



EVENT BRIEF AND SPEECH

Event	Ballarat Regional Multicultural Centre (BRMC) AGM
Time	7.00pm
Date	Thursday 22 October 2009
Location	G PLACE, Golden Point Learning & Cultural Environment, Cnr Dunn & English Sts, Golden Point, Ballarat
Speaker	Mr Sam Afra, JP, Chairperson ECCV
Contact	Frank Williams mob 0438 326 384 Ph 03 5332 5941
Speech type	Guest Speaker 15 minute speech
Attachments	BRMC History and BRMC newsletter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

<< confirm acknowledgements on the day >>

- Mr Frank Williams – Chairperson, BRMC Council
- Community leaders
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

- Good evening.
- Thank you for the invitation to speak at this Annual General Meeting of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Centre
- It's a pleasure to be here with you on behalf of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria.
- Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, and pay my respects to any elders past and present.
- As chairperson of ECCV I'd also like to note my sincerest appreciation...
- for the tremendous work done by the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Centre as part of the Regional network of Ethnic Communities' Councils in supporting cultural diversity.
- First of all I am going to tell you a bit about the role of ECCV and how we relate to the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) as well as the link with the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC).

- After that I will talk about three aspects that I believe are important to keep up a dynamic ‘multicultural’ ECC.

ECCV, FECCA and VMC

- The Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a statewide, peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria.
- Advocacy is our main work to advise government at all levels on behalf of multicultural communities in areas such as aged care services, education, healthcare; settlement and emerging community welfare.
- ECCV is not a service provider, however from time to time, we do partner with service providers in order to develop new programs and policies, for example the Multicultural Multiactive Seniors Pilot Project which we run jointly with the YMCA.
- ECCV supports Regional Ethnic Communities’ Councils (RECCs) by:
 - Advocating on their behalf
 - Partnering with them to develop strategies that enhance the profile of multicultural communities across the state.
 - Hosting a monthly teleconference to compare and contrast issues of common interest
 - Providing timely guidance with the media

FECCA

- FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- FECCA’s membership comprises state, territory and regional multicultural and ethnic councils such as ECCV and BRMC.
- If you read our history book *Many Hopes, One Dream* you will see that ECCV played a significant role in helping to establish FECCA in 1979.
- Today, a long-standing ECCV executive member, Voula Messimeri is the first female Chairperson of FECCA in its 26 year history.

VMC

- The link between the Multicultural Victoria Commission (VMC) and ECCV has an interesting history.
- ECCV played a leading role in the development and implementation of the Multicultural Victoria Act passed in December 2004, one of Victoria's most significant pieces of legislation that recognises and celebrates our diverse population.
- The Act strengthened the VMC but some people saw blurred roles between them and us. For a while the mission and structure of the VMC and the ECCV were very similar.
- Then to complicate things further people saw the same people doing similar activities.
- For example, the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the VMC, George Lekakis and Hakan Akyol, used to be the Chairperson and long-standing Executive Officer of ECCV.
- There are, however some key differences between us.
- Again our history book states that the ECCV has evolved from a small 'community group of 'ethnic outsiders' to a community-based, non-government organisation with a strong policy unit that has resilient grassroots connections to about 200 member organisations.
- We represent the voice of the migrants and refugees. A lot of our work is carried out by volunteers as well as paid staff who sit on many reference groups and advocate for such things as language services, cultural competence training, rights, elder abuse prevention and social inclusion at all levels of government.
- The VMC, on the other hand, is an independent statutory authority; its work is largely set out by the Victorian Government and it does not depend on volunteers. It also provides an extensive community grants program.

- The three organisations FECCA, ECCV and the VMC have, each on their own way, been at the forefront of dramatic changes to bring about more positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and immigration.
- ECCV is still growing and evolving.
- In a similar way the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council (BRMC) emerged in the late 1980s and has been growing dynamically ever since.
- There are three things that I believe can assist regional ECCs such as the BRMC to be even more dynamic:
 - Working together
 - Forming partnerships
 - Maintaining cultural identities

1. Working together for a better future

- These are challenging times for all of us. Resources are tight and Victoria's multicultural population is increasing.
- At ECCV we are aware that in regional areas, such as here in Ballarat, multicultural organisations are stretched by the differing needs of recent arrivals and those of older migrant groups.
- Many long-established European migrants came here, some in the 1950s and 60s.
- They found jobs, got houses and their children went to school. Some people only learnt enough English to just get by. In those days there were no English classes or support services. Many of them established their own clubs and communities through sheer hard work.
- These days more and more families are fragmented, people are becoming isolated. Jobs take the adult children out of the area.

As older migrants age and frailer some even revert back to their first language.

- Even if they are not coping very well at home, culturally diverse seniors often find difficulties accessing aged care services or family carers support. We know that their needs can't wait.
- At the same time, the newly arrived settlers need accommodation, access to education and employment, social programs and engagement with youth. Their needs, too, are immediate and can't wait.
- It's not easy for service providers such as BRMC in regional areas where people are geographically spread out to provide timely services to all concerned.
- I commend you all on the work you are doing. It is difficult for people to find the time to run different programs; do the administrative work required for program accountability; and provide direct care support for the local migrant and refugee residents.
- It takes a lot of very hard work. Alone we can't do everything. Sometimes we have to rely on services provided by a range of different organisations.

2. Partnerships

- One thing we are advocating is to work together with other service providers.
- Partnerships between ethnic community based agencies and multicultural organisations, as well as other generic agencies, are becoming increasingly important for effective service delivery.
- This means sharing information; cooperating; and collaborating on joint projects.

- Partnerships are of limited value if one organisation is highly engaged and the other one is distant and just ticking the box.
- Partnerships depend on mutual trust and support. They are about getting to know each other and working together with common aims and equal commitment.
- For example ECCV jointly initiated a very successful forum in Shepparton last month on *Elder Abuse Prevention in Ethnic Communities*.
- It was jointly delivered by a Greek ethno-specific agency from Melbourne, the legal people at Seniors Rights Victoria, as well as a local multicultural provider in Shepparton.
- These kinds of partnerships pay off in the long run. Pooling resources and expertise can work very well to deliver programs that one organisation might not be able to do on its own.
- The range of multicultural services provided in Ballarat is impressive – ESL classes, HACC services, Telelink, Friendly Visiting Programs, a Multicultural Playgroup and Migrant Women’s Support Group. I’m interested to hear more about the *Helping Hand* mentoring program.
- Recently ECCV began advocating a new concept to the Victorian Government; that multicultural and ethnic organisations provide a *specialised* service, rather than simply an ethnic culture; that they are *experts and specialists* in areas such as cultural competency briefings, cultural awareness training, advice on languages and translations and strategies for overcoming barriers to accessing services. This is an important change in thinking.
- Similarly we in the multicultural sector can learn much by bridging across different groups that we may not have a history of working closely with for example the indigenous communities. We can learn quite a lot from recent work done by the Department of Health with Aboriginal communities.

- The *Aboriginal Cultural Competency Framework*, produced in November 2008 provides an impressive practical model that shows different stages of understanding, acceptance and respect amongst staff in organisations towards other cultures and how to deliver responsive programs. It is certainly a useful and practical tool for staff working with culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

3. Ethnic Communities to integrate but also maintain culture

- There are some terrific opportunities about settling in a great place like Ballarat and its surrounding district.
- I want to emphasise that people from diverse cultural backgrounds have the right to keep their cultural and spiritual identity and still feel they belong here.
- People of other cultures feel good about who they are when they are allowed to say openly and with confidence “I’m Filipino, I’m Chinese and I’m Tongolese.”
- Integrating into the general population includes the confidence to say I am an intercultural person, “I feel Polish and I feel Australian too.”
- The many social activities and multicultural events you are running in Ballarat assist people, especially newer arrivals, to say aloud who they are as well as feel good about their culturally diverse backgrounds. Hopefully that will assist them to find the right pathway to more socio-economic opportunities and greater participation in the general community.
- In summary, I encourage you keep working hard together with other groups for the future and assist our migrants and refugees to feel OK to be who they are. In particular I encourage you to keep talking to ECCV so that we can advocate on your behalf for a Victoria that works, not just some of us, but for all of us.
- The migrant story is never ending.