverse skills, experiences, cultures and commitment to make the best of their opportunities and life here in Australia. Behind the headlines about global displacement there are many stories of individuals and families struggling with separation. People are looking to rebuild their lives whilst facing the complexities of settling into a new country.

We want to strengthen Victoria's capacity to continue being an inclusive and welcoming state by acknowledging that each and every one of us has the equal and indisputable right to belong.

# Research and Coordination

## REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) are comprised of members of Victoria's diverse multicultural communities.<sup>2</sup> RAC members are our eyes and ears on the ground, keeping the Commission and the Victorian Government well informed about matters affecting their various communities. RAC members provide valuable information used in the development of policy, legislation and the delivery of services to Victoria's multicultural communities.

RAC members inform policy and service provision on matters of settlement, multicultural affairs, access to services and citizenship issues. They are strong advocates for the communities they represent and assist in promoting the benefits of multicultural Victoria in their local area.

There are three RACs based in Melbourne and its surrounds – Eastern Metropolitan, North & West Metropolitan and Southern Metropolitan, and five in rural and regional Victoria – Baron South West, Hume, Loddon Mallee, Gippsland and Grampians.

VMC Commissioners chair regular RAC meetings. RAC members are selected, through a public Expression of Interest process, that considers levels of community engagement, knowledge of settlement, issues facing newly arrived communities, and commitment to multicultural affairs in the local region.

## Community Consultations

Conducting state-wide consultations and research on multicultural matters are key functions of the Commission. For over 30 years, the Commission has provided independent advice to governments, to inform the development of services to Victoria's culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society.<sup>3</sup> Promoting greater intercultural understanding and access to government services are statutory objectives which the Commission fulfils.

Generally flexible, community consultations can focus on systematic and community-wide settlement and service issues, or on specific and targeted issues, to address the needs of Victoria's diverse communities. This includes the development of partnerships between community organisations that provide settlement support and service delivery.

The Commission also conducts evidence-based research into key issues facing multicultural communities. In 2015-16, the Commission focused its research, reporting and advice around the key areas of social cohesion, meeting community needs and advocacy.

## RAC Report

The issues raised by RAC members are collated and provided in a report to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Creating a socially cohesive multicultural society is an ongoing project. The Commission is grateful to the many committed community members who, as RAC members, provide advice on matters affecting multicultural communities across Victoria.

Supporting social cohesion in multicultural environments involves commitment to a shared community, and a willingness to listen to a variety of different views.<sup>4</sup> In 2015-16 the findings from RAC members demonstrated that, generally, community members actively engage in multicultural environments and seek intercultural encounters in their everyday interactions.

However, RAC members also identified the significant employment challenges facing people from multicultural backgrounds, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Overcoming barriers in gaining access to housing was another challenge, especially affecting newly arrived refugee and asylum seeker communities.

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2 See Appendix 1 for a distribution of ethnicities of RAC members throughout Victoria.

3 The VMC began advising governments in 1983.

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4 Moran, A., & Mallman, M. (2015). *Understanding Social Cohesion in Shepparton and Mildura*. Melbourne: Victorian Multicultural Commission.



Pictured above: VMC Ballarat Youth Forum, 2015 Photo credit: VMC

Topics discussed at RAC meetings, and used to inform the Minister, included the following:

- New and emerging systemic issues,
- settlement and newly arrived groups,
- employment,
- access to services,
- social cohesion and sense of belonging,
- education (including transition to employment),
- housing (especially access to and maintenance of private rental tenancy),
- alcohol and other drugs,
- youth disengagement,
- family violence (including elder abuse),
- aged care,
- mental health,
- transport, and
- public safety.

## VMC REPORTS AND SUBMISSIONS

### VMC Report: Engaging Our Youth Our Future

Published in 2015-16 this report communicates the ideas and views of young people who participated in the Commission's multicultural forums for young people conducted from December 2014 to June 2015. A key aim of the consultations was to hear from young people directly about the issues they face, together with their suggestions about strategies that would help them.

The forums found that young people think broadly about the issues they face, such as developing their identity, finding representation in diverse communities, acquiring a sense of belonging and making the transition from formal education to employment. The report findings inform the general discourse about social cohesion, especially in relation to young people from diverse backgrounds, and provide some signposts for intervention.

The report recommendations were accepted by the Victorian Government and rolled into the government's broader program of works. The report is available online at: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/EngagingOurYouthOurFuture.pdf>

### VMC Report: Meeting Community Needs

Also published in 2015-16 this report examines the issues facing service providers with analysis of the information gathered at the Commission's service provider forums held in Melbourne, Bendigo and Narre Warren in 2015.

A wide range of service providers contributed useful insights on the daily challenges they face when delivering services due to funding insecurities and the increasing diversity of the Victorian community.

The theme, *Meeting Community Needs*, set the context for workshop style discussions concerned with the ways in which service delivery assists integration and social cohesion for multicultural communities. This included topics related to the organisation and their clients, including family violence, and discrimination and bias.

The report is available on the Commission's website at: [http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/VMC\\_SP-2015-Report\\_July2016\\_FINAL\\_LINKED.pdf](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/VMC_SP-2015-Report_July2016_FINAL_LINKED.pdf)

## VMC La Trobe Study: Understanding Social Cohesion in Shepparton and Mildura

The Commission funded La Trobe University researchers Anthony Moran and Mark Mallman to examine the multicultural contexts of Shepparton and Mildura and measure the strength of social cohesion.

The study found that community members in both regional centres actively engage in multicultural contexts and reach across cultural differences in everyday life. The study also found however, that there is still further work to be done to develop social cohesion in these Victorian regions. The findings reveal employment and housing as significant challenges for people from multicultural backgrounds, especially people from non-English speaking, newly arrived and refugee backgrounds.

Nurturing opportunities for daily interaction between different cultural groups was identified as a means to strengthen social cohesion and build capacity in both communities. Thus, while noting the social capital value of cultural festivals and local sporting events which provide opportunities for everyone to mix, the study recommends further interaction is needed outside of these contexts.

The report is available on the Commission's website at: <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/SocialCohesionInSheppartonandMilduraOct2015WEB.pdf>



Pictured above:  
VMC Dandenong Youth Forum, 2015  
Photo credit: VMC

## VMC SUBMISSIONS TO REVIEWS AND INQUIRIES

This year the Commission has produced a number of submissions, advocating for the needs of diverse communities in a variety of forums.

### Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR)

#### Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) Review, Consumer Affairs Victoria

- The Commission prepared three submissions to different stages of this Review. People from diverse backgrounds face additional barriers when seeking private residential tenancies. These included factors not directly related to maintaining a tenancy such as ethnicity, visa status (newly arrived and humanitarian entrants) and the outright discrimination experienced by people from diverse backgrounds at the inquiry and viewing stages.
- Following these submissions the Commission was invited to participate in the Residential Tenancies Review Stakeholder Reference Group which will meet seven times in 2016 to provide feedback to the Review on options to assist in the framing of approaches to be presented to government as part of the broader housing reform package, *Fairer Safer Housing Victoria*.

#### Working with Children Regulations 2016

- At the request of the DJR, the Commission provided comment on the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) on the *Working with Children Regulations 2016* to ensure the proposed Regulations would not prohibit applications from Victoria's diverse communities, including the fee structure.

#### Access to Justice Review

- Requested by DJR, the Commission provided advice on strategies to facilitate pathways to justice, especially for self-represented litigants from diverse backgrounds.





- Following this submission the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) approached the Commission to collaborate in the Customer Service Improvement Program in order to ensure appropriate consideration of the needs of self-represented litigants from multicultural backgrounds.

#### **Victorian Court Network**

- The Commission provided input to the development of a resource booklet in response to addressing the information needs of unrepresented litigants from diverse backgrounds.
- The resulting resource assists litigants from diverse backgrounds when attending final hearings involving children or those presenting with high levels of vulnerability in the Melbourne registries of the Family Court of Australia and Federal Circuit Court of Australia.

#### **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

##### **Victoria's 10-Year Mental Health Plan**

- This submission advocated for the mental wellbeing of Victoria's most vulnerable multicultural communities, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, highlighting their particular needs, including recognising and responding to experiences of trauma.

##### **Victoria's Youth Policy: Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria, Office for Youth (OFY)**

- The Commission provided the OFY/DHHS with feedback pertinent to the Commission's consultations with young people in response to the Discussion Paper, *What's Important to Youth?*
- Office for Youth also drew upon the VMC Report, *Engaging Our Youth Our Future*, in the development of the new youth policy.

#### **Department of Education and Training (DET)**

##### **Education State Early Childhood Consultation Paper**

- This submission was also informed by the findings relating to education from the 2014-15 consultations, especially the young people's forums. The Commission's recommendations to this submission included the need to capture administrative data on ethnicity and non-English speaking backgrounds to better inform future resource planning, and advocated for an increase in numbers of children from diverse backgrounds in three and four-year-old kindergarten programs.

#### **Department of Premier and Cabinet, Women and Royal Commission**

##### **A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy**

- This submission responded to the Consultation Paper, advocating for the inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of equality of social, civic and economic outcomes.

#### **Commissioner for Senior Victorians**

##### **Review of Connecting Seniors: A Report on Isolation and Loneliness among Senior Victorians**

- At the request of the Commissioner for Senior Victorians, the Commission provided comment on the *Connecting Seniors Report* to ensure consideration of the needs of older people from diverse backgrounds, particularly in regard to population ageing policy and issues of social isolation and loneliness.

#### **Civil Justice Projects and the Office of the Public Advocate**

##### **Powers of Attorney**

- Civil Justice Projects approached the Commission for assistance in advising diverse communities of the opportunities offered by powers of attorney (POA) legislation. RAC members were canvassed in order to gauge levels of awareness and knowledge of POA in their communities.
- VMC Research and Coordination provided a report, *Understanding and use of Power of Attorney in Victoria's CALD communities*, with analysis of responses. The report recommendations were picked up by the Office of the Public Advocate who sought further VMC support for an application to the Law Victoria Law Foundation for the project: *Increasing understanding and use of enduring powers of attorney in Victoria's CALD communities*.
- The project proposal was acknowledged as a direct response to, and inspired by, the Commission's report into understanding and use of powers of attorney. The project ran successfully during Law Week in June 2016.

# Communications and Events

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY WEEK

Cultural Diversity Week (CDW), Victoria's leading multicultural celebration, took place from March 12-20 2016 to coincide with the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21.

Coordinated by the Commission, CDW celebrated the colourful sounds, sights, movements and tastes, which contribute to Victoria's rich and ever-diversifying community. It acknowledged and celebrated our state's diversity by uniting together and embracing our unique cultural advantage.

'Together we stand in harmony' was the overarching theme for this year's celebration. Music has had and will continue to have the ability to unify people and cultures in celebration and friendship.

## Aims and objectives

Promote full participation by Victoria's diverse communities in the social and cultural life of Victoria,

- support and help retain communities social identity and cultural inheritance and to promote mutual respect,
- promote unity, understanding and harmony among Victoria's diverse communities, and
- promote interaction between individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds.

Pictured below: Premier's Gala Dinner, March 2016 Photo credit: Artificial Studios





Pictured below:  
Premier's Gala Dinner, March 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios



### CDW activities

**The Premier's Gala Dinner** was held on Saturday March 12 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, officially launching the activities of CDW. Over 1400 guests from more than 30 different countries, representing around 35 multicultural and multifaith groups, enjoyed a three course menu and were entertained by performances from some of the state's most acclaimed multicultural music and dance acts.

**Victoria's Multicultural Festival (formerly known as Viva Victoria)** took place on Sunday March 20 at Federation Square. The Festival celebrated and showcased our state's rich and vibrant cultural traditions and attracted more than 50,000 people. Taking place from 12 noon through to 8.00pm more than 30 live dance and music acts performed across four stages. The Festival brought together a wide range of international cuisine, free children's activities, a market with arts and crafts from around the world, roving performers and exhibitions.

**During Cultural Diversity Week** hundreds of community organisations across Victoria hosted their own events and the Commission actively encouraged all Victorians to participate. This year, 122 events were hosted across the state.

**The Primary School Art Competition**, designed to engage the younger members of Victoria's community with our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, once again attracted a sizable participation rate. The theme for this year's competition was 'Harmonies from around the world' tying in with the overarching theme for Cultural Diversity Week 'Together we stand in harmony'.

This year over 400 artworks were submitted to the competition from around 31 schools. Winners were selected by VMC Commissioners based on their creativity and originality in relation to the theme and were presented with certificates by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in a ceremony during the Festival.

Pictured below:  
Awards for Excellence, December 2015  
Photo credit: Reed Graduation Services



### AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence was established by the Commission in 2002 to recognise and reward the contribution of individuals and organisations in the promotion of Victoria's multicultural harmony and services.

In 2015, the Commission received over 180 nominations across the 10 Award categories. 75 recipients were presented with Awards at a formal ceremony held at Government House on 3 December, made up of 22 females, 37 males and 16 organisations. A full list of the 2015 recipients of Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence is in **Appendix 2**.

### PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

In 2015, the Commission introduced a public lecture series, designed to engage audiences on a particular topic at an in-depth level. The first lecture in this series was given by Helen Kapalos and was on the subject of 'Multicultural or Mainstream'. This lecture discussed multiculturalism in Victoria, the importance of social cohesion and what that means in 2015.

The second lecture was held during Refugee Week with the topic 'What can we learn from the refugee experience'. Hugh de Kretser, Executive Director, Human Rights Law Centre joined Helen Kapalos, Sam Almaliki, VMC Commissioner, and practising lawyers Nyadol Nyuon, and Barakat Rezaie to discuss the social, economic, and cultural benefits of our humanitarian arrivals.

# Grants

## *...Strengthening Our Communities*

### MULTICULTURAL GRANTS PROGRAMS

The Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship worked closely to ensure a smooth transition to the new Multicultural Grants. Individually, Commissioners played an active role in grants assessment as well as collectively participating in a ratification process for each program below:

- The Community Harmony Program
- Capacity Building and Participation Program
- Community Infrastructure and Cultural Precincts, and
- Multicultural Festivals and Events Program.

Once ratified, recommendations were reviewed by the Chairperson for endorsement before being sent to the Minister for approval. This new process allowed the Commissioners to bring their knowledge of culturally diverse communities and Commission priorities to the grants process.



Pictured above:  
Victoria's Multicultural Festival, March 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND

The Community Support Fund (formerly the Chairperson's Sponsorship Program) provided small grants to community groups where the activity or project fell outside the scope of the Multicultural Grants program.

In 2015-16, 27 grants totalling \$112,560 were awarded, with grants ranging from \$800 to \$10,000.

Examples of the grants included:

#### **Bangladeshi Cultural Group**

##### **Youth Volunteering Program**

The Bangladeshi Cultural Group received a grant of \$2,000 to run a program for young migrants and family members to encourage volunteering in the community. The program sought to support the integration of volunteers from different ethnic groups in working together on projects and to develop strong team building. The program also promoted the retention of cultural heritage through music, dance, drama and debate.

#### **South Sudanese Australian Basketball Association and Basketball Victoria**

##### **National Classic Basketball Tournament**

In partnership with Basketball Victoria, the South Sudanese Australian Basketball Association received \$5,000 to engage professional referees for a tournament that brought together over 50 basketball teams with more than 600 players from around Victoria and Australia. The tournament, held in Werribee, gave an opportunity for the South Sudanese community to showcase their talent and develop positive role models within the community.

# Appendix 1

## REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP 2015/16

### EASTERN METROPOLITAN

Chairperson Mr Huss Mustafa (until 30 August 2015)

Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan (current)

RAC Members Cr Giuseppe Cossari

Mr Albert Fatileh

Ms Nildhara Gadani

Ms Birgit Goetz

Mr Rishi Kandel

Ms Lizzy Kuoth

Ms Chandani Kuruppu

Mr Mohamed Mohideen

Mr Danny Ong

Ms Julie Salomon

Ms Tina Stathopoulos

Ms Megan Liew

Mr Bright Chinganya

### GIPPSLAND

Chairperson Ms Elizabeth Drozd (until 30 August 2015)

Mr Tsebin Tchen (current)

RAC Members Mr Murphy Singh Aneja

Ms Cate Chaiyot

Cr Sandy Kam

Ms Soula Kanellopoulos

Mr Ali Khan

Dr Christine Lee

Mr J Murray Lobley

Mr Brodie Logue

Ms Lisa Sinha

Mr Jaeyoung Lee

Dr Ka Chun Tse

## GRAMPIANS

Chairperson Acting Chairperson Ms Safa Almarhoun  
(until 30 August 2015)

Ms Sonia Vignjevic (current)

RAC Members Ms Anne Champness

Ms Ann Foley

Ms Suzanne Gatz

Ms Mona Hatwal

Mr Manzoor Mian

Ms Meeta Narsi

Mr Barry Petrovski

Mr Norman Prueter

Ms Frances Salenga

Mr Frank Williams

Mr Muhammad Hussaini

Dr Sundram Sivamalai  
(resigned as VMC Commissioner)

## HUME

Chairperson Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan  
(until 30 August 2015)

Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts  
(current)

RAC Members Mr Brett Sanderson (resigned)

Ms Barbara Brown

Mr Charles Halter

Ms Susan Ingleton

Ms Charlene Norton

Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe

Mr Rashidi Sumaili

Mr Dean Williams

Mr Vijayakumar Kuttappan

Ms Mayssa Powell

Ms Eugenie Barima Oule

## LODDON MALLEE

Chairperson Mr Abeselom Nega  
(until 30 August 2015)

Acting Chairperson Ms Helen Kapalos  
(until 29 February 2016)

Mr Sam Almaliki (current)

RAC Members Mr Peter Byrne

Ms Noemi Cummings

Ms Angela Curthoys

Ms Susan Denny

Ms Kaye Graves

Cr Jill Joslyn

Ms Mary Ruane-St Clair

Ms Winifred Scott

Mr Sudesh Tiwari

Dr Antonio Alessi

Mr Stuart Gillespie

## NORTH AND WEST METROPOLITAN

Chairperson Ms Jenny Matic (until 30 August 2015)

Mr Peter Khalil (resigned 7 February 2016)

Miss Tina Hosseini (Acting Chairperson)

RAC Members Ms Romany Amarasingham

Mr Yadata Saba

Mr Antonio Bentincontri

Ms Kathy Brunton

Cr Gautam Gupta

Mr Joseph Haweil

Cr Bo Li

Mr Rick Nugent (resigned)

Ms Ezgi Sahin

Dr Anjali Tikoo

Ms Marisa Vedar

Ms Jennifer Vieyra (resigned)

Mr Bom Yonzon

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**SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN**

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Chairperson Mr Grahame Leonard AM (current)

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RAC Members Cr Roz Blades

Mr Eric Cheng

Mr Chandra Shekhar Kamat

Mr Wilhem Morgan

Mr Nason Mwanza

Mr Sam Navarria

Mr Marco Nazzaro

Ms Iman Riman

Mr Zuben Rustomjee

Ms Jennifer Semple

Ms Sharon Sykes

Cr Claude Ullin

Ms Sarah Williams

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**BARWON SOUTH WEST**

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Chairperson Dr Teresa De Fazio (current)

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RAC Members Mr Andrew Alexander

Mr Milovan Arandjelovic

Cr Eddy Kontelj

Mr Florio Skratulja

Mr Gary Thompson

Ms Sally Trigg

Mr Michael Martinez

Ms Stella Tzaninis (resigned)

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# Appendix 2

## VICTORIA'S MULTICULTURAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE RECIPIENT LIST 2015

### Award for Meritorious Service to the Community

#### Individuals

Dr Raju Adhikari

Mohsen Afkari

Manuel Asuncion

Josephine Cessario

Joseph Chiang

Lubov Cowall

Marcello D'Amico

Prakash Devatha

Robin Dzedins JP

Dan Hong Feng

Father Igor Filianovsky

John Haddad

Christos Kalavritinos

Demetre Kalodimos

Vijayawickrama Karunasena

Stepan Kichakov

Vasilios Koutras

John Mckinnin

### Award for Meritorious Service to the Community

#### Individuals

Rev Deacon George Piech Meat

Manzoor Ahmad Mian

Giuseppe Morizzi

Dr SRV Chary Mudumbi

Jeanette Mustafa

Pandit Patil

Jadwiga Piotrowski

Angelos Porfiris

Monica Sharma Raizada

Caterina Revrenna

Rita Ripani

Luis Rodriguez

Raju Shakya

Sujatha Surendran

Carla Taylor

Deepak Vinayak JP

Farah M. Warsame

Erika Watts

### **Award for Meritorious Service to the Community**

#### **Organisations**

Australian Afghan Philanthropic Association  
Ladies Auxillary (Philiptochos) of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Parish  
Multicultural Association of Russian Speaking Women and their Families Ogonyok  
Serbian Choral Society Inc

### **Award for Service Delivery to Multicultural Victoria**

#### **Individuals**

Nail Aykan  
Judy Blyton  
Amelia Crafter  
Danielle Hartridge  
Danny Ong  
Con Pagonis  
Lydia Kyungja Park  
Dr Yali Shao  
John Tatoulis  
Ramalingam Wickiramasingham

### **Award for Service Delivery to Multicultural Victoria**

#### **Organisations**

Connections UnitingCare

### **Victoria Police Multicultural Awards**

Sgt Ali Gurdag APM Police Annual Multicultural Award  
Sen Constable Matt Walker Police Multicultural Media Award  
Sen PSO M Alam Protective Service Officer Multicultural Award  
Victoria Police Muslim Association Police Community Exemplary Award

### **Education and Early Childhood Award**

Jewish Holocaust Centre  
Pembroke Primary School

### **Media Award**

#### **Individuals**

Walter Adamson  
Ismail Kayhan  
Karen Yuting Poh  
Wilfred Siriwardhana  
Karen Wang

### **Media Award**

#### **Organisations**

Channel 31 Melbourne and Geelong  
Indian Link Media Group  
Latrobe Valley Express  
PBS 106.7FM



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**Ambassador Award****Individuals**

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Abhishek Awasthi

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Khurram Jahangir Khan

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**Ambassador Award****Young person**

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Hanisha Sharma-Luitai

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Celia Tran

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**Victorian Multicultural Business Awards****Corporate Innovation Award**

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Bestway Supermarket

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**Victorian Multicultural Marketing Award**

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eBook Dynasty

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**Local Government Award**

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Wyndham City Council

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**Premier's Award for Community Harmony**

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Carmel Guerra

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**Victorian Multicultural Honour Roll**

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Roshan Bhandary

Pictured below:  
CDW, March 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios



Pictured below:  
Multicultural Cook-Off, November 2015  
Photo credit: 774 ABC Melbourne



Pictured left:  
CDW, March 2016  
Photo credit: Artificial Studios



