

## **InterAction: Multifaith Youth Network**

**Faiths /Traditions Represented:** Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Atheism

**Location of CC:** Melbourne, Australia

**Key Areas of Focus:** Interfaith, Youth Leadership and Skill Development, Advocacy, Social Action

### **Summary:**

InterAction is based in Melbourne, Australia and is the country's premier youth-led interfaith organization. It works with young people at schools, universities, and local council areas across Victoria. It works with young people of all cultural backgrounds, reflective of Australia's multicultural and diverse heritage.

InterAction's focus is to educate young people about the world's belief systems. Our model is based on the premise that for people to truly understand one another they need a basic level of knowledge or "religious literacy." This process enables us to present facts to participants and simultaneously dispel harmful stereotypes that often abound about various belief systems. It is vital work because the sooner young people learn objectively about the world's religions and belief systems, the sooner they can learn the difference between fact and rumour. This allows everyone to think critically about misinformation from the media or their peers or families about certain religions.

Our three areas of focus are: education about the world's religions and beliefs, youth leadership and skill development (focusing on communication and storytelling, advocacy, public speaking, responding to racism, interfaith 101), and social action.

InterAction has run its training program at universities, schools, and local government areas across Victoria. We have taught young people skills to advocate on their own behalves, knowledge about the world's religions, and how to run interfaith projects.

### **CC Profile Questionnaire:**

#### **1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?**

We work in Melbourne, Victoria (Australia). Victoria is the most culturally diverse state in Australia, with people from the majority of the world's countries, ethnicities, and religions who call Victoria home. In that sense, the snapshot of global diversity can be found locally here in Australia.

**2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?**

Amongst this almost unprecedented diversity, opportunities for tension based on ignorance and misunderstanding, often fueled by a frenzied and biased media or opportunistic politicians, abound. This means that promoting accurate information and the idea that each citizen bears the onus of educating themselves to fight off ignorance, is vital to promote social cohesion and peaceful and prosperous communities.

**3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out? Please specify the year in which the activity took/is taking place.**

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**4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?**

We have presented our program to participants from most of the world's religions, which includes non-theistic ethical traditions: Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, the Baha'i Faith, Zoroastrianism, atheism, secular humanism, and other diverse spiritual traditions.

**5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that generally do not engage or cooperate with each other.**

It depends on the setting. We use our relationship with interfaith councils to build up a relationship with local government councils, who in turn give us access to run trainings in government funded schools. We have used chaplaincy and faith clubs on university campuses to run programs at universities. Our model is to not source the participants ourselves but leave that to the "host organization" with whom we have built a relationship as they have the best understanding of their demographics. Our specific expertise is in running the programs. All else that relates to sourcing the participants we leave to the host organization, unless they need our help. In those cases, we introduce them to other organizations and encourage partnerships to ensure diverse participation.

**6. Why do the activities your CC is carrying out improve cooperation among people of different traditions in the broader community?**

Our CC's activities promote education and self-awareness. They put the onus on a person's learning squarely in the hands of the participants: we encourage them to see that our program is only the beginning. Ideally, they should continue to learn and explore and bring an open and enquiring mind to all new situations, and a critical mind to people who encourage racism and bigotry.

- 7. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? Have there been any challenges?**

The challenges have been about the running of a community organization, especially one that is youth led when young people are so busy and time poor. The relationship amongst those who manage the organization has always been an enriching one. Every day is another day of interfaith co-operation for us, whether we are running programs or not.

- 8. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?**

The feedback we get is always inspiring. People are impressed with our programs and with the knowledge our facilitators have, which in turn inspires them to learn more. We aim to model the knowledge, understanding, and respect for diversity that we teach to participants. We get called back to run programs at schools every year, that to us is a good sign that our work is valued.

- 9. What does your CC hope to achieve?**

In a nutshell we know we can't stop people hating one another if that is their objective. But as we always tell each other, on our watch that hate will not be from a place of ignorance. Our goal is to dispel ignorance with knowledge, replace suspicion with open minds, and to promote critical thinking instead of blind trust in the prejudices of the media, politicians, and other influential but divisive forces.

- 10. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?**

Ideally, URI could get us involved with the global youth leadership program, so we can share our knowledge, training and resources with people around the world.

- 11. As you know, the Purpose of URI is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings. In what ways do you feel your CC's work helping to achieve this purpose?**

We promote daily enduring interfaith co-operation because we are laying the foundation for that to happen: basic information, a platform from which people can begin to understand and connect with one another.

- 12. What value or benefits does your CC receive from being a member of URI?**

The global network reminds us that we are doing work that contributes to global peace and understanding. It can be lonely doing interfaith work in a country so far away and that is very secular and suspicious of religion. Being a part of URI reminds us that we are part of the bigger picture.

**13. What value or benefit does your CC currently provide or could potentially provide the URI network?**

As we said, we have a training program that we can share with youth trainers around the world. We believe it is based on best practice in youth engagement and interfaith.

**14. Do you communicate or work with other CCs in the URI network? If yes, please share a few examples. If no, please explain why you have been unable/uninterested to connect with other CCs.**

Not yet as such as the CC network in Australia is growing, but we are known in the interfaith scene and we hope to give URI more legitimacy here in Melbourne and we look forward to helping out at future URI events and partners in the future.