

National Anti-Racism Secretariat
Race Discrimination Team
Australian Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001
antiracismsecretariat@humanrights.gov.au

Wednesday 9 May 2012

Dear National Anti-Racism Secretariat,

Re MYAN NSW Submission to the National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW welcomes this opportunity to make submission to National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia.

About this submission

This submission refers to the National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia Discussion Paper and the three objectives it identifies, as well as the 12 questions it poses in reference to these objectives. In preparing this submission the MYAN NSW has consulted with MYAN NSW members via its Google egroup as well as with multicultural young people who are part of the MYAN NSW Multicultural Youth Rep Program.

This submission also focuses on the available evidence-base and recommends that the National Anti-Racism Secretariat refer to research and best practice examples of ways that racism and discrimination can be prevented and reduced.

About the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) NSW

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW is a network of services committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for multicultural young people in NSW. The MYAN NSW works to develop appropriate policies, strategies and resources that address multicultural youth issues at the local, regional and state-wide levels. It does this through consultation with youth and family services, the multicultural sector, state and local government, and multicultural young people.

Multicultural young people in NSW

The MYAN NSW use the term multicultural young people to refer to those aged 12-25 who are newly arrived, those from refugee backgrounds and Australian born young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

In Australia

- 2.7 million young people in Australia are aged 15-24¹.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 200 languages are spoken at home.
- Between 2005-2010, 31% (24,679) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24².

In NSW

- 871,712 young people in NSW are aged 15-24, 13.3% of population³.
- 12% were born in a non-English speaking country and over 80 languages are spoken at home⁴.
- Between 2005-2010, 30% (7,310) of all Humanitarian arrivals were young people aged 12-24⁵.

In 2009-10, 23,993 people aged 12-24 migrated to Australia of these 6,604 or 28% arrived to NSW. Of these young people 1,071 arrived as part of the Humanitarian Program, 4,143 came as part of family migration and 1,390 came as part of skilled migration⁶.

Talking about and defining racism and discrimination

The MYAN NSW believes that a public conversation about what is racism and discrimination needs to take place. Moreover, there needs to be opportunities to have open and honest discussions about how to talk about difference, and when identifying and talking about differences between race and ethnicity is and is not racism. The MYAN NSW identified that the phrase “I am not racist but...” often begins conversations about perceived differences between races and that Australians need more opportunities to explore both their differences and similarities in safe spaces. Moreover, the MYAN NSW believes that we not only need to have the space to explore differences but also safe spaces to acknowledge racist attitudes and beliefs and work through them as part of a larger national process and discourse on reducing and preventing racism and discrimination.

For example, as stated in Mansouri, Jenkins, Moragn and Toaouk (2009),

In an Australian study completed in 2000, students expressed socially progressive and liberal views about race, religion and diversity and a personal disapproval of racism. (McLeod & Yates, 2000:8). However, the study found that students expressed (unwittingly) racist attitudes when discussing the issue of racism at greater length’ (2000:5). In one case, a student was adamant that he was against racism, but in relation to Indigenous Australians and Pauline Hanson’s approach said it may be a small minority that she thinks about ... but most of them are fine’. The study argued that he patronises Indigenous people by describing them as a well-behaved group, a clearly defined —them|| to whom —we|| show fairness and understanding’ (McLeod & Yates, 2000:5)⁷.

This example demonstrates what commonly occurs in discussions about difference and racism, not only between children and young people as discussed in the study cited above, but among the adult population as well. Such an example points to the need for creative ways to have further discussions about what racism looks and feels like and how we can talk about difference without being racist.

In addition, the MYAN NSW recommends that definitions other than just the legal definition of racism and discrimination as part of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 need to be provided in forms, which encourage Australians to engage with these terms and have a clear understanding of what they mean as part of everyday life. In other words the concepts of racism and discrimination need to be user-friendly and applicable to everyday practical lived experience and any racism and discrimination strategy or campaign needs to consider this as part of its broader development.

Objective 1: Create awareness of racism and how it affects individuals and the broader community

1. What can we learn from how Australia has dealt with racism in the past? What achievements should we build on? What mistakes should we learn from?

When discussed the MYAN NSW believed that the appointment of the Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2011 was very positive and would like to see this role be a permanent one. In addition, the MYAN NSW recognized the importance of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 in providing a legal statement regarding Australia’s approach to

racism. The MYAN NSW believes that this existing legislation can be built on when and if appropriate and should define the public discussion on racism and discrimination.

Mistakes that could be learnt from include the current treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in the media and by Australia politicians, which has led to racist discourses being perpetuated at a national level, which has consequences for how Australians perceive asylum seekers and refugees. It also leads to the dominant discourse on asylum seekers and refugees being extremely negative and derogatory and publicly calls into question Australia as a humane and civil society where people can genuinely seek asylum and where multiculturalism is truly celebrated and accepted.

Achievements that could be built on include how racism and discrimination has been dealt with nationally through sports like AFL, which have made public statements about how it will not tolerate racist slurs etc. These types of public events could be built on through a national anti-racism campaign where high profile sports personalities make a commitment to a zero tolerance to racism and discrimination in their sports clubs for example.

2. What information would be useful to include in a campaign to prevent and reduce racism?

The MYAN NSW believes that racism starts with the individual and the family as well as the community and broader society.

The MYAN NSW suggests that an early intervention approach to racism and discrimination in Australia would be most beneficial and that children and young people need to be targeted at an early age and that this should be implemented through changes in the school curriculum nationally. Therefore, any campaign to prevent and reduce racism should specifically target children and young people.

Through our discussions the MYAN NSW believed that racism and discrimination needs to be personalised and that a campaign should provide information about the impacts of racism on the individual, the family, the community and the broader society. That is, a campaign should look at what racism and discrimination costs Australia and Australians. For example as stated in Mansouri, F. et al. (2009) the impacts of racism include:

In general terms, research has found that racism has a negative impact upon the settlement and transition of migrants, affecting self-esteem, self-confidence, and belonging to the broader community (Francis & Cornfoot, 2007; Mansouri & Percival Wood, 2008). Racism threatens personal and cultural identity and is often linked to psychological distress – specifically anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and anger. This research also warned that marginalisation can result in withdrawal from active participation in mainstream life and can lead to anti-social attitudes and behaviour⁸.

However, any campaign also needs to encourage positive responses to racial and ethnic difference by continuing to explore what living in a multicultural society means and how it benefits people.

The MYAN NSW also believes that for racism and discrimination in Australia to be prevented and reduced that it will take long-term cultural change, which must be supported at every level of government – national, state and territory and local. Therefore, any national Anti-racism campaign needs to be funded and embedded in these government structures.

3. How could we better acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

The MYAN NSW believes that the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities need to continue to be acknowledged through awards and recognition of their contribution to Australia at every level – local, state and territory and national. Moreover, there needs to be ambassadors or champions who represent these contributions and achievements around Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also need to continue to be recognized as the first Australians in government literature and dominant discourses about Australian history.

Objective 2: Identify, promote and build on good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism

4. What are the priority areas in which we should be addressing racism (for example: employment, education, sport, the media, cyber-racism?)

The MYAN NSW believes that the National Anti-Racism Secretariat prioritises employment, education, media and cyber-racism as ways to address racism.

Employment

Multicultural young people continually cite racism as a barrier to employment. Employers need to be encouraged to view people from CALD and ATSI backgrounds as equal to those from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds when it comes to employment.

Education

The MYAN NSW believes that education is one of the key ways in which racism can be prevented and reduced. The MYAN NSW recommends that the National Anti-Racism Secretariat refer to the work done by the Foundation for Young Australians and Mansouri, which provides a model for how racism education can be implemented through the curriculum. For more information see *Building Bridges: Creating Cultures of Diversity* (2009) Professor Fethi Mansouri, Dr Louise Jenkins, Dr Michael Leach and Dr Lucas Walsh <http://www.fya.org.au/research/research-publications/>.

The MYAN NSW believes that more measures need to be taken to establish, through education, common ground between people from different races and ethnicities.

For example, the NSW Department of Education and Communities has an ARCO (Anti Racism Contact Officer who is a teacher) at every school. In Western Sydney there are two leadership groups –one in the primary and secondary, which involves a number of schools doing workshops on preventing and reducing racism, cultural diversity. Initiatives such as this could easily be replicated in schools across Australia.

Media

The Australian media also need to be encouraged to take responsibility for perpetuating racist attitudes and discourses. For example, at the 2011 Refugee Conference Youth Forum young people reported experiences of racism and the negative media representation of refugees as a concern. Some participants had had very personal experiences of racism, where other's considered it to be a dominant attitude towards those who are different in Australia. As one young person stated:

“Refugees in the media are portrayed that we are low, unworthy, you feel shame. A group of friends and you're ashamed to speak about my refugee background. We all judge people

straight away, but no one knows your story. People just judge me on what they think and what they see.”⁹

Cyber-racism

Cyber-racism is rampant and given the nature of the Internet is hard to control, however, when measures can be taken they should be enforced. For example, the moderation of online discussion or “chat” rooms where often racist statements are posted and are allowed to remain online for weeks or months could be better regulated. Given that these websites and chat rooms are moderated, media outlets need to be encouraged to not provide a space where racist attitudes can be posted. Implementing recommended national guidelines for content moderation could be a good place to start.

Moreover, the Australian Government should support and fund research into how the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 can be applied to online content.

5. What measures should governments at all levels take to address racism?

The MYAN NSW recommends that the National Anti-Racism Strategy is applied at the local and state and territory levels as well as through the federal government. Moreover, all governments should fund and support programs and initiatives that bring people together in spite of their differences and that there needs to be education in every community that works to prevent racially motivated violence.

6. What role can business, the arts, sporting organisations, community groups, service organisations and the media play in addressing racism?

The MYAN NSW recommends that the National Anti-Racism Strategy encourage all organisations with a public face to set an example when it comes to reducing and preventing racism and discrimination.

7. How can we involve young people in addressing racism?

The MYAN NSW believes that all young people in Australia can be engaged in preventing and reducing racism. Young Australians care and are deeply affected by racism, whether they are victims or witnesses to racist acts and discrimination. Young people need to be supported and encouraged to be champions of anti-racism in Australia. Young people can be engaged through education as part of the curriculum; however, young people themselves can be educators for their peers and their communities. For example, an Anti-Racism toolkit could be designed for young people to take a leadership role in their communities, to further dialogue to prevent and reduce racism. Young people need to be supported and empowered to take leadership and implement change.

8. Can you give examples of strategies that you have seen used or been part of that have been successful in preventing or reducing racism? Why were they effective?

The MYAN NSW believes that creative, innovative and engaging strategies need to be used to prevent and reduce racism.

An example of a project that focused on Intergenerational Family Conflict and that could easily be expanded to talk about racism was the Powerhouse Youth Theatre project 'See it my way'. The project was an interactive Forum Theatre Performance about family conflict and communication devised by students and families from Fairfield High School in consultation with local community elders and in partnership with Fairfield City Council. This project resulted in the development of a

Resource Kit for Intergenerational Family Conflict issues for use within conferences, forums, workshops and community programs.

This resource kit was designed to be used in a number of ways in a range of community or educational contexts to provoke and generate discussion and exploration of the many issues surrounding intergenerational conflicts. This includes working with community groups of any ages, large or small, facilitating a Forum or Convention exploring intergenerational issues or even teaching high school students in HSIE or Welfare lessons.

The MYAN NSW believes that projects such as 'See it my way' which are practical and engage a range of people could be used to work through and talk about issues of racism and discrimination.

9. What tools or resources do we have at the community level, which could be better utilised in the fight against racism?

The MYAN NSW believe that multicultural peaks such as the Ethnic Communities Council and ethnic youth and community organisations as well as schools have a large role to play in the fight against racism.

10. How could these experiences be shared to help promote good practice? (For example: a best practice website, clearing house, seeding funding for pilot programs, changing criteria for Government grants programs?)

The MYAN NSW believes that a best practice website or clearing house could provide information about what works. In addition, best practice needs to be supported through additional funding community based projects. Ensuring that Government grants programs guidelines reflect the Anti-Racism Strategy will also be important.

Objective 3: Empower communities and individuals to take action to prevent and reduce racism and seek redress when it occurs

11. What strategies or approaches can be used to help individuals and communities who experience racism to speak up or take action? If you have experienced racism, what would have helped you to speak up or take action?

The MYAN NSW believes that newly arrived communities need to be educated about their rights and that racism and discrimination is not tolerated in Australia. Newly arrived communities also need to be encouraged to take action such as making a report to the Police, Human Rights Commission or even to their local Minister of Parliament about their experiences of racism upon arrival in Australia.

12. What strategies or approaches can be used to help bystanders address racism where and when it occurs?

The MYAN NSW acknowledges that addressing racism when and where it occurs is often challenging, particularly when it takes the form of aggressive or violent behaviour, and there are some instances when it may not be possible to intervene due to the risk of physical harm.

In instances when it is safe to intervene people who are bystanders need to feel empowered and have clear ideas of what to do in these instances. The MYAN NSW believes that the National Anti-Racism Secretariat as part of a strategy could develop a process or approach to help bystanders address racism when it occurs. Some of the young people who the MYAN NSW consulted with

believed that confrontation of the perpetrator was the best way to address racism on the spot. However, how to do this skilfully and effectively was not specified.

One MYAN NSW member reported a recent incident when a child had referred to one of their clients as “the brown guy”, in this instance, this member had suggested that the child ask the client their name so that he could then refer to him by it. Examples such as this demonstrate simple and positive ways that racism can be addressed, however, people need to be supported to know how to do this.

Conclusion

The MYAN NSW thanks the National Anti-Racism Secretariat Race Discrimination Team for the opportunity to make a submission to the National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia. The MYAN NSW believes that a National Anti-Racism Strategy is a positive step in reducing and preventing racism and discrimination in Australia and looks forward to assisting with the implementation of the strategy across Australia once it is released later in 2012.

For further information please contact:

Anne-Marie Taylor
MYAN NSW State Coordinator
Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) NSW
Suite 402, 64-76 Kippax Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Phone: 02 9281 5522 ext 6
Email: myan@yapa.org.au

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

² Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed

² Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.

⁵ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2011

⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010. Settlement Reporting Database, <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/> accessed 30/7/2010

⁷ Mansouri, F. Jenkins, L. Morgan, L. & Taouk, M. (2009) *The Impact of Racism Upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, accessed from http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf

⁸ Mansouri, F. Jenkins, L. Morgan, L. & Taouk, M. (2009) *The Impact of Racism Upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, accessed from http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf

⁹ Centre for Refugee Research (2011) *Celebrating the voices of young people from refugee backgrounds* Report on the 2011 Refugee Conference Youth Forum and the Australian Youth Forum (AYF) Discussion Topic, Sydney.