

REPORT: Youth Multifaith Forum at Roxburgh College Monday 26 May 2008

Report written by Michelle Sabe

The 26th of May was the day on which the first Youth Multifaith Forum took place at Roxburgh College. The Youth Multifaith Forum was the result of 10 months of hard work and training by a group of five Year 10 students as part of the 'Voices of Young Australians: *Uniting for Social Cohesion*' program at the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI). This project was organised with the support of CMYI, Roxburgh College and David Peake, who mentored our group.

Our aim for this event was to help the young people of our school achieve a greater appreciation for other faiths and cultures. During the Forum, representatives from five faiths were subjected to the very curious minds of a selected group of Year 9, 10, 11 and 12 students. The representatives were Petr Svoboda, who spoke about Buddhism; Bishop Phillip Huggins, an Anglican Bishop, Sheik Isse who spoke about Islam, Stefan Oberman from the Australasian Union of Jewish Students; and John Tye who spoke about Indigenous Spirituality and Christianity. These guest speakers were part of a Panel Discussion and each presented about their faith. Some of the topics spoken about included:

- What are the main principles of your faith/spirituality?
- What are some of the ways that people from different cultures/communities/cultures follow your faith/spirituality?
- What are issues, stereotypes and misconceptions that people of your faith/spirituality face?
- What are some of the ways that young people can promote respect and understanding of different faiths?

As well as the faith representatives attending, two Multicultural Liaison Officers from the Victorian Police attended. Ali Gurdag and Sahin Sahinkaya talked about some issues which are faced due to religious racism and how the youth of this area can prevent this from happening by promoting peace and acceptance in the community.

Students were able to ask questions of the guest speakers during and after the Panel. It was really great to see different students asking all the guest speakers questions about their faith/spirituality. Some of the questions that were asked were "Why is there so much conflict between faiths if all the faiths seem to be about peace and harmony?" as well as questions about particular aspects of each faith.

All the students that attended were very interested and enjoyed the day as was evident in the feedback forms they filled out after the forum. One student said when asked what they'd enjoyed about the forum, "It educates each individual about different faiths and religions, and it really gives you an insight about different people." Many students hoped that the Forum could happen annually as they believed the impact which it had on them was enormous.

We were also privileged to have Ms Liz Beattie, Member for Yuroke and Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, and Deputy Mayor of Hume, Councillor Moya White attend the forum. Ms Beattie gave an opening address and highlighted the importance of gaining an acceptance for religions other than our own the community so it can grow into a more cohesive environment.

We are all very proud of what we have achieved and hope that we have promoted a better understanding of the different faiths and cultures which make up our very diverse society.