



youth affairs network qld

PARTNERS AGAINST RACISM

DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ANTI- RACISM STRATEGY FOR QUEENSLAND

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WHO ARE PARTNERS AGAINST RACISM

Partners Against Racism (PAR) is a coalition of concerned individuals and organisations from around Queensland who are seeking to develop a statewide anti-racism strategy. PAR is coordinated by the NESB Policy and Network Officer at the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANO). YANO is the peak youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Other partner organisations include the Indigenous Youth Health Service, Inala Youth And Community Combined Action (YACCA), Inala Youth Service, Brisbane City Council's Community Development Team and Indigenous Unit, Centacare, Nambour YACCA, Cherbourg YACCA, Townsville Migrant Resource Centre, Non-English Speaking Background Youth Issues Network (NESBYIN), Sisters Inside, Church Network For Youth Justice, Peace Centre, Australians For Reconciliation, Mt. Isa Youth Action Group, Aboriginal and Islander Child YACCA Program, Gold Coast Youth Service, Hervey Bay Multicultural Worker, Gympie Migrant Information Network, and Kangaroo Point TAFE's Indigenous People's Unit.

PAR's HISTORY

PAR originated from the 5th State Youth Affairs Conference coordinated by YANO that was held in Townsville during November 1998. Delegates at the Conference witnessed and experienced overt racist incidences involving the police and a local nightclub. Shocked and dismayed, Conference Delegates decided to harness the energy evoked by suggesting we all work together to develop strategies to combat racism in Queensland. Hence, PAR was born. Our dream is a racist free Queensland...we hope you have a desire to share our dream...

PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION PAPER?

PAR is in the process of developing a statewide anti-racism strategy. This discussion paper will act as a consultative mechanism to ensure that a broad base of individuals and/or organisations across Queensland have the opportunity to input into the development of PAR's statewide anti-racism strategy. The discussion paper will explain the structure of the group, offer a working definition of racism, forward a discussion on racism in Queensland and its social/individual impacts on young people, a section on personal experiences/insights into racism, and recommendations on ways to input into the development of the statewide anti-racism strategy.

STRUCTURE OF PAR

Members of PAR have been involved in establishing the group and its structure since its inception. Structural aspects of PAR include the establishment of three sub-groups that support the broader group and its aims and mission.

PAR's mission statement is:

PAR is a group of concerned individuals and organisations from around the state who are dedicated to creating a fair and just society for all people in Queensland regardless of cultural background

PAR's aims are:

1. *Develop a statewide anti-racism strategy.*
2. *Develop and implement the strategy in collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders.*
3. *Initiate public education processes in relation to racism (public education may also be included in the strategy).*

The structure of PAR is:

1. *Members of PAR located in Southeast Queensland will meet regularly to support the work of three sub-groups. Members outside of Southeast Queensland will link via teleconference.*
2. *The first sub-group is comprised of those organisations/individuals concerned with the development of the statewide anti-racism strategy.*
3. *The second sub-group is concerned with the development of public education processes.*
4. *The third sub-group is comprised of regional contact people who will input into the development and implementation of the statewide anti-racism strategy. The regional contact people are responsible for liaising with their local/regional communities and engaging them in PAR's processes and activities.*

WHAT IS RACISM?

Racism is an abstract concept. Racism is a theory about certain types of individual or collective attitudes and/or behaviours toward a person or group who have characteristics or cultural norms, values and beliefs that differ from the perpetrators. Because racism is abstract and may mean different things to different people or groups, any definition is open to debate and interpretation (Youth Affairs Network of Queensland 1993). Debate about “*what racism can mean and where it originates from*” is also exacerbated because the term can evoke very strong feelings and emotions for people. Nevertheless, it is important that PAR suggest a balanced definition of the term racism so that readers are able to understand the basis upon which statements, critiques, and recommendations are made. Chambers and Pettman (1986 pp: 3-7) suggest a balanced four-dimensional approach to racism that will provide this discussion paper with a foundation to build from. This four dimensional approach is:

1. *Racial Prejudice* ~ the process of pre-judging others without sufficient information. It suggests both an unfounded or unreasonable judgement...racial prejudice refers to negative attitudes towards those classified on the basis of physical or cultural characteristics.
2. *Racial Discrimination* ~ usually refers to behaviour which disadvantages people identified on the basis of their (real or supposed) membership of a racial or ethnic group.
3. *Racist Ideology* ~ racism as an ideology expresses social myths about racial or ethnic groups. It devotes others, asserting and ‘explaining’ their inferiority or disadvantage in ways that blame the victim.
4. *Institutional Racism* ~ refers to a pattern of distribution of social goods, including power, which regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and racial groups and disadvantages others.

Because racism takes many forms, it can be viewed as both overt and covert. Overt racism can manifest in obvious behaviours such as direct name-calling and physical violence based on race. In its more covert forms, racism can manifest in subtle and insidious ways. Covert forms of racism can include policies that subtly exclude some groups outside the dominant culture, the unequal distribution of goods and services in a systemic way that can exclude some groups outside the dominant culture, and divisive and underhanded exclusion by some individuals or groups outside the dominant culture (YANQ: YouthSpeak 98 Pre-Election Kit).

The origins of racism and racist behaviour are just as contentious and debatable as definitions of racism. The debate can even be taken back to theories of human nature. For instance, are human beings predisposed to be innately prejudiced? Are human beings predisposed to believe they are superior to other groups in society based on race and background? If the answer to these questions and more of a similar nature is yes, then it could be assumed that racism is an intrinsic part of human nature. Alternatively, if the answer to these questions is *no* then we need to explore and uncover other reasons, rationale and theories that may explain the emergence of racism and racist behaviour and attitudes (see Berliner & Hull 1997, *Australian Psychological Society 1995-1997*).

These questions are important in the context of this discussion paper and the development of a statewide anti-racism strategy. Clearly, a discussion paper that purported to the view that human beings are intrinsically racist may well be quite different than one which forwarded the view that our environment creates and sustains racism and racist attitudes. Also clear is the fact that you, the reader and potential contributor to the statewide anti-racism strategy, will be influenced in your views by bits of both theories and possibly others, or one or the other. It is for you to decide

and ponder on, just like many of our predecessors across the centuries have! However, for the purpose of this discussion paper, PAR, is of the view that:

Human beings have the innate potential to be good, kind and sharing, and that it is our environment that influences and informs our behaviour. Equally, human beings have the potential to be racist, and that it is our environment that influences, informs and perpetuates racist attitudes and behaviours

RACISM IN QUEENSLAND & ITS IMPACTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Historical Perspective:

Racism probably did not exist in Australia prior to the European invasion that occurred in 1770. British imperialists dispossessed indigenous people of their land and asserted its sovereignty without ever seeking consent to do so from the traditional owners. While dispossession occurred over 200 years ago, our indigenous population is still feeling its effects today. The very real threat of the extinction of indigenous people from Australia and Queensland, assimilation policies (institutional racism) and the policy of removing indigenous children from their parents are forms of racism introduced by British imperialism. The effects on the indigenous population have been and remain nothing short of devastating and act as a painful reminder of Australia and Queensland's history (*Compact '98*).

Some of the cumulative effects of the European invasion of Australia include social statistics such as the following:

- Out of 308 discrete indigenous communities in Australia, 306 have water unfit for human consumption. Most of the problems associated with water supply and consumption occur in Queensland and the Northern Territory (*National Housing & Community Infrastructure Needs Survey 1992, cited in Compact '98*).
- Indigenous young people in Queensland are 41.1% times more likely to be incarcerated than the rest of the community (*Michael Dodson 1996, cited in Compact '98*).
- There is a startling 38 to 40% unemployment rate across all age groups within the indigenous population. Some discrete communities suffer a 100% unemployment rate (*Compact '98*).
- The indigenous population suffers the poorest health conditions than any other group in Australia (*Compact '98*).

Reconciliation is a response to Australia's brutal and oppressive colonisation process. Reconciliation is about acknowledging Australia's history in a truthful and meaningful way. Part of the way forward is for all of us to learn from our history and to make certain past events are not repeated. Reconciliation enables us to reach this goal through building better relations with indigenous people based on respect and understanding.

Racism Today:

Racism in Queensland toward the indigenous population still exists today at an institutional/structural level and an individual one. However, the emergence of Queensland as a multicultural society through the settlement of people from a range of countries throughout the world has meant that racism at an individual and structural level is also directed at many others outside the indigenous population. Hence, people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are often the victims of all forms of racism. Seto (1991, pp: 85) argues "I consider racism by Anglo-Australians against NESB young people to be the biggest barrier to their successful social integration and personal growth."

Indeed, in an exploratory action research project involving 600 young people from Brisbane's southern suburbs that sought information on their needs and issues, found that racism emerged as a prevalent and pervasive form of oppression (*Gilmore, Peile with Ferguson 1993*). Racism in a contemporary context, seems to be extremely prevalent in the school environment (*Gatbonton 1992*) and is widely acknowledged as an extreme barrier to young people from NESB trying to enter the workforce (*Youth Affairs Network of Queensland 1993*).

Rice (1996 cited in Tu'ipulou & Ferguson 1997, pp: 15) claims that for high school students from other cultures, racism impacts on their lives to a very high degree. Rice goes on to suggest that “*Racism is a fact of day to day life for young people from language backgrounds other than English, because it is widespread in our community both in its overt forms and institutional forms.*”

There is no doubt that racism affects young people in different ways, but nevertheless, it is painful for the people and groups who are subjected to it (Youthspeak 98). Racism can effect young people in the following ways (Youthspeak 98):

- Racism can hurt emotionally and/or physically.
- Racism can make young people feel unsafe and insecure.
- Racism can make young people unsure about their cultural identity.
- Racism can isolate young people.
- Racism can make young people feel they are to blame for negative situations because the ‘finger is always pointed at them’.
- Racism can severely effect the self-confidence and self-esteem of young people.
- Racist experiences can contribute to the negative way a young person may view their community, and therefore result in situations that can cost the whole community.

Undoubtedly racism can affect all people irrespective of age. Older people can also act as a source of great wisdom and knowledge. This suggests that there may well be many older people in our communities that we can gather key learning’s from regarding the issue of racism given their previous experiences and backgrounds. Racism can also permeate many other areas. The following are just some:

- Workplaces.
- Employment processes.
- Education systems.
- Media.
- Government and community services.
- Private businesses of all types.
- Sport.

This list could go on forever! The point is of course is that nothing and nobody can escape racism. We have a social and moral responsibility to stop racism, especially as it relates to young people given their status as the future generations of Australia who will carry the legacies we lay down now forward into the new millennium. We need to be sure that we involve all people in this process so it is a collective legacy we leave behind us born from collective wisdom’s spanning many generations.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES/INSIGHTS INTO RACISM

The following dialogue reflects the experiences of 5 young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Their brief stories and comments have not been edited.

I don't have what they have in Australia, like the language. People just walk away from me when I speak...it's embarrassing, kind of rejecting.

They are treating me differently because I have an accent and black skin. It's a problem we all know about, but nobody wants to talk about it, nobody wants to admit they are racist. It scares me.

When I came to Australia racism was the first word I learnt. Government does not understand racism and what to do about it.

There is hate here. Aboriginal people have been hurt because of racism, look what happened to these people. It's like the racist's are always watching, starting, having a killing look in their eyes, more than I ever seen in the war in Bosnia. It shocks me. How do you stop people from hating?

They said I am from a lower class, they insulted me, saying I cannot speak English. They didn't look that different from me. It doesn't make any sense to me. Pauline Hanson's rise to power reflects people's attitudes here. It's very strange! All humans are the same, does it really matter?

Amy is a Thursday Islander in her mid 40's and has lived in Brisbane since approximately 1972. Sharon is her 22-year-old daughter and has lived in Brisbane all her life. I approached Amy and Sharon and asked if they would be willing to share their experiences of racism. Both were more than willing.

Amy explained that when she first moved to Brisbane with her husband that they moved house about 4 times due to racial abuse from neighbours, i.e. Rubbish continually thrown into her yard, complaints about noise etc. They finally settled in Inala and have lived there ever since. In conversation with Amy it was obvious that she has been experiencing racist behaviour all of her life, as have her children. Amy decided to tell a recent story:

"One day I was in [a second hand goods store] at 9am in the morning. I was taking the stereo up. I waited from 9am because they open at 9 o'clock. Then all the people came in, I was first, but the man served them straightaway. I was standing for 2-3 hours. I finally said hey I was here first, they came here after me, I was first and you are serving them. I said to that man that it was because I am black. That man then said sorry and served me".

Amy told this story to highlight the fact that racist behaviour still occurs today and went on to make comment that the whole episode made her feel embarrassed and quite distressed. Amy finished her story with the comment "Its amazing how having dark skin makes you invisible to some people".

Sharon commented "Even the type of service you get in a shop, you see them serving someone very politely, you know, and then you get served and they chuck it at you and say, here. Its just like you are nothing, you know, and it hurts".

Sharon recounted an incident that occurred in the Queen Street Mall last year. “We had been to the Miss Indigenous Ball, as my sister was a contestant, and were walking through the Mall to go and get a taxi. There was my brother, my sister, myself and 2 male friends. We had a really good night and were happy and were carrying a Torres Strait Island flag. So we were walking down the Mall and there was all these people standing outside Hungry Jacks and they started making comments to my sister, you know, talking rudely to her and she turned around and said to them that just because she was dressed like that (ball-gown) they had no right to be rude to her and to leave us alone as we just wanted to go home. My sister’s boyfriend agreed but they kept on calling my sister names. I wont repeat them, and it was pretty insulting and the boys got upset, you know, and push came to shove and it was getting scary.

Now this was happening right outside the police shop there in the Mall and the cops came over and grabbed all of us. They pulled one of the guys up who had been calling out and asked him what happened, you know, and he got to tell his side of the story but they didn’t give us a chance. I said to the cops, look we don’t want any trouble, we just want to go home, we have had a good night and just want to get a taxi. The cops were getting real tough with us, shoving us around and threatening to arrest us if we said one more word. We ended up being escorted down to the taxi rank. As we were walking down to the taxi rank we were waving our flag, you know, and one of the cops said “yech Pauline Hanson yech” and we were shocked, we didn’t think that the cops would say that. It was really insulting.

When asked if they had complained about the behaviour of the police, Sharon said, “ what’s the use, this stuff happens all the time” .

Tracey is a non-indigenous woman. Her husband is an indigenous man and they have three beautiful children. Tracy has shared the following experiences with us to highlight the effects of racism on her family.

Story One

We arrived approximately 8.00 am in the Isa on the Saturday morning. We booked into our motel room. I was going to pay for the room up front but the person (husband) on the counter said not to bother pay later if you like and with that he gave me our keys to the room.

My husband took our children to their sports while I stayed in the room and had a sleep. When he arrived back at the room I asked him to go to the reception area to ask if they had an ironing room or iron that we could use

The woman (owner) who was on the phone at the time looked up and asked my husband if he was right and he told her what he was after and she told him that it was at the side of the building. Then....

As my husband was about to leave the woman said to him “can you pay something on your bill” while she was still on the phone. My husband told her that he would send me up to take care of it. When my husband told me what was said to him I was furious as this was the first time in all our lives that we had been asked to pay up front.

I went and paid my bill and while the woman was writing out my receipt I asked her if it was customary for everyone to pay their bills up front or was it just because we are a BLACK family.

The woman's reply was that people have a tendency to skip through without paying their account. I then told her that is why customers fill out registration forms with all their details and if such an event does occur well you inform the police.

I told her that whenever we have stayed in Mt Isa we have always stayed at this motel because the previous owners always made you feel welcome but in future we will be staying elsewhere. Further more if people ask me... Where is a good motel to stay I will not be recommending this one until there is a change of ownership again.

I understand that she is trying to run a business but at the same time I strongly feel that she was acting in a racist manner because she saw my husband and you certainly don't carry out your day to day business with customers while you are on the phone.

Story Two

The following is an extract from a letter sent by Tracey in response to treatment received by her family. The letter of complaint tells the story..

Dear Sir

I wish to make an official complaint about the treatment, which was metered out, to husband infant daughter and myself during a visit to Hospital A.

The facts of the matter are as follows:

We have a daughter who is 4 ½ months old. We had her to Doctor X here in town on a couple of occasions and she was diagnosed as having recurring urinary tract infection. The doctor found this quite unusual for someone so young and he was a little concerned. He recommended that she have an MCU carried out and arranged an appointment for us out of town.

We arrived at the hospital and were first attended to by two nurses. They attempted to insert the catheter into our daughter. Our daughter was clearly distressed at this procedure and would let out a sharp little cry now and then. At this point, a male person arrived, and I assumed that he was the Doctor, as he did not introduce himself or ask any questions. He just put on a pair of gloves and proceeded to examine our daughter and then attempted to insert the catheter.

As my child was distressed, I was leaning over the top of her feeding her to calm her down. The male person, whom I later found out to be Dr W also had difficulty in inserting the catheter. My daughter was clearly hurting as she pulled away and started to cry really loud. I then stood up and my husband went to her side to try and calm her down. I moved to the end of the table so as not to be in the way.

Dr. W. then put up his elbow and pushed my husband in the chest out of the way. Dr W then bent down and dragged the baby off the pillow onto the hard X-ray table. As the pillow was some 3 to 4 inches in thickness, this was quite a drop for a baby. She then became even more upset.

My husband then turned to Dr W and said ‘Excuse me Doctor’ but before he could finish what he was going to say, the doctor turned towards us and put both hands on his hips and looked over his glasses and said “ I don’t think we need you two in here, We will get a couple more nurses down here to help us”

My husband walked out of the room and I followed. We stood just outside the door of the room. When we left the room my husband said that he was going to the X-ray reception to ask about our rights of being put out of the room. Reception apparently told him that it would be better for the baby and us if we stayed outside.

My husband then came back to me and by this time I was upset and crying. He asked me why I was crying and I said that I was upset because the baby had been screaming for the last 3 to 5 minutes after being pulled off the pillow and that I wanted to be in there with her.

I guess that the poor little thing had been frightened by the doctor’s aggressiveness and as I had never heard her cry like that before I was concerned about the doctors treatment of her. The doctor certainly displayed his arrogance and was most unfriendly. In all, his conduct was most unprofessional.

We entered the room again and stood at the head of the table away from the Doctor and nurses. We did not try to interfere in anyway whatsoever, but watched the proceedings.

Dr W then turned around from my daughter and looked over his glasses and then put both hands on his hips and yelled “Look you people, I thought I told you to get out of here.”

By this time I felt that I had taken enough of his rudeness and arrogance and I yelled back at Him, “That is my baby there screaming and I have every right to be in here with her.’

The Doctor then yelled at me, he said “You can take your baby and go to another doctor.”

The nurses were trying to comfort my husband and me and were most helpful and very pleasant during our whole time at the hospital.

Dr W then left the room and returned with our baby’s file. He then started to pat my husband on the back and said don’t worry he wasn’t going to continue to do the test and that he was getting a Pediatrician down to look at the baby because she had a skin fold over her vulva and that he was a bit concerned. That is why he had trouble getting the catheter in.

When the Pediatrician tried the same procedure the baby let out a bit of a cry but it was nothing like it was with Dr W.

As the Pediatrician was also unsuccessful, he decided to stop as he felt that the baby, my husband and I had had enough stress for one day.

When we returned home and our baby was examined by our local doctor, Doctor X. He noticed minor abrasions from the treatment, which she had received.

Tracey's response in hindsight... I think this doctor thought we were just a pair of dumb black parents anyway and that he could dish this sort of treatment out and we would sit back and accept this. I believe that Dr W had a duty to introduce himself and to explain what the procedure was about. Further if he had taken the time to ask questions in the first place all of this could have been avoided.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON WAYS YOU CAN INPUT INTO THE STRATEGY

The following list of ideas and suggestions on ways you or your organisation can input into the development of the statewide anti-racism strategy is by no means exhaustive, and acts only as a guide.

1. Inform your local/regional/statewide networks/interagencies on the development of the statewide anti-racism strategy and engage them in dialogue on what they think needs to be included.
2. Open up dialogue with your local/regional indigenous population and/or NESB population to see what they think needs to be included.
3. Explore any research completed in your local/regional area on racism. This may provide some very useful pointers and general information.
4. Try to develop an understanding and perspective on whether your local/regional needs differ from other areas around the issue of racism.
5. Try to locate any local/regional initiatives/processes developed as a response to racism and pass the information on to PAR.

You can pass your information, ideas, submissions, and /or recommendations onto PAR through the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland by contacting John Bamborough (*NESB Policy & Network Officer*) or Carolyn Grant (*Policy & Network Officer*) through the following mediums:

- Telephone: (07) 3236 5400, 1800 177 899, or 0417 637 042.
- Fax: (07) 3236 5411
- Email: johnbam@thehub.com.au or cgrant@thehub.com.au
- Post: PO Box 70, Brisbane Roma Street Qld 4003
- Closing date for input is **September 17th 1999**.

Please Note: Refer to Compact '98 for a description of key tasks that organisations can undertake to support the process of reconciliation.

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