

ERASE RACISM! FORUM

REPORT

Toowoomba 20 October 2006

A Forum organised by the
**Youth Affairs Network
of Queensland**



October 2006

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About YANQ

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. YANQ advocates on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. The interests and well being of young people across the state are promoted by YANQ in the following ways:

- disseminating information to members, the youth sector, and the broader community;
- undertaking campaigns and lobbying;
- making representations to government and other influential bodies;
- resourcing regional and issues-based networks;
- consulting and liaising with members and the field;
- linking with key state and national bodies;
- initiating projects;
- hosting forums and conferences;
- input into policy development; and
- enhancing the professional development of the youth sector.

YANQ employs a Multicultural Development Officer to coordinate the Multicultural Youth Network Queensland (MYNQ). MYNQ is a community-driven state-wide network which began its life as a YANQ working party in 1992 to improve the quality of life for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people. The network is composed of organisations, services and service providers committed to multiculturalism and improving the opportunities and outcomes for CALD young people in Queensland. As at October 2006, MYNQ has a membership of 260 individuals from government and community sectors.

About ERACISM! Forums

YANQ's ERACISM! ("Erase Racism") forum series grew out of the ERACISM! Strategy in 2004. Following the successful forums held in Brisbane, the 2005 forum was hosted by Townsville and this year's forum was held in Toowoomba.

The primary aim of YANQ's broader ERACISM! Strategy has been to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other people together to openly discuss the state of racism in Queensland and Australia, and to unite people locally and across the state to counter racist acts, attitudes and institutions.

Using the broad aim of the ERACISM! Strategy, forums are organised to directly address key issues experienced at a local level with a state wide outlook on developing practical strategies to combat racism against young people in Queensland.

For more information on the previous two forums, see the ERACISM! reports at www.yanq.org.au.

YANQ's Policy on Racism

Racism is alive in Queensland, and young people are suffering as a result.

What is racism? It 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.

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

Racism can make some young people in Queensland feel unsafe, worthless and even suicidal. Racism affects people's education, health, relationships, wellbeing and life chances.

Background to ERACISMI Forum 2006

Having a roof over one's head is a basic human right. For many Indigenous and CALD young people, they are likely to be turned away by real estate agents and landlords because they are stereotyped as being 'bad tenants'. For other young people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds, they may not be aware of the services available to them, often becoming at risk of being homeless. Others may have to commute long distances on public transport to get to school or work, simply because rent is too high in areas where they work or study.

In addition, with the evident housing crisis in Queensland, as well as major housing policy changes, the ERACISMI Planning Committee agreed to focus this year's ERACISMI forum on Indigenous and CALD young people's experiences of racism in the Queensland housing sector.

Toowoomba was chosen to host the ERACISMI forum due to the constant stream of racist incidents reported over the last three years in connection with the increase in the number of refugees settling in the area. Additionally, holding the forum in Toowoomba was intended to

provide opportunities for multicultural workers and organisations in Toowoomba to showcase their achievements in promoting multiculturalism.

The forum was aimed to provide a platform for community debate and discussion on racism within the Queensland housing sector and to identify collaborative strategies for combating racism against CALD young people in Queensland.

The specific objectives of the forum were:

1. To increase community awareness of racism and how it affects the lives of Indigenous and CALD young people;
2. To build on existing multicultural youth networks and increase their participation in advocacy and policy making;
3. To document Indigenous and CALD young people's experiences of racism;
4. To develop collaborative strategies for addressing racism at local and state levels; and
5. To encourage Indigenous and CALD young people to speak out against racism through active participation in forum discussions.

Process

This section of the report outlines the process involved in organising the ERACISMI forum. YANQ's Multicultural Development Officer was largely responsible for organising and managing the pre-, during and post-forum process.

Stage 1. Forum Planning

YANQ's ERACISMI Planning Committee was established in March 2006 to provide advice and input to YANQ's Multicultural Development Officer in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of the 2006 ERACISMI forum. The Planning Committee comprised of 6 members from the community sector. Terms of Reference were developed for the planning committee. In total, 3 planning committee meetings were held between March and August 2006 with additional one-on-one meetings held with Planning Committee members.

Through discussions with the Planning Committee, YANQ decided to prepare a discussion paper to highlight key issues on housing, racism and Indigenous and CALD young people.

Stage 2. Data Collection and Consultation

As part of the data collection process, a special meeting was held with the members of MYNNQ in June 2006. The meeting was attended by 18 youth and community workers, service providers and community organisations. Presenters from the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition and Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASHRAM) delivered a presentation on key housing issues faced by young people and CALD people in Queensland. MYNNQ members engaged in an in-depth discussion about issues relating to young people and housing. The findings of the discussion informed the preparation of YANQ's discussion paper.

In addition, YANQ conducted a workshop with students from Milpera School in June 2006. YANQ provided disposable cameras to refugee students and asked them to take photos that reflect the theme - "This is My Home". The workshops were intended to utilise visual media to engage young people to capture images and messages on the importance of housing through young people's eyes. The students also participated in a discussion about where they live, their

neighbourhood, their access to public transport and other issues related to housing. The data obtained from the discussion was incorporated into the discussion paper. In September 2006, a debriefing session was organised with students to enable them to tell stories about the photos they've taken. The photos were displayed at the ERACISMI forum.

Additionally, YANQ held face-to-face interviews with refugee young people, youth workers and multicultural service providers in Toowoomba in August 2006. All interviews were recorded on film and the footages were used to compile a five minute documentary.

Stage 3. Preparation of Discussion Paper

Drawing on the data collected in Stage 2, a discussion paper titled “No Place for Racism” was prepared by YANQ. A brief summary of findings and themes from existing research on housing and young people was also documented in the discussion paper. The paper was used to promote the ERACISMI forum and to facilitate community debate on the existence of racism, and its effect on young people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds. YANQ disseminated a media release four days prior to the forum and participated in a radio talk back show on ABC Radio Toowoomba.

Stage 4. Implementation of Forum

Over 60 people attended the ERACISMI forum on Friday 20th of October 2006. The forum was held in the boarding house dining room at St Saviour's College, Toowoomba.

The forum program commenced with an opening by the Jarowair Gaibal people, followed by dances performed by Ngambileh Mallarah. This was followed by a welcome speech by YANQ's Director and then an explanation of the forum format was provided to the forum participants.

To open the panel discussion, YANQ's five minute documentary was screened to set the context for the forum theme.

The members of the panel included:

- Liz Bond, Indigenous Unit Manager, Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland
- Susan Daniels, Refugee & Migrant Young People Project Worker, Lifeline Toowoomba
- Angelo Geng, Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy Coordinator, Anglicare, Toowoomba
- Darryl Bates, Youth Development Officer, Toowoomba City Council
- Deng Ajang, Sudanese Young Person, Toowoomba
- Jok Keer, Sudanese Young Person, Toowoomba
- Tsering Yangzom, Refugee & Migrant Community Development Worker, Lifeline Toowoomba
- Rose Best, Housing Coordinator, Sisters Inside

The panel discussion was divided into two sessions:

Session 1: How does racism affect Indigenous and CALD young people's housing choices?

Session 2: Putting 'No' into action – strategies for combating racism in Queensland.

During the 30 minute morning tea break in between the sessions, Triple Click, a local Sudanese youth rap trio performed for the forum participants.

The forum concluded with the forum participants expressing their thoughts and comments on issues discussed by the panel members. Shortly after the forum, SBS Radio conducted a focus group with those who were interested in furthering the discussion on racism.



Panel Members at the ERACISMI! forum in Toowoomba

Stage 5. Preparation of Forum Report

After the forum, YANQ prepared a report on the ERACISMI! forum to document the process and key findings from the panel discussions.

Outcomes

It was evident from the forum discussions that people from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds are being affected by all forms of racism on a daily basis. The issues and comments raised specifically by the panel members included:

- Refugee young people have difficulties in accessing housing because they do not have previous rental experience.
- Racism is also present in the work environment, particularly when CALD people apply for jobs.
- Racism is part of the daily life for some refugees. “What makes the difference is whether we acknowledge the existence of racism and what we are doing of it.”
- “Racism is everywhere.”
- Negative stereotyping of Indigenous and African young people is a form of discrimination and racism.
- Lack of public awareness and knowledge of the Aboriginal history. Racism is a constant barrier for the Aboriginal people.
- The need for forging better relations between the Police and Indigenous and CALD communities.

Amongst the panel members, certain instances of racism were identified. Some panel members commented that:

“If a white person picks up the phone and say I need police, the police will be there in 5 minutes or 2 minutes. But not if you are black. We have to start to change by not assuming that because I’m black, I’m the bad person.”

“I don’t care about my colour – we [all] should be friends. I used to get called ‘black’ – all I wanted was someone to help me stay here [in Australia]. So I ignored the racism.”

“Racism stems from ignorance. People ask why Sudanese people dress well – they think they receive more payment from Centrelink when in fact they don’t. Dressing nice is part of cultural practice for the Sudanese.”

When the ‘surface’ issues relating to settlement and multiculturalism delved into deeper issues on racism and discrimination, the discussion became focused on turning specific incidents into implications for structural and policy change:

“Racism is impacting on policy developmental level as well as on the ground.”

“It’s unlawful to discriminate against people’s race. Racial vilification, which is any public act of hatred and inciting hatred to others are unlawful acts under the *Racial Discrimination Act* (1991). The bottom line is there is law in this state and you have the right to exercise your right.”

“It’s the policies that fail the Aboriginal people not the Aboriginal people who fail. We have to challenge the government policies. People need to be aware that we are trying to come with solutions. Support is diminishing (e.g. DATSI closure). Aboriginal people don’t have a voice – voices have now gone.”



Live performance by Triple Click

In terms of developing strategies for combating racism against Indigenous and CALD young people, the panel members expressed their support for existing anti-racism and cultural relations programs as well as strengthening community networks to address institutional racism which is often harder to identify.

“There are positive things being done in the community in Toowoomba. Council has worked on a postcard project and it employs a Local Area Multicultural Partnership worker. We need to make people feel proud of their community. Council should and can provide training in cross-cultural training and this should happen in the rental market [to facilitate Indigenous and CALD young people’s access into the rental market].”

“I have hopes that Australia is going to grow from its past experience through exchange of ideas and thoughts with different people. The world is getting smaller and we have to learn to live together in as much peace as we can.”

“There are new dialogues being forged with Police. Things are moving forward to improve relations between refugee families and Police.”

“There needs to be a policy change to allow the Aboriginal people to have a voice.”

Key Learnings from the ERACISMI Forum

Overall, the ERACISMI forum was a successful event that focused on local issues and the implications of these issues on the development of broader anti-racism strategies and policies. Many participants were keen to share their stories and experiences, and there seemed to be strong support from the forum participants to undertake similar forums and events in the future to acknowledge the existence of racism.

Reflecting back on the forum, YANQ has identified key learnings, which include:

- Due to the tight program, not all participants were given the opportunity to fully interact and respond to the panel members’ comments. In future forums, more time is needed to encourage the participants to respond to and ask questions of the panel members.
- Involving young people in planning and implementing in a way that recognises their individual talents and skills is a valuable part of any youth-focused event.
- Building relationships with the Indigenous community is essential for obtaining their consent and to mobilise members from the Indigenous community to participate. YANQ can continue to strengthen its connections with the Indigenous communities.
- Establish a strong working relationship with local community organisations and engage them in planning and promoting the forum.
- More time is needed to create discussion on the “how to” combat racism to provide the forum participants with tools to take action, whether it be through lobbying and/or advocacy.

Finally, future forums should be centred on specific sectors (i.e. housing, employment, education, etc) to provide a collaborative space for young people and other key stakeholders within the sector to discuss and act on issues that affect Indigenous and CALD young people. Future forums can provide an avenue for people to engage in policy development to address covert forms of racism.

Resources

- Youth Affairs Network of Queensland. 2006. *No Place for Racism*. Discussion paper, September 2006. Available at www.yanq.org.au
- Youth Affairs Network of Queensland. 2005. *Young People, Reconciliation & Challenging Racism in Queensland*. Scoping paper, August/December 2005. Available at www.yanq.org.au
- Youth Affairs Network of Queensland. 2005. *New Kids on the Block: Making space for Sudanese young people in Queensland*. Research paper, January/October 2005. Available at www.yanq.org.au