

FIRST EVER MAJOR SOUTH ASIAN MIGRANT EVENT IN SYDNEY.

SOCIAL UNITY IN DIVERSITY - A SOUTH ASIAN CONFERENCE.

This Event was essentially a SEVA initiative, which was a long time coming... but did ... when it did.

It was held in partnership with the Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Center in Parramatta who played a major part in putting it all together along with the Parramatta, the Holroyd and the Baulkham Hills Shire councils. The Holroyd council had also kindly hosted and provided the venue for the event.

The Conference which was held on 17th July 2006. at the Holroyd Council Hall at Merryland attracted over 150 members drawn from all the major countries of the Indian sub continent along with the consulates generals of Bangla Desh and Sri Lanka - the Indian, Pakistan and Nepali had expressed their regrets as they had prior commitments , but conveyed their good wishes - along with state and federal MPs and local councillors who were present.

The conference explored response strategies on settlement issues most relevant to the South Asian Community in general - such as Education, Employment/ Business and Health - and also aimed at promotiung greater liaison between this community and the wider Australian community. The target communities were the Indian. Pakistani, Bangla Deshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali Burmese and Bhutanese communities in Sydney. Mr. Ejaz Khan(Solicitor and Barrister), Mr. John Turnbull (from DEWS) and Kate Carnell - CEO of the Australian Division of General Practice- covered the key conference issues respectively. The key note speaker of the day - Mr. Jock Collins provided the tone for the conference with reference to some recent developments on relations between new migrants and the wider Australian community in Sydney and elsewhere. He also spoke on immigration policies followed by successive governments of different political persuasions and the overall migrant environment.

After a 5 star luncheon break, during the afternoon session, concurrent workshops were held on best practice models drawn from the community in the respective areas of the conference. These models had been handpicked by a Screening Committee drawn from the community. This was followed by a presentation by Kalyan Ram- President of SEVA International - provided a historical perspective on the migration of people from the Indian subcontinent dating back to the late 18th century and dwelt on various aspects of the dynamics of the emerging South Asian community with specific reference to SEVA's role.

An appeal for volunteers to join the organisation in its efforts also drew an encouraging response.

Some of the specific issues emerging from the conference and the workshop sessions were :-

EMPLOYMENT.

- underemployment- due to the lack of jobs in specific areas of specialisation, expertise or qualification;

- job prospects; lack of information on job opportunities prior to migration;

- waiting times; delays in evaluation of qualifications; registration with Centrelink;
- problems created by the dismantling of Skimax and other similar organizations which used to provide case management, skills training, Resume writing and Interview skills to new migrants and long term unemployment ;
- inability of newly set up bodies to provide adequate levels of support;
- prospective employers' insistence on prior local work experience to even new migrants.

EDUCATION.

- Problems faced by South Asian student migrants both on and off campus; their high expectations of contact with their professors and teachers; of income and career expectations; isolation at campus;
- education being seen as the key to social mobility and acceptance within the wider community;
- great emphasis placed by the South Asian parents on education being important for their children and to expect them to perform at their peak and becoming very competitive-seeing education as a gateway towards a successful employment pathway in Australia.

HEALTH.

- lack of community consultations by health service providers in terms of culturally appropriate and sensitive services to the community;
- lack of access for the community to information and services available through specific health service agencies;
- lack of adequate representation on relevant consultative bodies for the community..

Consensus

The general consensus of all those who attended the event was that it was a very useful and timely initiative and was a worthwhile event all round.

NOTE: SEVA proposes to address the main outcomes of the conference, in time