



**YARRA CITY COUNCIL.  
MULTICULTURAL  
PARTNERSHIPS  
PLAN 2015-18**

**DRAFT**

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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

Yarra City Council acknowledges and pays respect to the Wurundjeri people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land now known as Yarra. Council deeply values the contribution of the Wurundjeri, and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people past and present, to the cultural heritage of this municipality.

## **1. Introduction**

This plan is Council's commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful multicultural community in the City of Yarra. For the next four years it will guide Council's interactions with multicultural communities.

The plan aims to reflect the complexities of the diversity within our community, and capture the depth and breadth within the many stories of who we are and how we live. The ideas and actions included here are the result of the thoughtful work and feedback of many people, and were developed during an extensive community consultation.

People have different journeys, different migrant experiences. They are skilled, speak many languages and everyone carries with them a diversity of traditions. Some are refugees who are granted humanitarian visas. Some people have no formal skills but bring other qualities, and some people are skilled migrants whose journey is supported through their profession. Some people are here to join family, while some people are entirely alone. However all arrive with various strengths which contribute to the richness of Yarra.

Yarra has a long standing history of welcoming people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Numerous waves of migrant communities have settled in Yarra and contributed to the diverse character of Yarra. Irrespective of their journeys to Australia, Council continues to recognise the skills and strengths of the newly arrived groups, and the important contributions they make to our local community which is reflected in the meeting spaces, community centres, celebrations and local businesses.

Council values the diversity of Yarra, and reflects this by listening to the community's needs, and providing appropriate services, programs and facilities. Council recognises the importance of supporting newly arrived groups to participate and contribute to the local community.

Based on our consultations with the community, we have identified four priority areas that direct and inform Council's policy:

- 1. Relationships**
- 2. Access and Inclusion**
- 3. Opportunities**
- 4. Anti-racism**

Council wants Yarra to be an inclusive place of ongoing cultural exchange, where we recognise and value our differences and similarities, creating a place of belonging for everyone.

To do this, Council will cultivate an environment that nurtures community relationships, increases accessibility and inclusion, encourages cultural expression, and seeks out opportunities for multicultural interactions and exchange. This will be supported by strategic and responsive actions.

This plan is also informed by the values of respect and social justice, which Yarra Council strives to always uphold in every interaction with our community.

Council has created a Language Services Policy (draft), Community Engagement Strategy and the Future Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communications Framework which should be read and understood as companion documents to this plan. During the consultations people said that language, and the way Council communicates information, is a major obstacle to making Yarra an inclusive community. These companion documents set Council's standards for making information available to everyone in their own language. It will address this key issue by standing alongside this plan and acknowledging that communication happens in the context of ongoing engagement with residents.

## 2. Priorities, Strategies and Actions

Our four priority areas are:

- > **Relationships**
- > **Access and Inclusion**
- > **Opportunities**
- > **Anti-racism**

### 2.1 Relationships

Being able to connect with other people is very important for everyone's wellbeing. By building relationships and interacting with other people we can break down the barriers that would otherwise lead to isolation and compound difficult circumstances. Working together, being a part of something bigger than yourself, makes everyone stronger. Council will work to improve communication and foster the positive connections that create a socially inclusive and welcoming community. Through existing mechanisms such as the Yarra Settlement Forum<sup>1</sup> and Community Grants programs Council will also continue to build leadership capacity and increase opportunities for new and stronger relationships.

#### 2.1.1 Strategy:

*Create opportunities for people from multicultural backgrounds to create connections and share traditions, encouraging a stronger sense of belonging to the broader Yarra community.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Opportunities for cultural exchange
- Interaction between groups
- Welcome events for International Students
- Welcome events at neighbourhood and Council levels.

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<sup>1</sup> The Yarra Settlement Forum (YSF) is a network of agencies located in the City of Yarra which provides services for refugees, asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants. YSF aims to act as an advocacy body and deliver projects and forums in response to refugee and asylum seeker settlement issues in Yarra. YSF is proactive in addressing settlement barriers for newly arrived communities which can limit participation in community life.

- Links with Senior Ambassadors?
- Intergenerational activities?
- Programs to combat isolation
- Rotating exhibition space for cultural groups to display art / craft
- How better to utilise the Welcome Pack from Council.
- Explore strategies to connect with residents who may be isolated and not linked in with existing community groups.

### 2.1.2 Strategy:

*Provide opportunities in which Council can build strong relationships with multicultural groups, and that these groups are able to contribute to Council processes as active, informed citizens, who are involved in the life of their communities*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Investigate appropriate models for multicultural representatives to interact with Council in an advisory capacity.
- Regular informal meetings of Council officers with multicultural groups, maintaining relationships with established groups. E.g. the presence of “Champions” throughout Council in a variety of units and departments, so that the responsibility of engaging with CALD groups does not rest solely in one branch.
- Special invite to multicultural groups to attend specific Council meetings?
- Facilitate networking and collaboration between groups, service providers and Council (Yarra Settlement Forum to expand?)
- Establishing an annual awards program to recognise people and initiatives that are furthering culturally and linguistically diverse causes.

## 2.2 Access and Inclusion

There are many different aspects to our community and Council recognises that people need different ways to reach the same outcomes. Access and inclusion to services and processes is essential for people to fully participate in community life and assist in their physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Unfortunately however, people can face barriers to services when services are not sensitive to language, cultural and religious needs. Yarra residents should have equitable and easy access to services regardless of cultural, linguistic and religious background. Council will work on improving its services in ways that are appropriate to CALD needs, so that they are more equitable and inclusive.

Gender can be another issue that impacts on people’s access to services. Council recognises that the principle of gender equity may conflict with some cultural values held by people in our community. While Council respects the right to a variety of viewpoints, it support gender equity and promotes it in all Council work.

### 2.2.1 Strategy

*Provide information and services to multicultural communities that are easily accessible and are appropriate to their cultural needs and language requirements.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Development of Language Services Policy and Customer Charter.
- Development of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communications Framework.
- Investigating more appropriate and targeted means of getting information to residents and groups, eg. use of audio resources, community guides, etc
- Investigate idea of “Community Passport” as a method of providing information on services as well as having a welcoming function.
- Create a “Diversity Photo Library” which includes images of local Yarra residents from diverse multicultural backgrounds for use across Council in publications and information.
- Regular cross-cultural training for council staff, which incorporates a suite of services and resources including:
  - Develop internal resource to increase skills in community engagement (refer to Engagement Strategy), understanding cultural complexity, best practice etc.
  - Council Open Days?
  - Improve website information
  - Build centralised library of translated materials at Council?
  - Investigate models of best practice in use of language services, specifically around translations. (Build multilingual staff list for checking translations? Maybe incorporate community leaders into this?)

### 2.2.2 Strategy

*Support programs and services that target group from multicultural backgrounds at risk of disadvantage (e.g. asylum seekers, women, people with disabilities, international students, GLBTI)*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Work in collaboration with local stakeholders to respond to emerging issues in at risk communities (e.g. newly arrived, asylum seekers, women, international students, etc.)
- Support the implementation of actions in the Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan.

## 2.3 Opportunities

Multicultural communities in Yarra should be enabled, encouraged and empowered to participate in community life. Council will work to create formal and informal opportunities for education, communication and intercultural exchange. These opportunities will enable building interpersonal, social, and group capacities, which will then lead to fuller participation and increased well-being of Yarra residents.

### 2.3.1. Strategy

*Support and strengthen the capacity of Yarra communities to become independent, resilient, engaged and informed.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Community grants program
- (refer to Economic Strategy) – Work in partnership with universities to support International Students residing / working in Yarra.
- Advocacy?
- Leadership/ambassadors program

### 2.3.2. Strategy

*Building an inclusive workforce at Council by increasing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- (refer to Economic Development Strategy) – Work in partnership with universities to support International Students residing / working in Yarra.
- Traineeship and work experience opportunities with Asylum seekers, and newly arrived migrants and refugees.
- Where is Council's employment diversity strategy at?
- Advocate at higher levels of government around employment opportunities for CALD residents?
- Explore possibilities of work experience opportunities / traineeships for asylum seekers, new arrival migrants and young people from CALD backgrounds at Council in areas of aged care, children's services and libraries.
- Support provision of reflection spaces for Yarra staff, to cater for diverse religious needs and practices.

## 2.4 Anti-racism

Council is proud to be a signatory to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-racism Strategy, which aims to promote a clear understanding of what racism is, and how it can be prevented. Intercultural understanding is one of the keys to building better relationships in our community and so cultural exchange and celebration will lay the foundation for these connections. The objectives and actions outlined in this strategy will be used as a basis for Council to promote cross-cultural education and understanding. By recognising our differences and celebrating our cultures together, we will create opportunities for better communication and positive relationships.

### 2.4.1. Strategy

*Support opportunities which promote intercultural relations, combat racism, celebrate diversity and acknowledge the multicultural heritage of Yarra.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Celebrations and events (e.g. Cultural Diversity Week, Refugee Week)
- Link in with local historical societies to explore opportunities on how to highlight and promote the multicultural heritage of Yarra.
- Support antiracism programs funded by Community Grants program
- Awareness raising on human rights information and related legislation to stakeholders and Council staff
- “Report racism” program collaboration with VEOHRC
- Antiracism postcard campaign? Awareness raising in community to reduce racism
- Promotion of good news stories in Yarra news and local paper?
- Advocacy
- Training for staff

#### 2.4.2 Strategy

*Provide leadership at Council level by taking a stand against racist behaviour.*

Ideas that arose through the consultation:

- Providing a range of email banners (such as the “Racism. It stops with me” banner being used by staff) endorsed by Council which staff can include in their email signatures.
- Investigate Council policy or terms and conditions of use on social media regarding removal of racist comments.
- Development of a strategy around racism
- Investigate policies around use of Council facilities by white supremacist or hate groups
- Policy around racist graffiti – is it possible to give priority to removal of racist graffiti?
- Anti-racism messages in other languages (community campaign to include CALD groups)
- Ensure clauses which are included in Sporting Grounds Users Agreements (against racial vilification behaviour) are included across other Council policies and agreements.

### 3. Multicultural Policy Statement

#### Vision

Yarra City Council seeks to ensure that people from multicultural backgrounds are valued, included, respected and engaged citizens, who have the freedom to express their cultural, linguistic and religious traditions without fear of discrimination, and who have equal opportunities to lead and participate in their communities.

Yarra City Council:

- > Affirms that Indigenous Australians are the first custodians of this country and continue to contribute to the cultural heritage of this land. Council recognises that cultural diversity existed before white settlement in the cultural diversity of the Indigenous nations living here pre-colonisation.
- > Recognises cultural, linguistic and religious diversity as an integral part of Yarra's history and identity.

- > Respects and promotes the expression of culture, language and religion free from vilification or discrimination.
- > Acknowledges that within multicultural communities, there are potentially vulnerable groups who may be at risk of further disadvantage such as women, asylum seekers, GLBTI (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender and Intersex), and people with disabilities.
- > Promotes an inclusive community, in which people are enabled to participate fully in the social, cultural, economic and political opportunities of the municipality irrespective of race, gender, culture, language or religion.
- > Welcomes refugees, asylum seekers and other new arrival migrants to the municipality with respect and compassion, and has a role to play in a responsive resettlement process.
- > Advocates for the elimination of racial and religious intolerance.
- > Rejects all forms of racial and religious vilification, violence, harassment and unlawful discrimination.

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### 3.1 Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statement

#### Preamble

While Council does not provide direct settlement services to refugees and asylum seekers, it provides and manages a range of services and activities that assist and support refugees and asylum seekers in the community including maternal and child health, sports and recreation, libraries, youth and family services.

Council has the role of facilitator of a range of partnerships and networks which provide services to asylum seekers and refugees. Council also acts as a funder of projects and activities by community groups and organisations that support multicultural groups and advocates for appropriate services that support the needs of refugee and asylum seeker communities.

Yarra City Council:

- Recognises and welcomes all people who have arrived on humanitarian visas, people seeking asylum and those who come from refugee backgrounds who arrive on other visa types, including family migration and skilled migration.
- Recognises the United Nations definition of an asylum seeker as an individual seeking international protection but whose claim has not been fully decided yet. They are known as asylum seekers while their refugee status is being determined.
- Recognises the journey of asylum seekers and refugees who are often fleeing from war and human rights violations. They have often experienced trauma and persecution and should be treated with dignity and compassion.
- Will provide opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to actively participate and contribute in community life;
- Will celebrate and acknowledge the contributions refugees and asylum seekers have made to Yarra and continue to do so, recognising these communities have inherent strengths and resilience.

THE CITY OF YARRA WELCOMES REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS.

## 4. Context

### 4.1 International Context

International agreements and policy frameworks inform Council's own multicultural partnerships work. The United Nations (UN) and its sub-organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), set these policy agendas. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity guides UNESCO's work, with the overall aim of its program on international migration being to promote respect for migrants' human rights, and to contribute to peaceful integration of migrants into their new societies. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was established to protect the interests of refugees and asylum seekers.

### 4.2 Federal and State Context

Council's policies are also informed by federal and state legislation.

State and Federal legislation clearly state it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of characteristics such as cultural and language background. It is Council's responsibility to respond to the needs of CALD residents through the provision of information in accessible formats, and culturally appropriate services.

As mentioned in the priorities, Yarra City Council is a signatory to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-Racism Strategy and has expressly embedded these actions into this Multicultural Partnerships Plan.

The Commonwealth of Australia *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* prohibits discrimination on the basis of race in many areas of public life and prohibits offensive behaviour based on racial hatred (racial vilification). Additionally, Victoria is subject to anti-discrimination laws.

The Victorian Human Rights Charter is a Victorian law that sets out the basic rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people in Victoria, and requires public authorities, such as Victorian state and local government departments and agencies, to act consistently with the human rights in the Charter. Legally, Council is required to ensure people have the right to fully participate in public life, which necessitates the provision of information which is accessible and appropriate.

Recently, the Victorian government released guidelines for Using Interpreting Services, and Effective Translations. These Guidelines have been useful in developing the Access and Inclusion Strategies, Yarra's Language Policy and Guidelines (draft) and the CALD Communications Framework.

## RELATED POLICIES / LEGISLATION

### Commonwealth policy context

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act (1986);
- The Racial Discrimination Act (1975);
- *The People of Australia* statement by Australian Multicultural Advisory Council;

### State Policy context

- Equal Opportunity Act (1995);
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001);
- Multicultural Victoria Act (2004);
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006);
- Local Government Act (1989);

### Council Policy Context

- Multicultural Policy developed, incorporating the Strength in Diversity Statement and the Council's first Multicultural Action Plan (1999);
- Yarra is a signatory to the Refugee Council of Australia's "Refugee Welcome Zones" ongoing campaign in 2002;
- Multicultural Policy and Action Plan 2004-2006 is adopted (2003);
- Council endorsed the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statement (2005);
- Council and approximately 30 community groups signed the Community Accord (2006);
- Yarra became a signatory to UNESCO's International Coalition of Cities Against Discrimination in Asia and the Pacific and endorses a Ten-Point Commitment Plan of the Coalition of Cities against Discrimination (2009 );
- Yarra adopted the Customer Service Guarantee (2009);
- Multicultural Policy 2010-2014 and Action Plan endorsed July 2010;
- Council Plan 2013-2017
- Language Services Policy – Aged and Disability Services, Yarra City Council.
- Community Engagement Policy 2014
- Inclusion for All – Access and Inclusion Plan 2014-2017
- Aboriginal Partnerships Plan 2015 – 2018
- Employment Diversity Strategy [currently in development]
- Health Plan 2013 – 2017
- Reconciliation Action Plan 2015 – 2018
- Yarra's Customer Service Guarantee
- Draft Yarra Heritage Strategy 2014 - 2018

## 4.3 Local Context

### 4.3.1 About Yarra

Yarra City Council is proud of its multicultural population, and has a strong sense of community based in a history rich in industrial development and cultural diversity. It recognises that engaging in social and cultural activities enhances community belonging and well-being.

City of Yarra is one of Australia's vibrant inner-city municipalities. It is situated five kilometres from the Melbourne CBD, bordering the City of Melbourne as part of the inner-metropolitan ring of cities. An estimated 80,688 residents (as at June 2012) and more than 33,500 households call Yarra home. As well as residents, 66,792 people work in Yarra, and the community includes a large number of visitors, tourists, employees, business owners, property owners, community organisations, local services and community groups.

The Wurundjeri people are the traditional owners of the land in Yarra, which has long been an important home and gathering place for Aboriginal people from all over Australia. Although today Yarra's Aboriginal population is statistically small, the city maintains a strong, local Aboriginal culture, and continues to provide a range of services for Aboriginal people. The Yarra landscape is rich with places that are of great significance to the Wurundjeri, and also of national significance to Aboriginal history and culture.

Yarra is made up of a diverse and dynamic population. The 2011 Census indicates that 63% of Yarra residents were born in Australia. After Australia, the most common countries of birth of Yarra residents were from England (3.7%), Vietnam (3.5%), New Zealand (3%), Greece (1.8%) and China (1.6%).

Sixty-nine percent of Yarra residents speak only English at home, while 27% of Yarra households speak two or more languages. The most commonly spoken languages after English were Vietnamese (4.4%), Greek (3.5%), Italian (2.3%), Cantonese (1.6%) and Mandarin (1.6%). Other languages spoken by the 50+ cohort include Arabic, Serbian, Croatian, Hakka, French and Spanish. In addition languages spoken by the more recently arrived groups (in the last 5 years from 2009-2013) include Arabic, Somali, Dinka, Oromo and Tigrinya.

In the five year period 2008-2013, a total of 4,252 (or 1%) new migrants settled in the City of Yarra. Of the new migrants to Yarra, the largest number migrated through the Family Stream (42%), followed by Skilled (39%) and Humanitarian (8%). Additionally 21% of Office of Housing tenants are from a range of countries, the largest number of tenants being from Vietnam, China, Sudan, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Somalia and Greece.<sup>2</sup>

Office of Housing sites managed by the Fitzroy office have the largest proportion of Yarra's African born tenants, while sites managed by the Richmond office have the largest proportion of Yarra's Asian born tenants.

New migrants to Yarra in the past five years are predominantly young - 80% were under 34 years of age on arrival, corresponding with the large number of skilled and family migrants during this period. Humanitarian entrants are also predominantly young, with 80% similarly under 34 years of age.

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<sup>2</sup> The countries are not explicitly identified for privacy reasons, as there are fewer than 68 tenants from their particular country.

More women have migrated to Yarra in the past five years than men (54% compared to 46%). Looking at migration streams, more women than men migrate under the Family Stream and the Humanitarian Stream, while the Skilled Stream is fairly even. Although the data does not identify who is the primary 'skilled' applicant and who is the spouse.

While it is not thought that many asylum seekers reside in Yarra due to the prohibitive cost of housing, many services in Yarra have anecdotal evidence of many asylum seekers visiting, working in, or using services in Yarra.

#### **4.4 How the Plan was Developed**

##### **Method**

Council adopted several methods in developing the Multicultural Partnerships Plan:

- **Research and Review**
  - Review of historical context of multiculturalism in Australia
  - Review of current policy and action plan
  - Summary report of current multicultural socio-political climate
  - Update and expand on demographic and forecast information on CALD communities in Yarra
  
- **Establishment of Reference Group**

A reference group was formed, comprising several Councillors, Council Officers, Community members and service providers. A concerted effort was made to ensure a cross section of ages and cultural backgrounds was represented in this group. The Reference Group served as a guide throughout the process of the development of the plan.
  
- **Consultation with the Yarra Community**

Consultations commenced in March and continued through to May 2014. The process included a cultural diversity event, visits to established CALD community groups, individual interviews, focus group discussions, written questionnaires at local festivals, and an online survey. Consultations were also held with external service providers along with Council staff. A wide range of engagement methods were employed to ensure inclusion of as many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities as possible.
  
- **Information from recent consultations held for the development of Yarra's Youth Policy and Positive Ageing Strategy was shared with the Community Planners to also feed in to the development of the MPP.**