

Rapporteur Summary

Day Three: Modern multiculturalism

Agnes Cusack, Director of New Australia Media, reports on the major themes covered in Day Three of Diversity in Health 2010.

As a journalist with an interest in multiculturalism, it's been a pleasure to be invited here today – it's been a real smorgasbord.

With my 'reporter hat' on, the story of the day for me was the *Refugee Voices* session. The thing about working as a reporter, especially in a war zone, is that you always have the opportunity to leave and the choice of where you'd like to go. We heard today from a woman who wasn't so lucky. She talked about getting out of Burma with her kids and how her daughter never saw her father. She talked about making her way out of Burma into India, and living in the slums of Delhi for three or four years before she managed to find her way through the UNHCR system and came to Australia. There were tears in her eyes (and those of the audience) when she talked about finding food and shelter for her children, and of women being forced to allow men to touch their bodies in exchange for food to survive.

As moved as I was by this story, I knew very well that it would not get a run in the mainstream media. My news editors would say, "Where's the angle? Haven't you heard about compassion fatigue?". The question for all of us is: how do we combat this attitude?

This morning we saw the lovely Saeed in action. He talked about being a multicultural journalist and gave us hope that we could broaden the news agenda. He told us we needed to go

out and change things, not just snipe from the sidelines. He correctly said that journalists often work from a position of ignorance, rather than any sort of conspiracy theory. They don't know what they don't know.

Multicultural communities are often hard to penetrate and it's hard to find people to talk to.

Saeed also let slip a dirty little secret (which is not so much a secret in this room) that there are good business models in all of this. It makes economic sense to think about multiculturalism in terms of the media dollar. Saeed works for *Leader Newspapers*, a Murdoch publication with 33 newspapers that land on people's doorsteps throughout metropolitan Melbourne.

At this point I'll put in a shameless plug for New Australia Media:

www.newaustraliamedia.org. It's a mentoring program for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who work with journalist volunteers. Next week we're going to have our first story in *Leader Newspapers* – about a group of young Karen people going back to the camps in Thailand. They are doing a video project to show the kids in the camps what they'll be coming to in Australia. As well as the young people benefitting from this project, we're trying to get the message to journalists who haven't had much to do with migrant communities.

New Australia Media is based on New America Media, which aggregates

stories from multicultural sources in the USA – so it was good to hear from Andrew Jakubowicz about his online venture www.culturaldiversity.net.au. Andrew is trawling through media reports and academic journals and aggregating stories so that people can source information on diversity. Andrew listed user-generated content as the biggest struggle for his website – he said that one out of every 3000 people who signed on to social media sites actually participate. So there's the challenge: we need the content and everybody here has got a story to tell or knows someone they'd like to tell a story about.

Today started with a fantastic plenary session that got right down to basics: what do we *mean* when we use words like 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity'? Here I think that Juliana Nkrumah absolutely took the biscuit. She said that multiculturalism puts white people at the core and other groups,

particularly Africans, on the outer. It's confronting stuff and she challenged us to genuinely embrace diversity and not use the standards of 'whiteness' to judge other people.

Today's takeaway for me – and I'm sure you have many more – is that one day there will be a place in the mainstream media for stories like we heard today in *Refugee Voices*, from people who opened their hearts to us. It takes bravery to tell these stories and hopefully one day, people from all around Australia will be listening to them.

The only way to make this happen is to become a more active consumer of the media – to call if you hear something you don't like or pitch a story if you've got one. Demand change – it'll benefit all of us and the economy as well!

Thank you very much.