

# **UNEMPLOYMENT AND RACISM**

## **DISCUSSION PAPER**

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL  
PASTORAL CARE, CHURCH NETWORK FOR YOUTH JUSTICE  
AND BRISBANE YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS

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## **PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION PAPER**

The purpose of this discussion paper is to highlight the issue of racism as a barrier to employment among young people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). The idea for the development of the discussion paper evolved from common concerns held by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ), Church Network For Youth Justice, Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care, and the Brisbane Young Christian Workers around the issue of racism as a barrier to employment among young people from NESB. Further, the fore-mentioned organisations are of the view that the government and community need to be aware of the relationship between young people from NESB, racism, and unemployment and to respond accordingly. Additionally the discussion paper has also been developed in response to a report produced by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference on *Young People and the Future (1998)*. The report represents the culmination of three years of dialogue and consultation between Catholic bishops, parishes and young people. This discussion paper is primarily concerned with Chapter Two of the report on unemployment (page 13).

The concerned organisations involved in the development of this discussion paper and dialogue around strategies that may influence and support responses to the issue of racism as a barrier to employment among NESB young people, are:

### **YOUTH AFFAIRS NETWORK OF QUEENSLAND (YANQ):**

YANQ is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing approximately 400 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, we promote the interests and well being of young people across the state, especially disadvantaged young people. YANQ also represents Queensland's community youth sector to government and the broader community. YANQ actively supports and encourages cultural diversity in Queensland. As such, YANQ in partnership with the NESB Youth Issues Network (NESBYIN) continue to develop and sustain the NESB Policy Officer position within the state youth peak. NESBYIN is an issue based Network comprised of 130 individual and organisational members from across Queensland who are concerned with issues as they relate to NESB young people.

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### **CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL PASTORAL CARE:**

The Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care, (CMPC) as the agency of the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese focused on issues affecting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, recognises the need to respond to the issue of unemployment as it affects young people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). The Centre also recognises the 1998 Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference report, "Young People and the Future", which highlighted unemployment as one of three priority areas requiring national action.

The Centre is therefore concerned with exploring the additional barriers faced by young people from diverse language and cultural backgrounds in their attempts to gain employment, so that strategies to tackle the major social and moral issues can be enacted. In exploring these concerns, CMC also recognises the critical nature of working in partnership with agencies across church and community to ensure appropriate and effective responses to the problems young people themselves identify.

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**CHURCH NETWORK FOR YOUTH JUSTICE:**

Church Network for Youth Justice draws its membership from church based agencies and individuals working with disadvantaged young people in Queensland. It is funded by Centacare and operates as part of Catholic Prison Ministry. The Network provides resources, research, community education on juvenile justice issues and a referral service through its partnership with Micah Inc.

The Network publishes Snippets, a digest of research and justice issues concerning young people. It is distributed on a subscription basis. A part-time project worker is employed to support the Network and develop appropriate distribution of material in print and electronic media.

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**BRISBANE YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS:**

Young Christian Workers (YCW): YCW has 8 groups located at Aspley, Beenleigh, Caboolture, Camp Hill, Kingston/Marsden, Ipswich, Red Hill and City workers. The YCW offers young adults who have left school the opportunity to participate in an action reflection process each week. The value of each worker is an important part of the YCW belief system and to fulfil the YCW mission of faith we are currently outreaching to young people who are unemployed or casual workers. On a broader base we work collectively to bring about change for these people.

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## 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 a balanced definition of the term racism is articulated so readers are able to understand the basis upon which statements, critiques, and recommendations are made. Chambers and Pettman (1986 page 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 devalues 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 toward those 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, rational and theories that may explain the emergence of racism and racist behaviour and attitudes (see Berliner & Hull 1997, *Australian Psychological Society 1995-1997*). One factor the origins of racism and racist behaviour do not affect is the devastating consequences for those who fall victim to this evil and insidious phenomenon.

## **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. Seeto (1991 page 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 page 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.

The Catholic Church clearly recognises racism as an issue relevant to the Christian faith. In the St Paul publication *The Church & Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (1989 page 41) it is stated that “*Faith in the one God, Creator and Redeemer of all humankind made in his image and likeness, constitutes the absolute and inescapable negation of any racist ideologies.*”

**Questions to consider:**

1. Is racism an issue for NESB young people?
2. In what ways does racism affect NESB young people?
3. How should the Catholic Church enact its responsibility to respond to the issue of racism as it relates to NESB young people?

**Please note:** research reports cited in this section are available from Youth Affairs Network of Queensland if more detailed information is required.

## WHAT IS EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT?

### Employment/Unemployment:

The process involved in a person's skills and/or knowledge being traded in return for remuneration can define employment. There are many definitions of the term employment that vary according to ideology. Bryson (1992 page 91) describes employment within the context of *conditions* by suggesting that a worker has the relative freedom to enter into a contract with another to sell their labour. Undoubtedly, employment has a long and fluid history. However, regardless of era or age, employment has usually been closely associated with the notion of active participation in community life. Conversely, those who are unable to secure a contract to sell their labour, skills and/or knowledge are classified as unemployed and are therefore often living in poverty.

Because of the strong relationship between employment and participation, there exists a view that those who are unemployed are naturally not participating to their fullest in community life. The more contentious factor in this debate is about where the blame lies for the lack of participation. Is it an individual issue, a government concern, or a mix of both?

If we were to take the view that unemployment and subsequent non-participation is an individual issue, then we would herald the conservative notion of faith in the free hand of the market to regulate and create employment conditions to sufficient levels. It naturally follows that such a belief would lead to the assumption that if someone is unemployed, then it is an individual flaw that has resulted in the individuals inability to secure paid employment. Alternatively, if we were to take the view that unemployment is a structural issue, then we may herald the notion that capitalism by virtue of its competitive nature, is unable to create full and balanced employment conditions (McAllister 1986). It naturally follows that this belief would suggest that government needs to strongly intervene in the employment arena to regulate the economy and therefore create job opportunities. This discussion paper purports to the view that unemployment and its associated issues are structural concerns rather than individual problems.

Unemployment disproportionately affects young people. The youth unemployment rate in Australia is nearly double that of the general population. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures from February 1998 showed that 19.2% of 15-19 year-olds and 15.3% of 20-24 year-olds were unemployed in Queensland (*cited in YANQ: YouthSpeak '98*). The ABS 1996 Census also shows us that of the 35, 189 NESB young people actively seeking employment in Queensland, 19.2% were unemployed. There are of course unemployment hotspots throughout the state that act as further barriers to young people securing employment. Some of the more *staggering* examples are highlighted below (ABS 1996):

- Hervey Bay: 29.2% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Hervey Bay: 28.1% unemployment rate among 20-25 year-olds.
- Esk: 24.9% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Herberton: 31.7% unemployment rate among 20-25 year-olds.
- Logan: 20.0% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Maroochy: 23.6% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Maroochy: 21.3% unemployment rate among 20-25 year-olds.
- Mount Morgan: 47.1% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Mount Morgan: 36.8% unemployment rate among 20-25 year-olds.
- Tara: 38.7% unemployment rate among 15-19 year-olds.
- Tiaro: 29.4% unemployment rate among 20-25 year-olds.



Unfortunately, when young people are able to secure employment conditions are often poor. Young people are often concentrated in industries that have lower wage levels, lower union membership levels, and high mobility levels. What is more unfortunate and concerning is that no government in contemporary Australian politics has been able to address the issue of unemployment, especially as it relates to young people.

What is concerning in contemporary Queensland politics is the current Labor party's projected employment rate of 5% (*Queensland Labor Party 1998*). Even a projected employment rate of 5% has seen skeptics and economists reeling at the possibility of reaching this figure in today's global environment. However, an unemployment rate target of 5% raises questions relating to the notion of full employment conditions. Have we as a community in Queensland reached the conclusion that it is no longer possible to reach full employment conditions? If so, then it follows that the most disadvantaged population groups will still remain marginalised even if the current government is successful in reaching the projected target of 5%. This situation is very concerning, especially for those people who are affected by racism in the employment market.

## **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACISM & EMPLOYMENT**

Unemployment is often associated with and explicitly related to many social issues. Issues of poverty, crime, homelessness, lack of participation, depression, and self-harming behaviour and suicide are some of the issues often related to unemployment. Many issues related to unemployment act as barriers to employment. Undoubtedly racism is one of the more pervasive barriers to employment among certain population groups.

If we take the view that racism is an individual and/or group attitude and/or behaviour toward a group of people outside the dominant culture, then it is clear that this situation can easily pervade the process of employing an individual. One of the critical factors in the relationship between racism and employment is the fact that racism can often be subtle and therefore hard to substantiate, especially relating to arbitrary employment selection processes (*Iredale 1992*). Racism therefore has an explicit relationship with employment at an individual level.

As mentioned earlier, racism exists at an institutional and structural level. It follows that the unequal distribution of goods and services to certain groups in society impedes their ability to compete effectively in the employment market. Institutional and/or structural racism therefore has a clear relationship with employment opportunities.

Racism and unemployment are pervasive and destructive issues that impact daily on many individuals in our society. As separate phenomena's they are insidious, when fused they are a treacherous mix of beguiling evil and absolute unfairness. No person or group should be devalued because of cultural background or race. No person should be denied access to employment based on cultural background or race. The reality is of course is that many people are denied access to employment because of cultural background and/or race. The whole-of-community and government need to be concerned with this issue and to respond accordingly and appropriately.

## **RACISM AS A BARRIER TO EMPLOYMENT AMONG NESB YOUNG PEOPLE**

Much of the available evidence on racism as a barrier to employment among NESB young people is anecdotal. However, there are many research reports that allude to racism being a barrier to employment among NESB young people (see *Iredale 1992 Minimising Diversity: Employers' Attitudes and Practices Towards Overseas Trained Professionals, Managers and technicians, Tu'ipulotu and Ferguson 1997 Valuing Cultural Diversity on the Sunshine Coast: Every Face Tells a Story, Newell and Miller 1999 Cultural Diversity: The Cooloola Story, YANQ 1993 Racism as a Barrier to the Employment of Young People from non-English Speaking Backgrounds*).

NESB young people have higher rates of unemployment as a population group. Indeed, some groups such as Vietnamese young people are severely under represented in the labour market. Seto (1991 page 69) explains this away by suggesting that "...birth in a non-English speaking country, limited English language proficiency, recency of arrival and inappropriate educational qualifications for the Australian marketplace" are factors that can act as barriers to employment among NESB young people and therefore create higher levels of unemployment. Indeed, even for those NESB young people who have successfully secured employment, racism can still effect their ability to fully perform and to even retain employment (YANQ page 6 1993).

The education system also disadvantages NESB young people preparing for the transition into the labour market. The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) in its 1992 report "*A Stitch in Time ~ Strengthening the First Years of School*" recognises basic literacy, numeracy, problem solving ability and commitment to the workplace as work skills needing to be strengthened among school aged students. However an anomaly exists among NESB students because the education system does not offer as effective an English as a Second Language (ESL) Program as possible because of a lack of resources in this area. This has created a situation where many NESB young people who lack proficient English language skills are not given the opportunity to fulfil their scholastic potential. This clearly disadvantages them in the area of educational qualifications and preparation for a highly competitive labour market (*Bamborough 1998 ESL Program Issues Paper*). The issues highlighted from the NBEET report married with the current situation for many NESB young people accessing ESL Program support in Queensland paints a bleak picture.

Additionally, the *Catholic Bishops' Report Young People and the Future (1998)* does not recognise or acknowledge the link between youth unemployment and racism as a barrier. This is disappointing because it is a reality for many NESB young people. Additionally, if the issue is not acknowledged or even recognised, then we cannot reasonably expect such a report to influence or foster responses. It is doubly disappointing that the 1997 Catholic Bishops' Conference (see *People First Report 1997 page 26*) did recognise the link between young people from NESB, employment, and racism through Recommendation 8.4 which states "*That Catholic organisations examine the extent to which their staff and staffing policies take account of Australia's multicultural character. The representation of women, indigenous people and people from NESB in decision-making roles and in employment will provide one indicator of such concerns.*" Clearly the 1998 Catholic Bishops' Conference did not explore this issue any further in their deliberations regarding young people and unemployment.

### **Questions to consider:**

1. Is racism a barrier to employment among NESB young people?

2. In what ways should the Catholic Church enact its responsibility to respond to racism as a barrier to employment among NESB young people?

**Please note:** research reports cited in this section are available from Youth Affairs Network of Queensland if more detailed information is required.

## **RESULTS OF SURVEY CONDUCTED AMONG NESB YOUNG PEOPLE:**

The purpose of the survey was to deduce NESB young people's perceptions of racism, and in particular, racism as a barrier to employment. The survey was conducted outside the Woodridge Centrelink Office. YCW were responsible for conducting the survey. The results are as follows:

- 10 females and 10 males were surveyed.
- Of the young men, 5 had Samoan backgrounds while the other 5 had Filipino backgrounds.
- Of the young women, 2 had Indian backgrounds, 4 Samoan, and 4 Filipino.
- 18 of the 20 were actively seeking employment.
- 80% of those actively seeking work wanted part-time employment, while the other 20% were seeking full-time employment.
- All of the young people stated their "language" as a barrier to employment.
- 50% of the young people surveyed believed that racism acted as a barrier to their securing employment.
- All of the young people surveyed stated that they had experienced forms of racism.
- 2 of the young people surveyed stated that they had been left feeling degraded during interviews by the way in which interviewers had "looked at them".
- 1 young person currently working part-time stated that his manager deliberately gave him the most difficult cleaning jobs because the manager believed that he should clean because of his cultural background.
- All of the young people surveyed had experienced racism in the school environment.

### **Analysis:**

The producers of this paper believe that the results of the survey conducted by YCW highlight the extent and prevalence of racism as a significant barrier among NESB young people attempting to secure employment. It is not through coincidence that all of the young people had experienced some form of racism in their attempts to secure employment.

It is interesting to note that all 20 young people surveyed believed that their "language" acted as a barrier to employment, yet did not name or recognise this as a form of racism. Also interesting and very concerning, is the fact that all of the young people had experienced racism in the school environment? The "language" issue highlighted here and racism occurring in the school environment suggests that schools need to become more proactive regarding anti-racism education. This may assist young people in being able to identify and understand different forms of racism and therefore in a better position to challenge it.

If racism is a significant barrier to employment among NESB young people as the producers of this paper believe it is, then the whole community needs to be concerned about such issues. During the last 30 years or so we as a Nation and State have moved away from discriminatory assimilation policies to multicultural policy frameworks that espouse the value of cultural diversity. Unfortunately this attitude does not seem to be shared by all in our communities.

## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' REPORT

As mentioned earlier, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference report on *Young People and the Future* (1998) represents the culmination of three years of dialogue and consultation between Catholic bishops, parishes and young people. This report highlights unemployment as a significant issue for young people in Australia.

The report also recognises “*Work as an essential rite of passage between adolescence and adulthood*” (page 13) and employment as a fundamental right of every human being. Additionally, the report acknowledges unemployment as essentially a structural issue by suggesting that “*The Australian community must be careful not to blame the victims of unemployment*” (page 15).

The report also recommends that (page 16):

*Diocesan agencies continue to educate people on the social obligation to provide work for all: maintain a strong voice in the local community on employment needs, and:*

*The federal government to initiate genuine job creation schemes, including those aiding infrastructure development, and promote alternative models for employment, for example, worker co-operatives”*

The producers of this paper fully acknowledge that unemployment affects all young people. However, young people from NESB are doubly disadvantaged because they also encounter racism as a barrier to employment. However, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the Australian Catholic Bishops' report does not make the link between NESB young people, unemployment and racism as a significant barrier to employment. This is concerning because any responses developed from the reports recommendations would fail to address the issue of racism as a barrier even though it has been recognised in other Catholic publications.

While the producers of this paper fully support the recommendations contained in the report, we would also suggest additional recommendations be applied to the issue of young people and unemployment in order to bridge the identified gap.

The following section of this discussion paper on recommendations will articulate strategies that bridge the identified gap, while supporting and progressing other recommendations made by Australian Catholic Bishops.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Catholic bishops, church departments and agencies, and parishes across Australia and Queensland develop strong partnerships with communities to initiate processes that may break down the barriers to employment faced by NESB young people.
2. Catholic parishes and bishops lobby the federal and state governments in partnership with YANQ, Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care, Church Network For Youth Justice and Brisbane Young Christian Workers to address the issue of racism as a barrier to employment among NESB young people.
3. Catholic parishes and bishops lobby the federal and state governments to resource the development of alternative and self-sustainable employment initiatives and opportunities for all communities, especially worker co-operatives.
4. Catholic parishes and bishops lobby the state government in Queensland to enhance its ESL Program so NESB students are given the opportunity to fulfill their scholastic potential in line with all other students in Queensland's schools.
5. Catholic parishes and bishops develop strategies to combat racism at all levels in Australia.

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