

# A safe, strong and resilient Somali community

The Somali population is over represented in crime statistics.<sup>1</sup>

**With almost 10 percent of the Heidelberg West/Bellfield community made up of people with Somali ancestry<sup>1</sup>, Banyule City Council's *Diverse Communities Project* is pioneering ways to divert Somali youth away from crime.**

Almost 4000 people have participated in the program in just over 18 months, but with funding now completed, the program will stop short of being able to completely embed key crime prevention strategies needed to support the Somali-Australian community.

## Diverse Communities Project

Banyule Council piloted the *Diverse Communities Project* to address the prevailing issue of Somali youth engagement with the justice system, social cohesion and parental capacity and confidence.

Council delivered program activities between January 2022 (delayed from September 2021 because of COVID) and October 2023. Almost 4000 people have participated in events, workshops or received individual support from staff.

The vast majority of participants in the project have been Somali-Australian young people aged 12-25, closely followed by Mothers from the community who have participated in a range of educational programs and events. Muslim young people and families from other local culturally-diverse groups have also participated in a number of the initiatives that have been provided.

## Supporting data

**9.5% of the Heidelberg West/Bellfield population are people with Somali ancestry.<sup>1</sup> Whilst Somali-Australians represent only 0.25% of total offenders in Victoria, the Somali-Australian offender rate is 3.39 times higher than their population share, second only to the Sudanese<sup>2</sup>.**

With reference to specific offences across Banyule, the 3081 postcode is over represented in the crime statistics.

The September 2020 Crime Stats data indicates 29.6% of crimes against the person; 22% of property and deception

## We are seeking:

1. For the State Government to provide additional funding for the Banyule Diverse Communities Project for the next two years beyond the initial funding period so that the project can focus on further family capacity building and early intervention



**The *Diverse Communities Project* aims to address community safety by implementing a complementary and integrated suite of circuit breaker and capacity building activities to prevent Somali-Australian youth crime.**

offences; 34% of drug offences; 35.3% of public order and security offences; 19.1% of justice procedure offences and 43.6% of other offences occurred in Heidelberg West-Bellfield and Heidelberg Heights.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Victorian Child Adolescent Monitoring Framework Portal, in this region 18.2% of young people experience high levels of psychological distress, 42.8% report experiencing bullying, and less than half (41.9%) of the young people can access mental health services when needed.<sup>3</sup>

A Banyule Youth Services survey (2023) highlighted the ongoing concern held by young people related to mental health, school and racism.

Somali-Australian young people specifically reported safety as a key concern.<sup>4</sup>

“Somali-Australian young people continue to tell us regularly through consultation and conversation with them, that they face ongoing “discrimination”, “lacking employment networks” and “intergenerational pressures due to their families being unsupported in how to raise young people that are growing up in Australia”.<sup>4</sup>

## Keys to success

**The *Diverse Communities Project* is testing a strength-based capacity building diversionary approach as a sustainable means of disrupting the local Somali-Australian youth crime issues.**

This approach aligns with the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030, which identifies that youth experiencing disadvantage are better served by having their needs met, which includes timely access to health and social supports and ongoing connections to education and employment pathways.

**The project is successful because of its capacity building approach seeking to uplift the community. It is led by Somali-Australian community members and workers and is based on ongoing relevant feedback and consultation.**

The project acknowledges that:

- Somali-Australian youth require meaningful, interest-based recreation and social opportunities to disrupt cycles of family, school and community disengagement.
- Somali-Australian youth seek to contribute to social cohesion within families, the Somali community and the broader Banyule community.
- Somali-Australian families require knowledge and skills to support their young people to navigate the social challenges and positively contribute to the community; and seek to reduce the barriers to accessing specialist services to address prevailing youth health and wellbeing issues.
- Somali-Australian young people seek support to develop employment skills and secure meaningful work.
- Developing cultural competence within workplaces and services will address unconscious bias and discrimination against Somali-Australians.

**Some of the highly successful initiatives in the project so far, include:**

### Cultural-competency training

We have developed and facilitated training to 35+ services and organisations who support or want to connect with the Somali-Australian and Muslim local community. 498 professionals have undertaken the training so far, leading to an increase in access and inclusion across facilities including mental health providers, libraries and leisure centres.

### Parental capacity building activities and education programs

Workshops for Parents and Carers on topics such as alcohol and other drugs, wellbeing and parenting in partnership with organisations such as SHARC and YSAS.

### Engagement of young people

Regular activities promoting social cohesion and participation for young people has been a key component of the project. This has included various recreational events, leadership workshops and mental health training. 40 young men also attended a forum to get support to overcome the barriers they face in gaining employment as Muslim young people.

### Address the escalation of Somali-Australian inter-community violence (across Metro Melbourne regions)

In partnership with other councils and services, addressing violence amongst young men by collaborating on restorative programs and events, information sharing and education for young people and their families.

### Events to support health & wellbeing, cultural celebration and the positive profiling of young people

30+ events and programs have been run to support the development of leadership skills, connection to culture and community and to build intergenerational connections amongst young people and older people. The project has also had a focus on the positive profiling of young people in key community spaces and online.

### Individual and Family Support

One on one support work and supported referrals for young people and their families. Addressing factors including mental health, relationships, alcohol and other drug use, education and employment, housing, etc.

# Supporting the project

The program is currently funded for seven days a week, with Council providing additional support for three days per week until June 2023.

The funded workers are from the Somali-Australian community and between them have a diverse skill-set to reach all members of the community.

These include:

- **1 x Family Support Worker**  
*3 days per week (whole family approach)*
- **1 x Youth Programs Worker** – 3 days per week  
*(support for all young people)*
- **1 x Youth Programs Assistant** – 1 day per week  
*(young women)*




**Banyule**  
City Council

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing, 2011 and 2016*

<sup>2</sup> *Crime Statistics Victoria, 2020*

<sup>3</sup> *Victorian Child Adolescent Monitoring Framework Portal*

<sup>4</sup> *Banyule City Council Youth Surveys, 2021*