



Public exhibit: Notes from informal consultation, held on 24 August 2022 at the Multicultural Hub, Canberra, of the ECI Committee with culturally diverse young people.

1. Background

- 1.1. The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion (ECI) established the inquiry into racial vilification in the ACT on 11 November 2021 and called for submissions as part of the inquiry.
- 1.2. In her submission, the Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner, ACT Human Rights Commission, invited the Committee to liaise with her office in order to discuss ways to engage the views of children and young people.
- 1.3. The informal consultation held on 24 August 2022 denotes the outcome of that liaison.
- 1.4. Present at the consultation were Committee members, two young African Australian people, two adult staff from the Multicultural Hub, Canberra, and the Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner.
- 1.5. The summary below comprises the experiences of one young person and two adult staff from the Multicultural Hub, Canberra which were discussed during the consultation.

2. Observations

General

- 2.1. One Multicultural Hub staff member recalled an incident when he and a stranger stopped to help a homeless person in the street. They called the police and checked his pockets for his identity. The stranger said to him, 'Make sure you give the wallet to the police'.
He thought it was a racist and un-necessary observation, assuming, because of his colour, that he may be a potential thief.

- 2.2. Targets of racial vilification may vary according to international current events. For example, Chinese people have been targeted during the COVID pandemic.

Subtle racism

- 2.3. One participant noted that she arrived in the ACT two years ago. In her country of origin, Australia was portrayed as a 'good' place. However, on arrival, she experienced subtle racism, which is often not noticed or understood until well after the incident. She deems this the 'worse kind of racism' because it is difficult to identify.
- 2.4. The participant, an African Australian, has a casual job in a restaurant and some diners have asked if they can touch her hair and inquire as to whether she can straighten it. They also remark that her English is 'too good', demonstrating a lack of understanding that English colonisation is internationally prevalent.
- 2.5. The participant noted that it is not easy to speak up in the midst of racism, 'When racism happens, you freeze. It's like a whack in the face and you can't believe it happened'.
'It's hard to have the conversation'.
'I don't want to be the angry, coloured person'.

Public transport

- 2.6. Racism becomes expected. One may become used to a white person not sitting next them on public transport.
- 2.7. Transport is a ubiquitous site for racism, including repetitive racism. Multicultural Hub staff exemplified the case of a single woman who takes her child to school on the tram. She is targeted, for wearing a hijab, by a group who also travel on the same tram each day. She has become frightened because they expect her on the tram. She does not know to whom to report this.

Young people are vulnerable

- 2.8. Young people are often the targets of racial vilification, especially when they socialise in groups.
- 2.9. Tall, black male adolescents and adults may feel self-conscious about their presence instilling fear in white people. For example, groups of African male adolescents are perceived as intimidating. Therefore, teachers need to be educated but teachers need to be motivated to learn.
- 2.10. Some victims are afraid to report incidents of racist vilification in case the police wrongly assume that the victims were the perpetrators. For example, a middle Eastern boy was apprehended by police in Canberra despite that fact that he was the target of racism from a female.
- 2.11. Some have felt frightened at police presence at drop-in centres for culturally diverse young people, even if the scenario is friendly.
- 2.12. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the older generation may be more racist than its younger counterpart. It was suggested that those in power provide the right 'tools' to support young people who want change and an end to racism.

Schools

- 2.13. Multicultural Hub staff noted that principals from both government and non-government schools had contacted the Hub seeking advice regarding racism in their schools.
- 2.14. Schools are not adequately held accountable – for example, no translators available for parents.
- 2.15. Teachers may laugh at racist jokes in the classroom – a noted example of a retort, ‘I’ve heard worse!’
- 2.16. Schools need to have their own policies to address racism, separate to anti-bullying policies. Some young people feel the need to address racism on their own – for example, a boy who was suspended from school for fighting those who continually addressed him with the ‘N-word’, even though he had previously reported this, several times, to teaching staff.
- 2.17. Multicultural Hub staff noted one school that proactively addressed racism. For example, a teacher was suspended for racist behaviour.

Inter-racism

- 2.18. Inter-racism is also a concern – for example an Australian of Fijian Indian origin in Canberra may not feel a sense of belonging from the Indian community in Canberra, nor from the Pacific Islander community.

Need for outcomes

- 2.19. What is needed is tangible outcomes and not tokenist conversations.
- 2.20. The young person noted that there is nothing in her casual work contract about how she will be supported in the case of her being a target of racism at work. Associated policies need to be put in place in workplaces and in schools. These policies should include who to talk to when a racist incident occurs, what to discuss and what the formal responses are.
- 2.21. The group concluded to the Committee, ‘That fact that you’re here today is helpful – the fact that you want to hear from us. We appreciate it!’