

No Place for Racism

A discussion paper written to encourage open debate on the issue of racial discrimination faced by young people from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in the housing sector.

This discussion paper will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups in the public, private and community sectors to engage in further dialogue at YANQ's ERACISM! Forum to be held on Friday 20 October 2006.

youth affairs network qld

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No Place for Racism

*A discussion paper by the
Youth Affairs Network QLD*

The Youth Affairs Network QLD (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing approximately 350 members, we promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community.

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How to use this Discussion Paper

This discussion paper has been prepared by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) to bring to the attention of community organisations, housing providers, government agencies and the private housing sector the issue of racism and its impacts on lives of young people and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Whilst it is not within the scope of this discussion paper to specifically identify the housing needs of Indigenous young people, the issues raised in this paper also affect both CALD and Indigenous young people in Queensland.

The discussion paper is intended to create debate and discussion in communities across Queensland in the lead up to YANQ's Erase Racism (ERACISM!) Forum on *Friday October 20 in Toowoomba*.

The Forum is a community-based initiative which will focus on:

1. **discussion** - through panels and discussion circles;
2. **expression** - through art and drama showcases by young people;
3. **collaboration** - through sharing of ideas and developing joint opportunities; and
4. **action** – skilling the forum participants with relevant and useful resources to take collective action.

Young people, youth workers, housing providers, community advocates and organisations, government agencies, real estate agents, landlords and other interested individuals are encouraged to attend the ERACISM! Forum.

This discussion paper consists of the broad housing issues related to the Queensland context (section 2) and the specific housing needs of young people from CALD backgrounds (section 3), definition of racism (section 4) and how racism is linked to housing outcomes for CALD young people (section 5).

At the end of sections 3 and 5, there are questions to prompt further discussion and debate at community and organisational levels.

YANQ believes that to create social change, individuals have to be part of the change. This is an opportunity for all people to speak out against racism and bring the issue of racism to the public realm.

ERACISM! Forum 2006
Housing, Racism and Young People

FRIDAY OCTOBER 20, 2006
NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY WEEK

9.00 am – 12.00 pm
St Saviour's College (Boarding House Dining Area)
Neil Street, Toowoomba

The program includes panel discussions on racism, housing and Indigenous & CALD young people, a documentary screening, photographic displays and a live music performance!!

Come along to this **FREE** state-wide event to hear young people speak out against racism!

RSVP to YANQ on 07 3844 7713 or at admin@yanq.org.au.

Introduction

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and of their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control.”

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 25).

Having a roof over one’s head is a basic human right, just as having food to eat and water to drink is essential to one’s survival as a human being. But what if you are stripped away from your bare necessities because of your skin colour, sex, language, religion or affiliation to a political group?

Incidences of racism and discrimination pose a serious threat to the wellbeing of people, especially young people from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Their experiences of racism can significantly impact on their physical, psychological, educational, economic and social outcomes.

Young people generally have difficulties accessing and securing housing because of high rental, bond and establishment costs, low income and non-permanent nature of employment, and not having referees. However young people from migrant, refugee or Indigenous backgrounds face additional barriers in finding a home or place to live. They are especially limited with their housing options due to racism and discrimination, which can result in “young people being denied their preferences and being forced to accept unsatisfactory housing”.¹

Leaving home is not always a choice that young people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds want to make. Family breakdowns, neglect, domestic violence and abuse can force many young people to leave their homes without knowing where to go. Statistics and reports show that young people are overrepresented as users of the federally funded Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and many more young people remain ‘hidden’, sleeping on friends’ couches, sleeping rough on the streets and in public parks.²

In a society that recognises the universal human right for all people to adequate shelter, food, clothing, water, education, health and employment, there is no excuse for not providing safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible housing and there is definitely no excuse for denying young people of their right because of their race, colour, sex, language and religion.

So why should it be any different in Queensland?

Setting the Scene: Demand for Housing in Queensland

Approximately, 700 people per week or 100 people per day move to Queensland from other states and territories. Many people moving from interstate and from overseas settled in Queensland’s southeast corner, recording higher growth rates than both New South Wales and Victoria in the year to June 2004.³

With an unprecedented growth, housing prices have sky rocketed as demand outstripped supply. Many localities, particularly in southeast Queensland, have undergone a massive transformation – change in demographics, high building activity, new residential estates (in some cases, the

¹ Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia. 2006. *Refugee Youth Housing Policy*.

² Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations. 2006. “Demand for SAAP Accommodation by Homeless People 2003-04”, *AFHO News*. February/March 2006.

³ State Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. 2005. *Population Growth: Highlights and Trends – Summary of Report*.

development of gated communities) all because of a sudden wave of people searching for the 'sea change'.

At the same time, many people were being driven into housing stress, with a huge decline in the number of affordable housing, including caravan park accommodation and public housing available in Queensland. According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, the supply of low to moderate rental housing decreased between 1996 and 2001 although private rental stock increased by 7.6% during the same period.⁴

Similarly, the Queensland Department of Housing identified that there was a 47% increase in the number of people on the waiting list for public rental housing between 2000 and 2005. During the same period, there was a 56% decrease in the number of new households being assisted in public rental housing due to lower tenancy turnover rates and limited options for people to move into the private rental market.⁵ According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, even SAAP services were turning away 1 in every 2 people each day who requested immediate accommodation during 2003 and 2004.⁶ Moreover, there is an estimated 24,569 people in Queensland who are homeless and a large majority of homeless people were either living with friends or relatives, with very little people in SAAP assisted crisis accommodation.⁷

The housing market in Queensland is comprised of home ownership (62% of the market), private rental (26%) and social housing (4%). This equates to approximately 50,000 public housing tenancies and an estimated 90,000 people still waiting for public housing in Queensland, some waiting up to five years before they are placed in a home.⁸

In January 2006, the Queensland Government introduced the one social housing system, combining the process of entry into public, community and Indigenous housing programs. The new system allows a person seeking social housing to register their need only once, unlike the old system where a person would have registered with a number of different housing agencies. After registering, the person is assessed on their housing need, and priority is given to people with 'complex needs' – those who earn a low income and have other personal or social circumstances.

The focus of the new social housing system is to encourage people with complex needs to eventually find a pathway out of social housing – the exit point being the private housing market. There is a sense of uncertainty as to whether the private housing market will be the solution for solving the housing crisis in Queensland.

CALD Young People and Housing

It is important to understand the specific housing needs of CALD young people in order to fully understand how racism may diminish the individual's housing choices and impact on other aspects of the individual's life.

In Queensland, there has been a significant increase of African refugees settling in areas such as Brisbane (Moorooka, Fairfield, Zillmere), Logan, Gold Coast, Toowoomba and Cairns. According to the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), 21% of all people arriving to Queensland on the humanitarian program were aged between 14 and 25 years of age.

Similarly, Indigenous young people between 14 and 25 years make up 21% of the total Indigenous population in Queensland (this figure reaching almost 60% if people under the age of 14 are included), indicating a younger population compared to that of the non-Indigenous population.⁹ In 2001, 27% of

⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. 2005. *Supply and demand in the low rent private market*. Available at www.ahuri.edu.au

⁵ Queensland Department of Housing. 2005. *Paving the way: housing people in need in the Smart State*. Information paper, October 2005.

⁶ Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations. 2006. "Demand for SAAP Accommodation by Homeless People 2003-04", *AFHO News*. February/March 2006.

⁷ Queensland Youth Housing Coalition. 2006. *Young people and Housing: a Snapshot of Queensland*. Keynote address, 6 June 2006.

⁸ Queensland Public Tenants Association Inc. 2006. www.qpta.com.au

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001). *Indigenous Profile, Queensland*. www.abs.gov.au

all Indigenous people in Australia lived in Queensland, following closely behind New South Wales at 29%.¹⁰

Previous research and reports conducted on the housing needs of young people from CALD backgrounds have identified a number of factors that contribute to them living in unsuitable housing conditions or being at risk of homelessness.¹¹

The identified factors include:

- *Language Barriers and Access to Information*

Not being able to speak, comprehend and write English can limit CALD young people's participation in education, employment and community life. This can also lead to CALD young people from being socially isolated from their peers, families and social networks. Even for CALD young people born in Australia, they may not be proficient in the English language because English is not spoken at home, however they are often not eligible to access the English as a Second Language (ESL) programs offered in schools throughout Queensland.¹²

Lack of English language can also affect young people's ability to seek information on social and support services available to them. Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council's research on refugee young people in Australia showed that CALD young people were not aware of the mainstream and specialist services available to them or they did not understand how the services would be useful to them.¹³ Limited awareness and understanding of services may be related to language barriers and inaccessibility of information and referral services to CALD young people. Similarly, O'Connor, Gowing and McDonald's research on the accommodation and support needs of non-English speaking young people (1994) found that only two people out of 48 young people living out of home found their accommodation through assistance from a community, social or youth worker whilst the remaining 46 obtained assistance from friends.

Language barriers can also cause CALD young people to be displaced or evicted from their homes because they are not aware of their tenancy rights. Research undertaken by Tenants Union of Queensland in 1996 revealed that many people from CALD backgrounds, particularly refugees and newly arrived migrants, had little understanding of their rights and responsibilities as tenants. Being poorly informed about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant does affect CALD young people's ability to secure and maintain housing.

- *Intergenerational and Intercultural Conflict*

Conflict arises within families and households because of the different values and expectations being placed on young people. Many CALD young people are caught between cultures, where their parents may hold strong views about parental authority whilst the Australian society promotes individual freedom of young people. Recently, this has been the main cause of tension between African communities and Centrelink on the issue of young people wanting to leave home because of the financial assistance provided by Centrelink. In regards to young people's financial freedom, one respondent from Westoby's research on Sudanese refugees in Southeast Queensland commented:

"We (Sudanese community) also find that many of the young people can get money from Centrelink if they leave home rather than staying with the family – they leave. They see young Australians doing this, living freely, so they want to. But the problem is that our young people do not know how to manage their lives or manage the budget. So it does not work. The smart ones, they will come back to the family and apologise and make a new life with the family. But many do not do this."¹⁴

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005). *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. www.abs.gov.au

¹¹ See Wallace (1990), O'Connor, Gowing & McDonald (1994), Roebuck (1994) and Piazzetta (1996).

¹² See YANQ's research paper *Cultural Chasm: The changing cultural and linguistic demographic in Queensland schools and the need for reform*. January/September 2004. Available from www.yanq.org.au

¹³ Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (2002). *Strategy for Refugee Young People*.

¹⁴ Westoby, P. *Narratives of Distress*. University of Queensland and QPASTT, page 11.

It has been reported in past studies that intercultural and intergenerational conflicts may contribute to CALD young people being homeless because they leave or are thrown out of their family home. Particularly for young women from CALD backgrounds, they may leave their homes due to difficulties within families and their communities if they are found to be disrespecting family rules, entering into a relationship, becoming pregnant or not fulfilling their cultural roles.¹⁵

In YANQ's interviews with Sudanese young people in Toowoomba, a Sudanese refugee told a story about how he was kicked out from the supported accommodation where he was staying because he was caught drinking alcohol. The elders from his community were disappointed at his recurrent drinking habits. When asked about how he felt when he was kicked out, he replied:

"I found myself homeless and I was really really depressed."

Sudanese refugee, 20 years from Toowoomba.

He mentioned that when he became homeless, not only was his own community turning away from him but his sisters, who are his only closest family members in Australia, were totally dismayed at his actions.

- *Family Breakdowns, Abuse and Violence*

Family breakdown is the major cause of young people being displaced from their homes. Especially amongst refugee families, there is a high risk of family breakdowns resulting from their experiences of trauma and grief. Their experiences are compounded by the settlement process - adjusting to a new country, new neighbourhood, new expectations and new societal norms. Such experiences and processes can cause confusion and distress among refugee families with enormous impacts on physical and psychological wellbeing of all members involved. In some cases, it has been found that violence and disturbance within the family - stemming from the sense of loss and grief - can cause young people to be disconnected from their families and in turn young people are likely to leave their families.

Moreover, abuse and violence in the home can be reasons for CALD young people to leave their homes. In a study of CALD female students in Brisbane, Roebuck (1994) found that CALD young female migrants were likely to be affected by family conflict arising from post-migration formation of new families, such as a parent's remarriage, which created tensions between young people, step-parents and step-siblings. In another study, young women from CALD backgrounds were identified as being at serious risk of abuse and mistreatment, and many young women from Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese backgrounds chose not to stay with their relatives due to exploitation and physical and sexual abuse.

- *Housing Affordability*

Amidst the increasing prices in the Queensland housing market, finding affordable places to live is extremely difficult. Housing that is affordable to young people may be located in the fringes of urban centres, which creates stress for young people who need to spend extra time and money to get to and from school or work. This geographical disadvantage can also be a source of social isolation and disengagement from community life.

In June 2006, YANQ conducted a discussion session with 10 refugee students from Milpera School about their housing situation. Many of them travelled to school using one or two modes of public transport with some students travelling from suburbs more than 10 kilometres away from the school. 6 students had seven or more people living with them in their homes whilst only 4 were living in households with four people or less. Living far away from school was what they disliked the most about the place they currently lived.

¹⁵ See Ethnic Youth Issues Network Victoria. 1990. I just move around and around: a report on the accommodation needs of Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese Young People. Ethnic Youth Issues Network: Fitzroy.

In addition, housing affordability can also contribute to unsuitable housing conditions such as overcrowding. The issue of overcrowding is particularly profound amongst Indigenous households and it can have an enormous impact on their health and wellbeing.¹⁶

Moreover, many young people are likely to be living in shared housing arrangements to minimise their housing costs which often raises the issues of security, safety and privacy and CALD young people are of no exception. Managing group dynamics within shared housing and dealing with conflict and disagreements over bills, responsibilities, household rules and cultural clashes can be a stressful experience for many CALD young people.

In summary, CALD young people's housing needs result from financial (lack of affordable housing), cultural (clash in cultural expectations and values), social (inter-generational conflicts, family breakdowns, abuse and violence) and educational (English language competency and awareness and access to information) factors. These factors can be interrelated and exacerbate CALD young people's living conditions.

Questions for Debate and Discussion

- What other issues are faced by CALD young people in relation to housing and homelessness?
- Are there adequate housing support services and youth accommodation available to young people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds?
- Are there gaps in the current provision of housing for Indigenous and CALD young people?
- How can the housing sectors in Queensland (private, public and community housing) effectively respond and plan for the needs of Indigenous and CALD young people?
- How will the new social housing system affect Indigenous and CALD young people's access to public and community housing?

What is Racism?

Racism is more than just prejudice, personal dislikes, or discrimination. Everybody has personal preferences about what they are culturally comfortable with. These preferences are not necessarily racist, (though they may be). But racism is about power relationships between groups of people, or individuals from different groups. Racism is prejudice plus power.

Racism can take many forms. They can be direct (overt and open) or indirect (hidden) or they can be born out of ignorance (institutional) embedded in existing social and political structures.

Open or overt racism includes what most people think of as 'racism'. Things like calling people by offensive names or nicknames, blatantly refusing to serve people in shops and clubs, or physically attacking members of a minority group are all examples of open racism.

Hidden or covert racism is when people are discriminated against or disadvantaged in hidden ways. There might not be a sign on the door saying "No Aboriginal People" but if the motel, restaurant or real estate agent has an unspoken policy of 'no dreadlocks or dark faces in here' then the effect is the same. Similarly, if you are allowed to attend a school, but (unlike other students) you are never believed when trouble erupts, you may very well be experiencing hidden racism.

Institutional Racism can occur sometimes despite the good intentions of most people involved. For example, a school or business may think that it 'doesn't discriminate' but if every sign in the building is

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005). *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. www.abs.gov.au

written only in English, if all or most staff are from a dominant culture, and if there are no efforts to make people from minority groups feel accepted and valued, then institutional racism is at play. This can explain why some institutions don't get job applications from anyone from minority groups, and why minority group members feel very unwelcome in some workplaces and settings.

Majority group members (i.e. white Christian Queenslanders) often have trouble believing that racism exists. Minority group people (eg Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse people) rarely do, because they experience it firsthand. Minority group members are the experts on racism.

From being insulted in the public realm or harassed in the work place, racism leaves an emotional and psychological scar on Indigenous and CALD young people. Racist incidents can make young people feel victimised, alienated and isolated, which can cause depression, and disengagement from their peers and family.

How does Racism relate to Housing?

Racism exists everywhere. In the housing sector, racism can include real estate agents refusing people from looking at possible rental properties or there may be an unwritten protocol about not renting to Indigenous people or refugees. Verbal insults from other tenants and neighbours are also forms of racism that are experienced by people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds.

Earlier this year, The Sunday Mail reported a case involving a Gold Coast couple from Aboriginal and Pacific Islander descent who were refused from staying in a Sunshine Coast motel because they were 'black'. The couple responded to the incident by making a claim to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. The male victim reacted to the incident by stating that he "felt so small" and he knew that he and his partner were being refused because of they were "dark".¹⁷

The above case shows that actions can be undertaken to report racist incidents. However, in most cases, racism remains undetected or unreported due to various reasons. Many people may not be aware of whom to contact or report or they may be afraid to speak to others about what they had experienced. Particularly amongst CALD young people, the impact of racism on their lives can manifest in physical violence, withdrawal from friends, family and school, alcohol and drugs and even suicide.

Racist incidents specifically relating to housing issues are often not documented or reported due to the reasons stated above. There is also a risk that a person who reports a case against a real estate agent or a housing provider may lose their security of tenancy and tenure.

Other stories from Sudanese young people indicate that racism has an enormous impact on various aspects of their lives.

"We (family) bought a house...they (people in the neighbourhood) actually, every weekend, they attack and throwing stuff like eggs and rotten vegetables at the house because of our skin colour. We couldn't stop them...every weekend it start on Friday and we couldn't go to sleep. It made me feel different. I was thinking what did we do wrong? Why were people doing this to us? Why us?"

Sudanese refugee, 26 years from Toowoomba.

"It's hard for Sudanese people to find work because of their colour and they (white Australians) are scared of black people."

A young Sudanese woman from Toowoomba.

Additionally, as discussed in this paper, CALD young people's housing options can be limited by the availability and accessibility of information in different languages other than English. This language

¹⁷ The Sunday Mail. "Couple in race complaint after motel booking row" 28/05/2006, p. 28.

barrier can lead to CALD young people not being fully aware of the choices they have when deciding to move out of home and subsequently they may end up in unsuitable housing conditions or out on the streets. In a renting situation, language barriers can create tensions with real estate agents, landlords and house mates over issues of rights and responsibilities of sharing and tenancing.

If informal networks such as friends are a main source of information for young people, there is an evident need for existing housing providers to educate all young people about the housing options and services available to them. At the same time, there needs to be a review of the utilisation of interpreting services by youth housing providers. A number of SAAP funded youth accommodation services in southeast Queensland have addressed the problem of making their services more accessible to CALD young people in their Access and Equity Policies. However, to date, there has been no coordinated effort to review the effectiveness and relevance of these policies.

As Queensland continues to grow, housing will remain as an issue of concern for socially disadvantaged people, including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Questions for Debate and Discussion

- What type of racism do Indigenous and CALD young people face when looking for housing?
- What strategies are needed to combat racism in the housing sector?
- Are youth workers aware of the processes involved in reporting racist incidents experienced by Indigenous and CALD young people?
- What culturally appropriate models of service delivery are currently in place within the housing sector to assist Indigenous and CALD young people?
- Why aren't racist incidents being reported? What difficulties are experienced in reporting racist incidents?

Where to from here?

For a number of reasons, young people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds are disadvantaged in accessing housing in Queensland. Of particular concern is racism, which significantly affects Indigenous and CALD young people on a day to day basis.

Discrimination based on age, race, religion, language and skin colour in the housing sector not only leads to Indigenous and CALD young people living in unsuitable housing conditions (or not having a house at all!) but it can also affect their physical and mental wellbeing, and social relationships with their peers, families and communities.

There is an urgent need for individuals and groups from public, private and community sectors to engage in an open dialogue and form strategies and actions to combat racism. Silence is what keeps racism alive.

Now it's time for you to talk and act.

Why?

Because there is no place for racism.

Resource List

- Ethnic Youth Issues Network Victoria. 1990. *I just move around and around: a report on the accommodation needs of Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese Young People*. Ethnic Youth Issues Network: Fitzroy.
- ERASE Racism. *Long Island Fair Housing: A State of Inequity*. Available from http://www.eraseracismny.org/strategies/housing/fair_housing_report/index.php
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