
Eleventh Annual General Meeting Wednesday 8 November 2017

Chair's Report

Introduction

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on, we respect their continuing culture and the unique contribution they make to the life of this area. We acknowledge all the people who have come to settle in the land of Australia as their home, the rich cultures these people have brought to this country and for the contributions they make to this country. We are all proud to be Australian and importantly we embrace and celebrate the success of Australia as a multicultural society.

It is my great pleasure to present my second and final term report as the CMCF Chair to the members of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Incorporated at this eleventh Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 8 November 2017 at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre.

A year in review – steady progress

CMCF's vision is a fair and harmonious Canberra community, which supports and celebrates cultural diversity. The role and work of CMCF is to support its members, the ethnic communities in the ACT, while ensuring the concept of multiculturalism is represented positively to the Australian community at large. We have been working steadily ensuring the voices and the needs of multicultural communities are heard at both the Territory and Federal levels of government. Since the ACT elections we have continued to monitor the progress of the newly elected government and the opposition to ensure multiculturalism does not slip off the agenda. We do this by meeting with various politicians on a one to one basis progressing our concerns and we also do that in the various platforms including general meetings and forums.

I am a great believer in providing frank and fearless advice, however, that comes with a caution that in providing this type of advice can create dissatisfaction and even enemies from certain sectors. However, in the current climate it is now imperative more than ever to stand your ground and put forward arguments in the aim of ensuring all in our community are cared and catered for. We may well be a thorn in the side of some, but we would be negligent in our duty if we didn't raise important issues and represent the ACT multicultural community to the full extent.

CMCF, as an effective peak community organisation currently has financial membership representing 72 ethnic communities and 28 associate members and one life time member.

Highlights of the past year

- Some of the highlights for the period include holding a leaders reception in September just before the ACT election last year. Held at the Albert Hall, our key note speaker was Dr Sev Ozdowski, Chair of the Australian Multicultural Council and we were fortunate to have ABC journalist Greg Jennet as our MC. Over 150 attended the event and I was able to garner statistics from our registration that indicated on the evening that those attending represented 54 languages from 85 distinct community organisations. It was a night that highlighted the diversity of Canberra's multicultural community and the selection of dances performing that night confirmed that. In my speech I implored for multiculturalism to be sustained and nurtured during a time of heightened levels of racism felt by many groups in Canberra. I also talked of strengthening peak bodies such as CMCF to enable further advocacy.

I advocated the reinstating a multicultural advisory board, similar to the board originally set up by former Chief Minister Kate Carnell and continued during Jon Stanhope's leadership. I also asked for a concerted effort to ensure we have a fully functioning and community developed multicultural policy and a summit that brought all the community together to develop that policy. In my speech I said:

“However, we cannot rest on our laurels. The success for a socially cohesive society is dependent on good multicultural policy. CMCF is advocating that a comprehensive multicultural policy that is community consulted and led be developed. We understand the last ten years has seen a shift in the types of migration to Canberra and we need to better understand those needs. We are also seeing a new wave of refugees and how can we as a community help in this area. I often give talks and sit on panel sessions and I am asked regularly how people can help in the area of refugee settlement. There is so much good will right across the board and we can do better to harness this good will.

So CMCF is also advocating for a summit to be held in which all community organisations come together to develop succinct multicultural policy, similar to a summit held by the former ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs John Hargreaves. It is now time to take stock of our communities and how we can work further to ensure social harmony and serious issues of racism can better be handled. “

Since the ACT election we are pleased and congratulate the ACT government and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith for listening to us. A new Multicultural Advisory Council has been set up and I have been selected to the board representing CMCF and Chin Wong will be representing the ACT Chinese community. Furthermore, it was announced a summit would be held. A big congratulations to CMCF for successful advocacy.

- In March this year we received an urgent call from Emma Campbell the CEO of FECCA to attend a hearing at Parliament House the next day to front a committee to present our views on the proposed changes to 18 C of the Racial Discrimination Act. We had already submitted our submission and this was an opportunity to speak to politicians face to face. Both Harry Oppermann, CMCF's Deputy Chair and myself attended the Hearing the next morning. Emma spoke first, I then added my perspective and spoke on behalf of CMCF and Harry was able to cover key areas including the personal example of witnessing how racism turned to hatred in Europe during World War Two with losing his family in the Holocaust. Suffice to say after we finished our presentations, most of the members of the committee stood up to shake our hands, and endorsement of the strong message we were able to present. At another occasion we attended a function held by Federal MP Gai Brodtmann and Tony Burke to celebrate the defeat of the changes and it was only then did we realise many watched the Hearing on the day through Parliament's in-house television broadcast and we were congratulated again.
- Later in the year, Federal government made an announcement that it was going to make changes to the Citizenship test which included making the English test at university level. CMCF held a forum and members were able to articulate their concerns of how the changes will impact on their loved ones who were already here or those coming in the future and the real possibility that many would be unable to pass a university level English test. The Member for Canberra Gai Brodtmann attended the event and was able to monitor and garner information from our members of some of the issues of concern and took those comments to parliament. Suffice to say the English test proposal was defeated in parliament.
- The Canberra Multicultural Womens Forum (CMWF) goes from strength to strength. The UN Information Centre chose CMWF in cooperation with CMCF to run a couple of programs that brought women together. CMWF were also successful in a grant from the Women's Grant process and will run a program called the CALD women's consultation initiative, whereby they

are consulting with major cultural women's groups to develop best practice in communicating with CALD women. In particular to ensure to reach out to women who generally would not participate in or know about or get involved in events and activities for their respective communities. They will discuss the community's understanding and knowledge of key ACT community services including, health, law, domestic and family violence. A report will be presented to the ACT government at the end of the financial year.

Of course this year we saw the passing of our dear friend Kabu Okai-Davis. Kabu was a highly respected friend of many in the multicultural community and it was fitting that a wake was held for him. Efforts are still underway to establish a scholarship fund in his name. CMCF has already contributed to the fund.

I have been selected to the Victims of Crime Advisory Board this year. My role will be to ensure the voices and opinions of the multicultural community are included in the development of the charter for victims of crime.

Representation

We continue to represent the ACT multicultural community at community participation forums, and we continue to put forward a strong voice and views in response to various national / local issues that are of significant interest and concern to our community.

November 2016:

- CMCF participate and supported the 'Day of Tolerance' organised by the Canberra Interfaith Forum.

December 2016

- Multicultural Reference Group meeting
- CMCF Executive members met with the new ACT Chief of Police, Justine Saunders

January 2017

- I met with CEO of FECCA, Emma Campbell
- CMCF Executive members met with the new Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith

February 2017

- CMCF Executive members attended a new year function held by the new Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Elizabeth Kikkert
- Met with Shane Ratenbury from the Greens, in regard to racism
- Attended ACTCOSS Peak forum meeting
- Attended the Special Rapporteur on violence against women at the UN Information Centre
- Attended the UN World Interfaith Harmony at Parliament House

March 2017

- Attended Special Hearing into proposed changes of 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act at Parliament House
- Community Languages meeting
- Commonwealth Day celebration interfaith event at the ACCC
- Attended the Soroptimist meeting
- Attended morning tea to celebrate the defeat to change 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act at Parliament House

April 2017

- Spoke at the ANU Bruce Hall on multiculturalism

May 2017

- Attended the Labor Women's budget statement
- Presented to SES 1, EL 1 and EL 2 on stakeholder engagement and multiculturalism as part of a Graduate Certificate in Public Policy and Finance

June 2017

- Attended Industry Strategy Workshop and ACT government initiative
- CMCF Executive members met with Senator for Canberra Zed Seselja to talk about multicultural issues for the ACT
- Attended ACTCOSS Peak discussion on budget outcomes
- I presented on World Refugee Day at the University of Canberra

July 2017

- I spoke at the MARSS multicultural matters meeting
- Attended the ACTCOSS meeting to meet CSD Director General, Michael D'Ath

August 2017

- Attended an event on citizenship at Parliament House hosted by Gai Brodtmann and Tony Burke

September 2016

- Attended ACTCOSS Affordable Housing event
- Multicultural Reference Group meeting
- I attended the citizenship ceremony at Government House
- Community Language meeting
- Attended the Canberra Multicultural Radio Gala Dinner

October 2017

- I was a panel on the Women's Celebration Breakfast organised by the University of Canberra at the Arboretum
- Attended the UN Day and Old Parliament House

CMCF programs:

Community Development Programs

A new series of community projects are being organised and run by CMCF. The education program will cover many areas of interest and need including, financial management, governance, how to run a meeting, etc. It will also run other such programs including liaising with the Department of Immigration to seek input from the community on how to better work and understand visa requirements. These programs will be run over the coming months.

CMCF Multicultural Seniors Network – SMILE program

The senior multicultural information learning exchange (SMILE) program is part of the CMCF Multicultural Seniors Network activities. The Multicultural Seniors Network continues to meet regularly on the first Saturday of the month with the aim to connect our seniors and community leaders together to promote community participation and healthy ageing activities, build links with community sectors

and improve access to information on aged care and community support services. CMCF acknowledges Chin Wong's significant contribution in facilitating this network.

Community Language and Education

CMCF is working closely with the Bilingual Education Alliance, the ACT Community Language School and other education and community interested groups to explore means to influence the ACT Government's policies on language education. CMCF acknowledges the tireless contribution made by Dr Mandy Scott for organising various successful events to promote children learning languages.

2XX Multicultural Voice

The Weekly Multicultural Voice Radio program Presented by CMCF committee members with Victor Marillanca as the regular and lead presenter is another CMCF initiative that provides opportunity for smaller community groups to promote their organisations and provided regular interviews with prominent leaders including politicians to discuss variety of current affairs and issues of interests.

Community Public Liability Insurance

CMCF has established an affordable community public liability insurance policy scheme for \$20,000,000 cover renewable yearly. Over 60 organisations have now joined the scheme and are benefitting from the reduced premium fees. The scheme is administered by Carol Keil and CMCF acknowledges her dedication to ensure that the renewals and new applications are processed in a timely manner.

ACT Policing and Crime prevention

CMCF and ACT Policing continued to work closely together to develop strategies to connect with communities to promote the community interface between ACT Policing and the multicultural community. CMCF is working closely with the Multicultural Police Liaison Officers and the Crime Prevention team unit with various projects, targeting community safety; youth at risk and young refugees' activities programs, neighbourhood watch programs and multicultural policing volunteers programs.

Relationships with Federal/Territory agencies

As an independent peak community organisation representing the interests of the ACT Multicultural community, CMCF has been proactive and has been well represented and participated in various peak organisation consultation forums at both Federal and Territory Government levels, thus enabling us to represent our communities, influencing new policy developments, especially in the area of migration and settlement planning; aged care reforms, transport issues, housing issues and urban planning issues.

CMCF continues to liaise with the Multicultural Liaison Officers from the Department of Immigration. We provide feedback of the current state of affairs in the multicultural community and feedback on the skilled migration and family reunion.

Advocacy and representation

CMCF was successfully working with and built a strong working relationship with the ACT Health Multicultural Policy Unit by meeting regularly and providing input into valuable policy and strategies in developing the ACT Health Care Services Framework. This included profiling various communities and providing information in their languages. Sadly, however at a recent meeting a shock announcement was made that the unit would be dismantle and no longer exist. CMCF has officially written to all the respective ministers and shadow ministers regarding our concern and lack of input to the changes. Our greatest concern and fear is that many vulnerable people who struggle with language and understanding ACT Health's system will suffer as a result of the decision made by the ACT government. We are currently pursuing this issue.

CMCF continues to assist the Federation of Ethnic Community Council of Australia (FECCA) throughout the year, providing support as ACT advocate with various national community projects, attended various consultation forums and is currently a member of the National CALD communities Aged Care Reference Committee, thus ensuring that there is an united voice being heard that is truly representing the ACT

multicultural community at the National level. The issue remains that FECCA have not yet made changes to its constitution to ensure CMCF and consequently ACT's multicultural community truly benefits from the funding FECCA receives to consult and gather information of the needs of our community. The message we send to FECCA is that if it intends to operate in a framework of democracy then it must practice democracy in spirit and in practice. The continued charade FECCA plays after so many years must cease and it must take serious steps to change its constitution to ensure organisations like CMCF are represented as part of its attempt to be a representation of councils. FECCA must introduce democracy into its functions and operations.

Funding and resources

CMCF, like many other organisations, rely on grants for funding. CMCF acknowledged the ACT Government's support and its acknowledgement of CMCF as the peak community organisation.

However, the provision of annual funding of only \$15,000 under the multicultural community Sector Development funding program in 2017 enables CMCF to maintain a small office at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre and to provide limited advocacy services for the multicultural community; organise community consultation forums to seek new ideas about the National Multicultural Festival; organise activities as part of community support to celebrate the National Multicultural festival. However, we call on the government to provide CMCF sufficient funding to allow for policy officer to execute the many ideas we currently would like to do, but are restricted simply by lack of time and money. It was a promise made by every minister for multicultural affairs in the past. We hope the new minister will consider providing the funding.

The work of the Chair requires time and energy to fulfil the many duties, events, programs and talks. I also gave many presentations throughout my term, this was done while holding down a full time job. However, there were times when it is all encompassing to attend so many meetings. Between attending meetings a few from CMCF Executive meet to discuss and plan for forums and programs. Furthermore, the many hours spent in the evenings writing up grant applications, designing posters, writing speeches and the list is very long. CMCF is a truly volunteer organisation as no one is paid to do the work. I estimate that I can spend up to an average of 10 hours a week and if you were to pay a modest \$50 an hour and multiply by at least 45 weeks in a year that would equate to \$22,500 worth of community work. At least three from the executive provide similar hours of work and we have around \$67,000 worth of community work provided free of charge. Hence we keep on calling on the ACT Government to fully support the work of CMCF.

On the matter of financial matters, overall, CMCF achieved a surplus of \$16,487 for the financial year. The main driver of this result was the receipt in June 2017 of a \$15,000 grant to the newly auspiced Canberra Multicultural Women's Forum. After allowing for that income, a small surplus of \$1,487 was achieved from normal operations.

Influencing Public Policy and Decision Making Process

Throughout the year, CMCF responded to ACT Government invitations and attended various community consultations and focus group meetings to speak on issues affecting the multicultural community in the ACT.

Strengthening CMCF Strategic partnership

CMCF continue to nurture the productive working relationship established with key representative/ Peak organisations that form part of the ACT Community:

- As an affiliated community organisation of Health Care Consumers Association, representing the multicultural community to address issues relating to health care needs and well beings of the community, especially matters affecting the heightened needs of multicultural community and participated as a health care consumer representative.
- As a member of ACTCOSS (ACT Council of Social Services), participating in various community sector consultations, representing the CALD community to identify, discuss and address social policies and community issues ;

- Working closely with Centre for Women Health Matters to set up the CALD Women's Reference Group to build linkage with Women Services and agencies to discuss issues affecting CALD women and identify strategies to connect with CALD women so their needs could be addressed. CCWF will also work in this area.
- Working closely with ACT Multicultural Mental Health Network as the auspicing body, promoting mental health and well-being; develop strategies to disseminate information to community related to mental health care and reducing stigma relating to mental illness.
- Attended regular meetings organised by the Department of Immigration in relation to Migrant Planning and Settlement Services; the ACT & Regions Client Reference Group. This enables CMCF to be more aware of the issues concerning new migrants and settlement services in the ACT.
- Attended RASH (Refugee Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian Co-ordination Committee) meetings which address issues of concern to these groups.
- Neighbourhood Watch program to address community issues relating to housing, neighbourhood harmony and safety.
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance promoting the interests of disabled people by lobbying government to ensure the needs of multicultural community accessing disability services are being met in a culturally appropriate way.
- Working closely with Council of the Ageing (COTA), supporting various projects initiated by COTA especially in relation to transport and housing issues.

End of my time as Chair

It is with honour that the my work as Chair of CMCF among other things that I do will be acknowledged in black tie award ceremony this Saturday. The award is the University of Canberra Distinguished Alumni Award, 2017 Chancellor's Award for Service and Philanthropy. Earlier this year I was also nominated for Australian of the Year Award. It is a humbling experience to be awarded the University of Canberra award and last year being awarded the Order of Merit of Australia. It pleases me when I find out grass root people are my nominators, it fills me with happiness that the work I do makes a difference.

I would like to thank the executive and committee for their tireless work and commitment. Each and every member has been fantastic to work with. I would like to thank Harry Oppermann the outgoing deputy chair who reckons he will retire from community work – I find that hard to believe but we'll let him off the hook for now. He has been a great wealth of knowledge and support during my time. I may still call upon him to help us with writing in the future. Malcolm Mahon our Treasurer is a wealth of knowledge who was able to at any point know CMCF's financial position, a sign of a good treasurer. Mandy Scott continues to pursue work around language and language in schools, she is a tireless and dedicated and we certainly appreciate that. I would also like to make mention of Yelin Hung and Mary Abdel-Massih who have both stepped up to the mark of taking on the Secretary role when Chin became Deputy-Chair. It is a breath of fresh air to have these two women take the work of the Forum seriously. Finally, I would like to thank Chin Wong. She is the rock and support of CMCF. I can sincerely say that if not for Chin who kept me on the straight and narrow and always reminded me in the kindest of way to reply to my emails. She kept me on track and is truly a wonderful leader in her own right.

I have now completed my two terms of Chair of CMCF. It has been a great honour to serve our community.

I present the report to you.

Diana Rahman, OAM
Chair
8 November 2017