Multicultural centre ‘opens doors’
Encourages our refugees

By ANTONY DUBBER

TWENTY five kids and young adults from the Goulburn Multicultural Centre jumped on a bus on Monday morning and headed to the nation’s capital to learn more about science. They toured several venues across the city, including Questacon, the CSIRO Discovery Centre, and the Gold Creek complex (which incorporates the National Dinosaur Museum, the Canberra Aviary, and the Reptile Sanctuary). They also have the opportunity to experience university life when they pay a visit to the ANU campus. Dr Sean Perera, from the Centre for Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) will give them a tour of the university and also encourage them to meet some of the students involved in the Science Communication degree.

The students set off from Goulburn Courthouse at 7:30 am, returning by 6:30pm. The Multicultural Centre will split the trip over two days, with another trip planned for this Monday, October 2, when the team will visit the National Dinosaur Museum, Canberra Aviary and the Reptile Sanctuary. They will once again tour the university from 4pm, with a science show from Australia’s first professor of science communication, and the presentation of certificates of participation.

The GMC, in conjunction with the Australian National University are running this program, called ‘Opening Doors’, with the aim to offer young migrants from disadvantaged and refugee backgrounds access to science engagement opportunities in Australia.

Dr Perera, in his role as a research fellow at ANU, saw the need for a program dedicated to inspiring kids of all backgrounds to want to take up a career in science. He was the main instigator of an initiative set up by the Federal government in 2011 called ‘Inspiring Australia’. The aim of the program, set up in May last year, was to take the idea of science communication into schools and also to the wider community to people such as parents and grandparents.

The Government provided funding in the 2011/12 Budget to the tune of $21 million over three years towards the ‘Inspiring Australia’ program.

The Goulburn Multicultural Centre (GMC) has also got behind this initiative, and Charlotte Butler from the GMC expressed her delight at what Dr Perera had done for these Goulburn kids.

“We were approached by Dr Perera to see if we wanted to be part of this program, and we agreed wholeheartedly,” she said.

“It’s so invaluable for kids to be able to have access to university entry programs, because a lot of them have done their equivalent of the HSC in their country of birth, and are extremely bright kids. Unfortunately, the Department of Immigration does not recognise these qualifications, and asks them to go through studies all over again here in Australia, which for some of them is a bit humiliating, as some of these guys are in their late teens-early twenties.”

“The Multicultural Centre runs a youth group once a month on a Friday night, and Dr Perera and project officer Caitlin Winter attended, giving the kids a talk on whether science would be a career path they would like to follow. They set it up to be tailored to each individual child’s tastes. We had a great response, with 30 students signing up for this Canberra trip. The figure was revised down to 25, as some of the guys had work commitments and other things to deal with, which is understandable.

“We love to include the kids in these sorts of programs, and they couldn’t wait to go. Also, the parents were extremely keen for their kids to be included but obviously, like everything else these days, paperwork needed to be filled out first for the kids to go on the bus and to be under our care. The parents couldn’t understand why this was happening, as for some of them, English is not their first language, so it took us about an hour to help them go through the forms and to arrange transportation.”

For more information on the services that the Goulburn Multicultural Centre offers, visit their office at 205 Auburn St (behind Jay Jays), or visit the website at www.gmc.org.au.
LEARNING EXPERIENCE:
Dr Sean Perera from the Centre for Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) pictured with some of the kids from the Goulburn Multicultural Centre involved in the "Opening Doors" project. (Front) Mupenzi Nizeyimana and Alphonso Karbehl. (Back) Dr Sean Perera, Charlotte Butler (GMC), Dantiva Mukamurenzi, Gifty Page, Damiara Jwiringymana, Melissa Tuichung, Caitlin Winter, (Project officer, ANU), Zour Dennis and Liam Eden.