



## Lets make the city greater: the Sydney Alliance has founded

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-15/sydney-alliance-campaigns-for-better-city/2901324>

Twitter <https://twitter.com/#!/search/sydneyalliance>

Telegraph <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sydney-nsw/vanu-coughran-is-helping-kids-break-a-cycle-of-violence-after-being-a-victim-herself/story-e6freuzi-1226137169543>

Sydney Town Hall was overflowing, as people from over 45 organisations with members numbering 500 000, came together to found the Sydney Alliance.

Between 6 and 7pm over 2000 people spilled over the streets, square and footpaths around the town hall, coming together to find a new way to have a say over the decisions that affect their lives in Sydney.

Randa Kattan, the chairperson of the Alliance told the crowd, “we have arrived”.

Statements of support were received from the Governor of NSW and Cardinal George Pell. Governor Marie Bashir wished us well and said the work of the Alliance “can demonstrate a model which will contribute to the greatness of Australia, a model for communities everywhere.”

The Cardinal’s message said “the Sydney Alliance is a new and significant force for the common good in Sydney. Its strength is found in the range of organisations and viewpoints involved and the fact that they take seriously the task of rebuilding community in this city.”

All our organisational leaders spoke in a fast-paced roll call – as people in the hall stood to be recognised as the new founding partners of the most diverse alliance Sydney has ever seen.

We heard the story of the Sydney Alliance – how we grew in response to the challenges of the Cronulla Riots and attacks on the fair go. How we stand on the shoulders of community coalitions that go before us, like the Green Bans of the 1970s. How we built the Alliance through one-to-one relationships, then training across our diversity – where we “don’t ask people to sort out their differences, but to engage in their commonalities.” Then a vision was cast for the future of Sydney – where the trust and respect that we have built inside the Alliance can be cast out to the city as a whole.

Wishes of support were received from our sister organisations in London and New York, and Joe Chrastil from the Industrial Areas Foundation spoke to us, saying “it was one of the best” founding assemblies he has seen in all his time organising.

A new breed of community leaders spoke. Liuanga Palu, a young community leader from Marrickville Uniting Church shared how she used community organising to help reconnect her community after one of her friends had been killed.

The Agenda for the Common Good was launched – with a new vision for community care and health, transport and social inclusion.

From Community Care and Health we heard about the need to provide support for families who often struggle under the pressure to care for others at significant times of their lives – whether kids, illness or age. Anne Robertson shared the story of her mother and the personal strain she has experienced in an aged care institution.

We heard a vision of an inclusive city – where people’s gifts and strengths are valued. Vanu Coughran told her story of being violently attacked at a Sydney petrol station in 2007. But she said “it was the loss of her eye that allowed the eyes of her heart to see.” Her decision to forgive her young attackers led her to a life of community organising, where she works to ensure young people are accepted and have a stake in the city. When Izzy Hadife, 19, told the crowd he wanted a city where he could be a young man not a man of “middle east appearance,” the crowd exploded in applause.

Maha Abdo, from the United Muslim Women’s Association invited Victor Dominello, the Minister for Citizenship, Communities and Aboriginal Affairs to the stage, and asked him if he would work with us on social inclusion by coming to our people’s assemblies in 2012. He said “yes, yes, yes” and committed to being a champion of the Alliance in Macquarie Street.

Gwen Hackett and Emily Pearce shared their experiences of getting around the outer western suburbs of Sydney. Gwen struggling with buses that don’t come and Emily often spends four hours getting to and from her University – because she has to travel from Penrith to Campbelltown.

Sue Day spoke about our vision for transport – where we can move around Sydney on public transport that is an alternative to the car. She said “we must be different to what has gone before”, and talked of our vision of an enforceable customer service standard.

Bob Schroder from the Rail Tram and Bus union quizzed Charles Casuscelli, Liberal Member for Strathfield, and Dr Geoff Lee, Liberal Member for Parramatta – asking them to attend a transport assembly in Penrith to discuss the customer service standard. They both said “yes”.

Then the call to action went out – people were asked to stand to come to Alliance orientations, 2 day trainings, and to get involved in the transport assembly, social inclusion assemblies and our community care research. Most in the hall stood at one time – and over one thousand commitment cards were collected at the end.

We finished the Assembly listening to the “Harbour City” a song written especially for the Sydney Alliance.

It was a great beginning.