

# I'm not

# racist, but...

## COMBATING RACISM and DISCRIMINATION forum report

**youthaffairs**  
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria.

YACVic's vision is for a Victorian Community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

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Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues  
**cmyi**

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) is a state wide community based organisation that aims to strengthen and build innovative partnerships between young people, support services and the community to enhance life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

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The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), in conjunction with the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI), hosted a forum called 'I'm Not Racist, But: Combating Racism and Discrimination'. This was held on September 18, 2001 at the Kensington Community Centre.

We began planning the forum because our members and the young people we spoke to asked us to address this issue. Given recent events such as the terrorist attacks in New York and the asylum seeker debate in Australia, this forum was extremely topical and was well attended. It attracted young people and workers who wanted to discuss how racism impacts on young people and most importantly, how we can work together to combat discrimination.

The forum program covered several areas:

**Challenging racism using the law:** Di Sisely, Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria

**Confronting racism in sport:** Gavin Brown, Director, Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-op

**Young People's experiences of racial discrimination:** Kavitha Chandra and Ervina Lay, Western Young People's Independent Network

There were two afternoon workshops - one specifically for young people, the other designed for workers with young people. The workshops explored how discrimination happens and how each of us can begin to address it.

Our racism forum had its genesis long before the actions of the Federal Government in relation to asylum seekers and before the September 11 attacks in the United States. Discriminatory responses to these events largely directed towards Muslim communities, were particularly disturbing. But it's not just in relation to large-scale incidents that we see racism at work. The problems facing society as a whole occur in everyday settings which include the workplace, schools, universities, recreational and sporting arenas, public transport and so on. It is at this grassroots level that discrimination can be at its most insidious and destructive.

Discrimination can show itself openly in violent behaviour or jokes. But it also exists in less obvious forms that may be more difficult to detect - for example, talk of links between ethnicity and crime or unemployment rates. Racism is often the easy answer for some people for the complex problems we face.

Discrimination is learned behaviour. Racism and intolerance have existed for a long time and will unfortunately continue to exist for many years to come but that doesn't mean that we have to accept it. The good news is that learned behaviour can be changed.

We can draw the line on unacceptable behaviour. However, before we begin the fight, we must detect the problem. The only way to stop the spread of discrimination is to confront it and address the ignorance, jealousy and fear that often promote its spread.

# Challenging racist attitudes

**D**iane Sisley is the Chief Executive of the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria, a position she has held since July 1994. The Commission is responsible for preventing discrimination and providing avenues for people to seek redress when it occurs. She also convenes Diversity Victoria, a broad based coalition of community, government and private sector organisations committed to combating discrimination based on race and ethnic origin. Diane is a member of the State Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, which seeks to achieve a meaningful reconciliation between indigenous and other people in Victoria.

## Responding to the terrorist attacks in America

In a message to all Australians on Sunday 23 September concerning the terrorist attack on New York and Washington, the Prime Minister John Howard said that:

*"In times of challenge, Australians have always pulled together. Now it is time to pull together with free people and free societies around the world in response to the global threat of terrorism. . . This is not a time for scapegoating groups within our society. Rather it is a time for united action against a common and abhorrent foe."*

While this common foe in the immediate context is hate-filled terrorists, the underlying common and abhorrent foe is racism and racial and religious hatred.

It is racial hatred that is fuelling terrorist actions and it is racism, born out of fear and prejudice, that is giving rise to attacks on Muslims and Arabic speaking Australians, especially women and girls, and on mosques, on schools and on community organisations. The Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV) is aware of almost 50 instances of such cowardly attacks since 11 September.

The consequences are that women and girls feel unsafe in public places. Schools have closed down, people have been hospitalised and people are isolated in their homes. It is indeed time, as the Prime Minister said, for united action against a common and abhorrent foe and that foe is racism.

We must not let shock, anger and fear distort our fair and humane approach to others. If we respond with fear and hatred, we will be playing into the hands of those who support terrorism. The terrorists will have succeeded.

This is a time for strong moral leadership. Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria calls on people to take a deep breath, take a step back and think calmly about the terrorist attack. Don't waver from treating people fairly. Don't let your shock and anger give way to treating Muslims and Arabic speaking Australians on the basis of assumptions or stereotypes.

The Mayor of New York urged New Yorkers not to take out their pain and anger on the city's Arab and Muslim population. He has said that "nobody should attack anybody else. . . we are dealing with insanity, with sick hatred."

We should all look to Mayor Giuliani's calm, his tolerance and humanity as a way of dealing with the pain of the terrorist attack.

## Australia's Commitments

Ironically at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, on Saturday 8 September, 163 countries from all parts of the world adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action that condemned racism and committed to the implementation of a wide range of measures to combat racism at international, regional and national levels. Australia is one of those committed to this action.

While much has been said about the World Conference Against Racism regarding long standing issues such as slavery, regional conflict and colonialism, what is not so well known is the very real commitments nations have given to introduce measures to prevent and reduce the devastating effects of racism within their own spheres of influence. For example, in adopting the Programme of Action, Australia along with 162 other nations has pledged to take concrete action to eliminate racism in the workplace. In Victoria, 64% of all complaints of racial discrimination occur

## “...to be effective the concrete actions required to change racist attitudes and behaviours must be serious, systematic and sustained”

in the workplace. Further, the unemployment rate for indigenous Australians is 23% compared to 9% for non-indigenous Australians. Clearly concrete action is required to redress these inequities.

Australia pledged to facilitate family reunification for migrants with due regard to the desire of many to have independent status. However, given the proposed changes to family reunification rules, only those with significant financial resources will be able to bring their aged parents to Australia. This is hardly equitable.

Australia reaffirmed its obligations under international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law relating to refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons and to provide them with protection and assistance in an equitable manner.

Australia also pledged to recognise the racism that refugees may face as they endeavour to engage in the life of their host country, to develop strategies to address this discrimination and to facilitate the full enjoyment of the human rights of refugees in accordance with international obligations.

To honour this pledge, Australia is going to have to think carefully and clearly about how it is currently treating refugees. Is it equitable for one refugee to have access to English classes and assistance with finding work and another not, or to have access to settlement services and another not, simply based on where they applied for refugee status? What is the impact of a temporary visa on a refugee seeking work? The EOCV is aware that refugees are being refused employment because they are on temporary visas. We have also received reports that people on temporary visas are treated less favourably in accessing accommodation and receiving goods and services. Clearly concrete action is required to overcome these barriers in order to provide protection and assistance in an equitable manner. The proposed Border Protection and related legislation will further add to the barriers facing genuine refugees fleeing oppressive regimes.

Australia pledged to ensure full equality of all before the law, eliminate barriers to accessing judicial and administrative tribunals dealing with grievances and to providing victims of discrimination free legal assistance in civil and

administrative cases. Given the current over representation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system, the increasing frequency with which young people from particular cultural groups are coming into contact with law enforcement agencies, and limited access to private or public legal assistance, concrete and effective steps are clearly required to fulfil this commitment.

Australia pledged to implement all necessary measures to promote, protect, and ensure the enjoyment and exercise by indigenous Australians of their human rights on the basis of equality and non-discrimination. Given that indigenous Australians face significant discrimination and do not enjoy equity in relation to, for example, health (infant mortality rate is 3-5 times higher for indigenous children than that for non-indigenous children), education (23% of indigenous adults possess post-school qualifications, compared with 40% of non-indigenous adults) and housing (in 1996 only 31% of indigenous families owned their home, compared with 71% of all Australian families). Much concrete action is required to redress this situation and honour the commitment made.

## World Conference Against Racism

To its credit Australia at the World Conference lead the work on commitments in relation to education to combat racism and to ensure equity in educational outcomes. But to be effective the concrete actions required to change racist attitudes and behaviours must be serious, systematic and sustained. We must learn from the successes and failures of the past. One-off grants to community groups to undertake unconnected activities will not lead to the systematic behavioural change required. We need to learn from those campaigns that have changed behaviour and perhaps attitudes, campaigns against the road toll, smoking and skin cancer, anything less will be ineffective.

But there were other pledges to combat racism agreed to at Durban. Significantly in view of the events of 11 September, Australia along with the 162 other countries pledged to intensify efforts to bring to justice perpetrators of neo-fascist, nationalistic ideologies which promote racial hatred at the national and international level and to bring perpetrators before national and international tribunals, including the International Criminal Court. Australia is yet to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court, although it has committed to eventual ratification.

Australia and all other nations undertook to develop national action plans to fully implement the provisions of the Declaration and Programme of Action. An annual report on this implementation is to be prepared by the High Commission on Human Rights and to be presented to the United Nations General Assembly. The Australian Government, indeed all States and Territory and Governments are now

obliged to develop Action plans to implement the pledges committed to. We must encourage and monitor this work to ensure that it occurs and that it is appropriate and effective.

Mary Robinson in a speech prior to the conference made a prescient observation. *"If truth is the first casualty of war, then observance of human rights norms is one of the first casualties of conflicts."* We must not let this happen. Hate and terrorism will only be defeated when there is real, actual and genuine recognition of the position and rights of others who are different in some way from us.

Clearly given the terrorist attack on NY and Washington, it is absolutely vital that the commitments made at the World Conference Against Racism, are kept. The commitments made by the nations of the world at this conference speak directly to the critical issues we now face.

## Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001

The *Race and Religious Tolerance Act* 2001 was recently approved in the Victorian Parliament and is due to commence operation on or before 1 January 2002. The Act prohibits public acts of vilification which incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion or severe ridicule of a person because of their race or religion. Complaints will be handled through the Commission's usual complaint processes.

A second category exists for more serious vilification offences, which involve intentional incitement of hatred towards a class or group identified by a particular race or religion. Offences in this category can attract imprisonment sentences of up to 6 months.

Exceptions exist in the areas of academic discussions, artistic works and fair and

accurate media reporting. The Act applies to vilifying materials transmitted over the internet and via e-mail. The Act also introduces a representative complainant mechanism, which allows organisations with a sufficient interest in the subject matter of the complaint to lodge on behalf of members of the class affected by the vilification.

## What Is Vilification?

Vilification is expressions of hatred that threaten the right of people to live in the community with a sense of safety and personal security, to be able to go to school or work or do the shopping without feeling afraid. Such actions are to be deplored, they don't represent the standard of behaviour we've set for ourselves as a community.

If we respond to the current situation with fear and hatred we'll be playing into the hands of those who support terrorism. The terrorists will have succeeded.

## Rise in Vilification of Muslim Australians

Right across Australia, especially over the past 2 days sadly we've witnessed a significant rise in the number of attacks on Muslim Australians. This has got to stop.

Overwhelmingly overseas born Australians came to Australia fleeing from refugee camps after the Second World War in Europe or from Lebanon following the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon. Currently people are coming to Australia fleeing repressive regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. People are coming to Australia to escape violence and terror, not to perpetuate it.

## What can People do if they experience vilification?

If you or a member of your family or community are subject to racist attack or verbal abuse contact the Commission or

your community group for help. It is against the law to verbally or physically attack or harm someone because of their race or religious belief or presumed race or religion.

The Victorian Parliament on all our behalf has recently reconfirmed this by passing the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

### Refugees and Asylum Seekers

We need to be very careful not, in any way, to automatically associate asylum seekers with the terrorist attack on the United States.

While Australia like all countries must ensure, as far as it possibly can, that it is secure from terrorist attack we must do

this in an intelligent and informed way. Simply treating those fleeing from repressive regimes in Iraq or Afghanistan as if they are terrorist is not intelligent, accurate nor fair. The vast majority of asylum seekers go on to be accepted as genuine refugees. Iraqi 97% and 92% of Afghani. The current discussion around refugee policy is being used by some individuals and groups as an excuse to engage in vilification and racial and religious hatred, this should not be condoned or continue.

### Vilification of Americans

Just as we call for no vilification of Muslim-Australians so people should not vilify Americans by saying, for example, that its about time, they deserved it, and

so on. Vilification and denigration of anybody and must stop.

### Call on all People

I implore people to step back and reflect on the values this country prides itself on - giving people a fair go.

Don't give in to knee jerk reactions remember Muslim and Arabic speaking Australians are our neighbours, our friends our local corner shop proprietors, members of our family and co-workers. The events in New York and Washington do not change this. Speak to your Muslim and Arabic speaking neighbours ask them how they are? Reach out and make contact. **You can also call the Equal Opportunity Commission for advice on 9281 7100.**

## Internet Resources

- The *Victorian Government's sport web portal* has information on programs for **indigenous young people and sport**. Go to <http://www.sport.vic.gov.au> and do a key word search for "indigenous".
- *Boomerang Magazine* is an online magazine for **international students** in Australia published by IDP Education Australia and APN Educational Media. Go to <http://www.boomerangmagazine.com.au> and follow the links to *Student Tips*. There is an article called *Is racism affecting you?* under the "Adjusting to life in Australia" menu.
- *Racism No Way* is a website project which aims to assist school communities and education systems to recognise and address **racism in the learning environment**. The project is an initiative of the Chief Executive Officers of education systems across Australia. See <http://www.racismnoway.com.au> for more info.
- *The Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria* is responsible for **eliminating discrimination in Victoria**. It is a statutory body and reports to the Victorian Parliament through the state Attorney-General. The EOCV offers information, training and education programs, conduct research and provide legal and policy advice. They also provide free and impartial complaint resolution services. See <http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au> for more info.
- The *UN World Conference Against Racism* was held in Durban, South Africa, August 31 - September 7, 2001. This conference attempted to create a **new world vision for the fight against racism** in the twenty-first century. See <http://www.un.org/WCAR/> for more info.

# we were all migrants once!

**K**avitha Chandra is a youth worker at the Western Young People's Independent Network (WYPIN). WYPIN is a youth organisation in the western region working with refugee and migrant young people. Kavitha has recently returned from the World Conference against Racism in South Africa where she attended the Youth Summit. Ervina Lay is a member of WYPIN and has been involved in WYPIN's anti-racism education programs. She is a strong advocate of refugee and migrant youth issues through Rotary. This is an edited version of Kavitha and Ervina's presentation to the racism forum.

Turn around and introduce yourself to the person on your right and tell them your ethnic background.

When WYPIN works in schools we get young people to do this exercise to show them how diverse the Australian population is. We think this is how we can begin to address racism. We need to acknowledge that all Australians, except Indigenous people, have a migrant and refugee history. There is simply no room for racism in Australia!

WYPIN is a group of young people who are interested in challenging racism and raising awareness of the needs of refugee and migrant young people in the western region. WYPIN has worked with schools using popular music and art to explore issues of identity and tolerance. WYPIN also performs 'Time & Space' to raise awareness in the mainstream community about why refugees come to Australia and how racism impacts on their lives.

These programs have also helped refugee young people to understand that Indigenous people were the first

Australians and that Anglo-Australians were also once new settlers and migrants.

## **Acknowledging racism**

One of the great things about the recent World Conference Against Racism was that there were over 700 young people from all over the world who were not afraid to talk about racism. Today's forum provides another opportunity for us to confront the issue of racism and to work together to fight racism both here and across the world.

At WYPIN we think it's really important to acknowledge the seriousness of racism. In Australia race is often only discussed in reaction to particular events. Perhaps people fear talking about racism because it challenges Australia's multicultural image. However, one of the key recommendations made at the World Conference Against Racism was the need to openly talk about racism and to document incidents. The following story illustrates how voices can be silenced.

There was an article in *The Age* recently about the experience of young refugees

at schools in Melbourne. The young people spoke very openly and bravely about their experiences which included police harassment and discrimination at school. Although the schools were not named in the article, some of these young people were told by their teachers that they had made the school look bad. This is one way of challenging what they had to say. Even when young people raise racism as an issue it is often not well received.

## **Young people's stories**

Racism reinforces young people's feelings of insecurity and discomfort and can create a feeling of not being a part of the mainstream community. This can result in young people feeling isolated. Racism can seriously impact on young people's mental health and development.

The recent attacks in America highlight this issue. A number of young people of Muslim background ring WYPIN asking 'should I go to school wearing my hijab'? Some young people on their way to school have not been allowed on the bus because of their Muslim appearance.

Racism is an ongoing problem for many young people. The following quotes provide examples of the types of discrimination that some young people deal with on a regular basis:

*Just because I am of African background people stop me in the street and ask me if I am a runner. (16 year old young person of Eritrean background)*

***People automatically assume that I can't speak English and speak to me really slowly, just because I wear a hijab.***

(18 year old young person of Somali background)

Young women are often forced to deal with both race and gender issues.

*I am made to feel ashamed for wearing traditional clothes, such as my hijab.*

(17 year old woman of Somali background)

***I am sick of people thinking that just because I a Muslim woman I am oppressed.***

(Young woman born in Somalia)

This overt racism is obviously hurtful and damaging. However, more subtle forms of institutionalised and structural racism can be as difficult to cope with. For example, many Muslim young women have complained of not getting jobs in fast food chains because they wear a hijab. When they go to interviews without a hijab they get the job. Relations between police and young people are also often affected by racist attitudes:

*I am of East Timorese background. The police automatically I think I am a drug*

*dealer when they see me walking in the street. I am sick of being asked for ID. (East Timorese young person 21 years)*

***I will be walking in my neighbourhood and just because I am black I get pulled over by the police and asked for ID and where I am going. In my culture we don't look directly in people's eyes when you speak to them, you look down as a form of deference.***

(Eritrean young person 17 years)

Another critical issue is education. Many refugee young people have had their schooling disrupted due to war in their home country or because they have had to escape their country and then live in refugee camps. As a result, many may be pre-literate or have limited language and literacy skills and they may find it difficult to settle into mainstream schooling. Limited funding to address the specific learning needs of refugee young people results in high numbers of refugee young people failing to complete their VCE. This limits their ability to access further education and employment opportunities and to participate more fully in the community.

Financial problems can also impact on young people. One young Vietnamese man said 'I need to leave school and look for a job to support my family'. Because he has recently arrived in Australia, he must wait 2 years before being eligible for Austudy and social security benefits. However, as money at home is limited, he feels pressured to leave school to help his family out. Desperate for work and with limited language skills this young person is vulnerable to low paid work.

*My Uncle sold his work tractor to enable me to flee Afghanistan, hoping that once I reached Australia I would be able to help him and my family get out of Afghanistan. I now must wait three years before I even know if I will be able to stay in Australia and then maybe another 3 years before I can be reunited with my family. (Afghani young person, 17 years).*

Although meeting the definition of a refugee, this young person like thousands others have been given Temporary Protection Visas by the Australian Government. The 2-year waiting period for income security and the Temporary Protection Visas are punitive policies that ultimately discriminate against vulnerable newly arrived migrants rather than supporting them to settle into Australia.

### **How to begin to combat racism**

So is it all depressing news? No. There are thousand of people all over the world who think that racism sucks and that it is a fundamental abuse of people's basic human rights.

At WYPIN we speak to schools and young people and do plays to educate people about how racism affects young people. WYPIN is also keen to see the issue of racism discussed more widely and we will continue to raise this issue with government and community agencies.

Today, we can start to give young people a voice to express their experiences of racism and together we can fight racism both here and across the world.

### **Contact WYPIN**

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# sporting diversity

**G**avin Brown has worked for the Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Organisation (VAYSAR) for the last 8 years. VAYSAR is a community-based organisation that supports and encourages Koori participation in sport and recreation at all levels. This is achieved via an annual sports calendar, sports development grants and by working with both indigenous and non-indigenous groups interested in Koori participation in sport and recreation. This is an edited version of Gavin's speech at the racism forum.

The local Koori community in Ballarat has produced a video called 'a World of Colour' which contains a series of short films about issues affecting the Aboriginal community in that region. The young people have used a creative form to try to combat racism. One of the films depicts a young Koori girl being racially abused during a basketball game. At VAYSAR we've come across racism in this form more times than we care to remember. This is the reality of what can happen in sport but the key is how we respond to this behaviour. If you look at the two young people involved in the incident on the video, their main emotion is anger. Fortunately, there was a young woman in the middle who acted in a different way by promoting mediation and cultural awareness training. If it wasn't for her, there could've been a complete outburst in the whole situation. For me, racism is out there but the most important thing is how you react to it.

We used to get invited to a lot of situations like the one shown in the video and we always suggested a mediation type of approach. Sometimes the competition is at fault and sometimes it's a lack of cultural awareness. We've had a lot of incidents where our potentially elite young sports

people were not being selected because of who they are - because they are Aboriginal or because they are seen as more of a risk or more maintenance. A lot of people get to the regional level and then struggle from there.

### **One sport for all**

For a long time the structures in sport haven't catered for different cultural groups. They cater for a mono-cultural society where you train on a Tuesday and Thursday and you play on a Saturday. However, in our community funerals come before anything so if a funeral is on a Saturday, some groups may not be able to participate. Factors such as religion do inhibit people playing sports. I went to a multicultural cricket meeting the other day to discuss getting more cultural groups involved in cricket. One Greek gentleman told me that in the 1940s and 50s he had to play cricket or football because there were no facilities to play soccer but his main passion was soccer. These are cultural issues and a lack of awareness can breed into racism.

### **The traditional influence of sport**

Sport has a place in all communities. It certainly has a role in the Aboriginal community. A lot of people don't know about the social learning role that sport

played traditionally. Sport provided an opportunity to pass on skills, traditions and knowledge because we didn't have a classroom. Coming together has always been a part of the Koori tradition. Historically, a number of tribes who lived in different regions around Victoria would meet at regular times to discuss business and marriages. At these meetings the communities would play a lot of sport.

VAYSAR organise sporting carnivals in a variety of sports such as netball, basketball, swimming and bowling. VAYSAR's annual football and netball carnival, which attracts up to 5,000 people each year, is the largest annual event in the Koori community. This carnival aims to bring the Koori community together. However, people get concerned when they just see us having a carnival and they ask why people from other cultural backgrounds can't participate. Because other cultures don't tend to have specific carnivals in mainstream sport, there can be a bit of conflict and it can turn into racism.

We have to explain that it's something that's been done for 40,000 plus years and our people do learn from it. It's not just about sport. It gives the young people organisational skills and

# “To eradicate racism there has to be a new approach within the sporting industry and how it deals with the different cultures that exist.”

promotes health. Sport then becomes a vehicle to promote cultural diversity and awareness among many other issues. While you're there you've got 4,000 to 5,000 people watching so you've got a captive audience and you use this to deal with broader issues. Sport has become a vehicle by which we can keep people together.

## **Achieving equity**

Ensuring equity doesn't mean treating everybody the same. To really achieve equity or fairness for people you sometimes have to treat people differently because their experiences are different.

Many people have experienced past discrimination. Because of this, and the legacies that this has left, such as lack of educational and employment opportunities, we have to provide services and support differently to address past and current discrimination. Equity doesn't mean that everybody has to have access to everything. It's about recognising different cultures. Just like it is very important to have women-only spaces it's important for different cultures to have their own spaces to develop.

So it's not an unfair advantage or reverse discrimination. We're treating people

differently to address past discrimination. The Australian Cricket Board have recognised this. They've acknowledged that Aboriginal people and cricket do not have a great history. The first team that went overseas was an Aboriginal team but since then you have had people like Eddie Gilbert who should've played for Australia but never did. But now they're moving forward.

## **Addressing racism in sport**

To eradicate racism there has to be a new approach within the sporting industry and how it deals with the different cultures that exist. Racism is out there but I'm not trying to point the finger at anybody. It's a matter of awareness and how you react to racism and how you try to eradicate it.

There are many new communities in Australia and they're dealing with language barriers among many other things and sport usually plays a big part in developing their community. You have to go and ask them what sport means to their community. That's what we do in our community. We ask the young people what sport they want to play and how it will fit into their lives.

There is a high percentage of Aboriginal players in the AFL and players like Michael Long and Nicky Winmar did a

lot to draw attention to racism on the field. The AFL initiated rules about racial vilification. However, when we asked them to endorse our national football and netball carnival, the AFL declined because they said it doesn't allow other cultures to participate. That's where we have a point of contention. But when we sit down with the Australian Cricket Board they want to talk to us about how they can develop the game within the Aboriginal communities. We respect the cricket culture and they respect our culture and how things need to happen in our community.

Different structures work differently. In some sports, they are quite mechanical and they say if you want to play our sport you play like everyone else. Some organisations come to VAYSAR and say that they want more Aboriginal people playing their sport.

The best way to develop sport within the Aboriginal community is to organise a game within the community. Eventually the team might link up with other teams and it can grow from there. But don't measure success by how many Aboriginal people are playing the sport because that's not the true meaning of participation.

# Tackling the issues: workshops

**W**orkshops at the forum were designed to allow young people and those working with young people to talk about their experiences of racism and to discuss how they, and the wider community, can combat racism at a local level and beyond. The workshops focused on several key issues:

- n the way racism presents itself at school, in the home and in the workplace;
- n the way in which the media and the government shape public debates about cultural issues;
- n using legal channels to complain about racist behaviour;
- n educating the community about cultural diversity;

The immediate issues of asylum seekers in Australia and the discrimination against Muslim people dominated the discussion in light of recent events.

The workshop discussions are summarised according to different themes.

## theme 1: the source of discrimination

### Key issues

Young people believe that racist views are typically learned from parents. Parents may promote discriminatory opinions, perhaps inadvertently, because of generational differences. They may have not have been educated about cultural issues when they were younger.

Inter-cultural discrimination is an issue. Some parents were themselves refugees or migrants but may not understand the issues facing more recent arrivals. Apprehension about new cultural groups is common. Some parents argue that as they applied to live in Australia in the 'right' way, 'queue jumpers' should not get preferable treatment.

Radio, particularly JJJ, is an important source of information for young people. However, as commercial stations do not address issues such as racism, the young people and adults who only listen to commercial radio may not be educated about the broader issues.

### Addressing these issues

Schools should initiate and promote cultural awareness days that celebrate the diversity of cultures represented at

the school. Parents should be encouraged to attend and participate in these days.

Schools should organise forums for parents that address racism and that promote cultural awareness.

Schools should involve all parents by providing interpreters or translated documents for those parents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.

SBS Radio is a very important resource for many families, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Educational programs should be promoted on SBS to address inter-cultural discrimination.

Much of the analysis around cultural issues occurs in the print media. However, this is not an attractive medium for many young people. Many young people listen to radio and watch TV more regularly than they read newspapers. Therefore, education campaigns around the issues of racism must use a variety of media to get messages across.

## theme 2 employment and complaints

### Key issues

Young people can experience racism within the workplace, particularly in the form of jokes about a person's cultural background. Although many young people do not feel comfortable listening to these comments, they feel unable to take a stand against this behaviour. This is because many are in casual employment with little job security and some are not represented by a union. They feel that they may jeopardise their employment if they make a complaint or voice an alternative opinion.

Young people do not know who they can complain to. Many were unaware of the complaint-handling function of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOCV). Even if young people do know about these bodies, they may not use them as they are seen as inaccessible to young people.

### Addressing the issues

Cultural awareness training for employers. Employers must be educated about the implications of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Legislation.

Young workers should be informed about their rights in relation to racial

discrimination at work or at school and educated about where they can take complaints. Advertising bodies such as they EOCV or local legal centres would be useful.

These organisations should be accessible to young people or a body established that provides support for young people only. Information should be available over the phone, on the internet as well as in person or print.

### Young peoples' voices

The young people at the forum were strongly opposed to war but felt that the Government is not interested in what young people think because they do not vote.

Similarly, young people are used to being 'seen but not heard' at school. Many young people do not feel as though they will be listened to even if they do voice an opinion.

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have even fewer avenues to express themselves.

The pressures associated with VCE mean that many older students do not get

involved in campaigns and strategies to combat discrimination because they do not have the time.

Within a local community, young people are exposed to different levels of education as some schools promote cultural awareness and others do not. Addressing the issues

Allow young people to discuss diversity issues and world events in the classroom as appropriate. Asking students to work on assignments relating to these issues could incorporate this learning into the curriculum.

Schools should encourage and support students to establish working groups which enable young people to organise cultural days, forums or letter writing campaigns, for example. This work could be linked into the curriculum to enable VCE students to participate while fulfilling their coursework.

Students should organise cultural days with other schools in the local area and share ideas about combating racism. This will ensure strategies have a wider impact.

## theme 3: education

### Key issues

Young people believe that there is too little time within the school curriculum to debate issues as they arise, such as the terrorist attacks in New York. This results in misinformation being perpetuated as many people do not understand the context of world events. For example, some young people do not understand why refugees have left their homeland. This can result in greater discrimination as people are not being educated about the bigger issues.

The capacity to talk about these issues at school largely depends on individual teachers being willing and able to incorporate these discussions into their classes.

Older students often hear guest speakers talking about issues such as

diversity. Younger students may miss out on these talks because they are not seen to have the same maturity level.

Some young people are embarrassed by their cultural background and are not encouraged to celebrate their culture at school.

Some schools organise exchange programs that provide a unique opportunity to meet students from different countries and cultures. However, there is often very little formal education about the cultural background of these students.

### Addressing the issues

The students recommended greater flexibility in the school curriculum to discuss world events. This would also enable young people to educate their families and friends about these issues.

Discussions could be incorporated into subjects such as sociology, history and languages but should not be limited to these.

Cross cultural training for both teachers and students. It is important that teachers are educated as they can then pass this information to students. Cultural awareness days may assist this process.

All year levels should have guest speakers that address the issues of racism and cultural diversity. These speakers should be appropriate for different age groups.

Where schools offer exchange programs, students should be educated about the exchange student's country and culture prior to exchange.

## theme 4 exclusion of young people

### Key issues

There is general discrimination against young people in public spaces as there is a perception that young people compromise community safety. Young people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are particularly targeted and there is tension between the police and these groups of young people.

There is a lack of culturally appropriate youth resource centres and recreational spaces for young people at a local level.

Newly arrived young people lack financial resources and this contributes to a lack of access to community resources.

Some services feel unable to deal with the specific issues of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This may lead to the exclusion of these young people from those services.

### Addressing these issues

Strategies should focus on building trust between police and young people from diverse backgrounds. This requires ongoing training for police. One-off training does not have a long-term impact. Informal events that bring together police, young people and community workers can also help to build this trust.

The level of income for young people, particularly those on Temporary Protection Visa should be addressed to ensure young people can participate in community activities.

Ongoing training of services providers concerning refugee and CLD issues and to draw attention to how they may be excluding some young people from their services.

Promote discussion about a Bill of Rights that would enshrine rights and responsibilities into Australia's constitution.