

## Race Relations: *Racism in Victoria* Statewide Forum report



# Race Relations: *Racism in Victoria*

## Summary

On 4 April 2013, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) hosted the first Statewide Forum for 2013 on Race Relations: *Racism in Victoria*. Ninety participants from government, community, sporting and multicultural agencies attended the half-day forum at the State Library of Victoria.

The Forum addressed contemporary manifestations of racism; the legal architecture relating to racial discrimination in Victoria; CMY's engagement with racism over the past 25 years; and migrant and refugee young people's experiences of and views on racism.

The Forum included facilitated breakout groups on the key themes of Media, Sport, Education and Employment, to generate discussion and recommendations to tackle racism against young people. The Forum recommendations will feed into a CMY briefing paper on racism to Victorian Minister for Youth Affairs, The Hon. Ryan Smith MP.

## Speakers

### Yin Paradies

Associate Professor Yin Paradies of Deakin University defined racism as the inequitable distribution of opportunity, benefit or resources across ethnic or racial groups. Noting the spectrum of racism from overt to ambiguous, Yin described the importance of intent, familiarity and relationships as factors to determine whether an action is racist.

Racism takes various forms, including: internalised (acceptance of attitudes); interpersonal (interactions); and systemic (institutional structures such as education, employment, police force). In assessing young people's experiences of racism, Yin identified schools and the media as primary sites of racism. Racism can be subtle, including stereotyping, normalisation of 'whiteness' and colour-blindness, where approaches don't recognise existing structural and power imbalances.

Racism negatively affects young people's health. Both Indigenous and migrant and refugee young people experience the negative effects of racism through inequitable access to resources; higher exposure to risk factors; mental health; and disengagement from healthy activities.

Racism is a common experience for children and young people in Australia and has a range of detrimental effects on health and wellbeing. Racism is a significant and ongoing social issue that requires action by individuals, organisations and governments to address.

Yin made the following recommendations to tackle racism:

- Increase cultural understanding and exposure to differences.
- Debunk stereotypes and question what Australian 'fair go' values mean.
- Show how seriously racism affects people's lives.
- Talk about racism in the media.
- Inform people about what they can do if they find themselves confronted by racism.

## Anna Hyland

[Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#) (VEOHRC) policy officer Anna Hyland provided a toolkit of options for workers when responding to racism.

Anna outlined the functions of the three pieces of legislation relevant to racism in Victoria: the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

The Commission broadly defines racism as: a belief that some races are inherently superior to others; a belief that some groups of people are different and do not 'fit' into the 'Australian way of life'; and aggressive, abusive or offensive behaviour towards members of other races based on those beliefs.

The legislation proscribes four sets of behaviours:

1. inciting hatred
2. prejudice or harassment in public life
3. practices and policies that disadvantage or exclude
4. failure to respect cultural practices.

The Commission's complaint resolution process is centered on conciliation. Principles that guide this process are that it happens as early as possible; is appropriate to the nature of the dispute; is fair to everyone; and is voluntary. A complaint can be lodged by an affected person/group; a consenting child's parent or other adult or an organisation on a consenting person's behalf.

The Commission has a set of [Anti-Hate reporting tools](#) to share ideas about standing up to racism with words to use when responding to 'haters' and bystander ideas.

## Soo-Lin Quek

CMY Knowledge and Advocacy Manager, Soo-Lin Quek, outlined the organisation's longstanding vision of seeking equality for multicultural young people. Describing the difficulty of identifying racism at times, given it may be subtle or deeply entrenched, Soo-Lin highlighted the need to build partnerships across communities and sectors in anti-racism work.

CMY's new five-year [strategic plan](#) acknowledges the primacy of systemic racism in the challenges faced by multicultural young people. All young people need to engage in challenging racism so the burden is not just on those on the receiving end of discrimination.

Consultations show that multicultural young people want to build connections with Indigenous youth to share experiences. In this context, CMY welcomes the opportunity to continue its work in engaging young people to tackle racism.

## Munira Yusuf

CMY's Youth Advocacy Officer, Munira Yusuf, presented the findings of the December 2012 Youth Forum on race relations. In reporting on the views of young people, Munira noted that often there are negative perceptions and stigma attached to 'young people' of any background.

With an approach grounded in the belief that young people are experts in their own lives, Munira explained that all of the young people at the forum had experienced racism. Young people reported racism as affecting them emotionally, intellectually and socially.

Young people reported experiences of racism in the following sites:

- public spaces (transport, outdoor areas)
- sports and recreation
- education (schools, universities, TAFE)
- employment
- community
- police
- services (health, youth and welfare services )
- media.

Highlighting school, public transport and sporting clubs as particular areas of concern, the young people at the forum made a range of recommendations to tackle racism in these key areas, including:

### Public transport

- Provide opportunities for interaction between cultures through festivals.
- Workshops on how to handle racism and help people reflect on their own behaviour or assumptions.

### Schools

- More emphasis on anti-racism in primary school rather than high school when ideas and beliefs are already formed and are harder to change.
- More focus in schools and education on Indigenous history.
- Schools should help with awareness-raising. Harmony day should be a week-long celebration for the entire school.

### Sport

- Increase cross cultural training in clubs and with referees.
- Improve responses to reports of racism and discrimination in clubs.
- Engage parents from multicultural communities.

## Breakout groups

Attendees took part in four facilitated breakout groups on the themes of Media, Sport, Education and Employment as they relate to young people's experience of racism. Using the morning's presentations as a basis for discussion, breakout groups responded to the recommendations of the Youth Forum. Each group was asked to discuss issues the young people with whom they work face; strategies at an individual and systemic level; and key recommendations to government or relevant sectors.

## Education

### Issues

- There is a need for robust conversations about racism.
- There is a need to maintain consistency in teaching methods and responses to racist behavior so that racism is never allowed to flourish.
- What is taught at school may not be reinforced at home- the influence of family attitudes and behaviour.
- Different learning styles require cultural sensitivity.

### Strategies

- Avoid 'colour-blindness' strategies.
- Introduce more Indigenous content in schools.
- Educate young people about other cultures to foster positive experiences with multiculturalism.
- Have celebrations in schools throughout the year on each culture's significant days.
- Find ways to bring families in to celebrations / conversations about culture.

### Recommendations to the Victorian Government

- Ensure the curriculum promotes diversity across all subject areas.
- Implement cultural competency training for teachers and promote culturally diverse teachers.
- Identify inspiring multicultural leaders and role models to promote anti-racism.

## Employment

### Issues

- Workplaces recruit workers who are a cultural fit similar to current employees, leading to exclusion of some groups.
- Lack of education makes employment difficult, for example completion of year 12.
- Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are often expensive and exploitative.

### Strategies

- Councils to examine internal recruitment and ensure workforce reflects local population.
- Create workplace traineeships for young people of migrant and refugee background to act as a foot in the door given lack of broader networks.
- Corporate social responsibility practice includes contracting local labor force and social enterprise.
- Organisational change requires external advocacy to hold organisations and councils accountable to their action plans around cultural diversity.
- Forming a community body on the ground to advocate and lobby on employment issues.

### Recommendations to the Victorian Government

- Quotas of migrant and refugee employees in government institutions.
- Use good practice to promote what works.

## Sport

### Issues

- Most local clubs are not culturally diverse and training is minimal leading to ignorance.
- Clubs have historically relied on Anglo Australian members.
- Participation of Anglo Australians is declining and clubs need further education.
- Images and promotional material are Anglo-dominated.
- Community sport is already highly monitored and regulated.

### Strategies

- A database of clubs identified as culturally inclusive.
- Young people may wish to create their own clubs but lack capacity and resources.
- Highlight examples of good practice, for example North Melbourne Football Club allowing participation in AFL.

### Recommendations to sport clubs and regulators

- Cultural competency and awareness to be promoted from within sporting clubs and not merely through external regulation.

## Media

### Issues

- Mainstream media do not have representations of refugee or migrant background young people noting SBS and ABC have more representation of migrants and refugees.
- Media may have its own agenda to cover negative not positive stories due to the belief this attracts a larger audience.
- Difficult to convince mainstream media to run positive news stories about young people of migrant and refugee background.

### Strategies

- Get young people into media and journalism to break into mainstream media.
- Good news stories about positive events at schools, public spaces and public transport.
- A business case for diversity within mainstream media that would be beneficial financially through social enterprise.
- Responding to racism through ambassadors or heroes.
- Lobbying government to have a campaign against racism.
- Establishing schools as safe places.

### Recommendations to the media industry

- Investment in young people as public representatives through community media training programs.
- Cultural awareness training for media professionals to shift personal awareness.

## Next steps

CMY is committed to continuing this important anti-racism work and will implement the following actions:

### **1. Briefing paper**

Drawing on the findings from this Statewide Forum and the Youth Forum of December 2012, CMY will brief the Victorian Minister for Youth Affairs, The Hon. Ryan Smith MP, on young people's experiences of racism in Victoria including recommendations regarding strategies to address this. This paper will be delivered to the Minister by the end of the 2013 financial year.

### **2. Training module**

CMY is developing a training module that will allow participants to reflect on individual and structural effects of race-based discrimination on young people and develop understanding of strategies to take action to address racism.