

ANTI-RACISM PROJECT

Organisations Involved & Contact Details

Immigrant Women's Speakout Association NSW

Aims & Target Group

Aims: To work in educational, interactive and non-threatening ways with young and older migrant and refugee women on dealing with Racism.

Target Group: Women from a diversity of cultural backgrounds took part, including those from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Russia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Chile, Macedonia, Croatia, Egypt, East Timor, Korea, Cambodia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Australian born women (both NESB and Anglo/Celtic backgrounds). The project focused on Bankstown, Fairfield and Parramatta in metropolitan Sydney and the Illawarra.

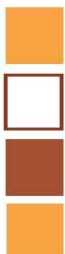
Project Description & Components

Ten workshops were conducted and one informal discussion session, three of these sessions being dedicated to young women.

Two areas of discussion were highlighted as issues of considerable concern : the Media and Employment. In both these arenas the impact of stereotyping was highlighted, and the project worked with media exercises to rework these images.

The project was conducted in collaboration with TAFE Outreaches of Granville, Wollongong and Shellharbour and also with several community organisations - in particular: Australian Arabic Welfare Council, Bankstown Multicultural Youth Services, Cabramatta Community Centre Circuit Breaker (youth training/further education) programme, Fairfield Community Resource Centre, and The Vietnamese Women's Association.

The workshops were designed and conducted by Nadya Stani, with the assistance of an Advisory Committee including Anne Bicer (Granville TAFE Outreach), Melinda Doolan (NSW Ethnic Affairs Council), Soheyla Gholamshahi (Parramatta City Council) and members of Speakout's Staff and Management.





Process

The workshops were developed in conjunction with the organisations or group facilitators with whom the project was running the workshops. The material included in the workshops was drawn from a wide variety of sources: media exercises, cultural action; theatre practice; and anti racism education practice. It was also responsive to some of the 'perceived needs' of the women in the group such as language difficulties and particular issues of concern. A number of education tools were used to trigger discussion and debate. These included videos, photos, hypotheticals, magazines and examples of television drama.

Videos

Two videos were primarily used to ignite debate and feelings. They also provided some humorous outlet for the groups.

Male Emulator was a segment developed for 'Torturevision', a young people's video production created by a group working with the Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) in Parramatta. Torturevision was about how television controls us. Male emulator was about a young Indian man wanting to be like Ray Martin. He paints his face white and says repeatedly to the camera good evening, this is Ray Martin.' The segment ends with the young man wiping off the white paint and walking away from the camera as the 'A Current Affair' theme fades up.

Talking Fruit was a commercial produced for television by the **Berri Fruit company** in 1997. It won the Multicultural Marketing Awards for that year. The commercial features different fruit making racist and disparaging remarks about other fruit.

Photo Language

This is a series of over 100 black and white photos developed by the Catholic Education Office. The idea was developed in France and was designed to encourage young people who feel uneasy or shy about speaking to express themselves through the choice of images about how they feel. The images in these photos have been adapted to Australia and range from people dancing in city streets to Aboriginal communities in central Australia.

Hypotheticals

These were often questions and scenarios put to groups about various situations where racism occurs. Groups were split up and asked to work out some of the ways to address the situation.

Magazines and newspapers

These offered a broad brush view of how Australian diversity was or wasn't expressed in the media. The magazines and papers were used by the groups to create collages of media images of diversity or dominance.

Television drama

This was a segment from Home and Away about the Stolen Generations. It was used as a script writing exercise with young women.





Outcomes

A common theme arising from the workshops held as part of this Anti-Racism Project, has been a sense of alienation as a significant experience for immigrant communities. There are the stories from Vietnamese women about being made to wait in hospital waiting rooms for long periods of time; stories from women from the former Yugoslavia about not knowing where to get assistance when faced with racism; stories from young recently arrived professionals about being rejected again and again for work they are qualified to do and stories from Arab women about seeing the Police harass and victimise their children 'for no reason.'

There are also deeply entrenched attitudes about each other and about Aboriginal communities. It is a disturbing feature of racism in Australia, though this is always a characteristic wherever there's a dominant /minority group paradigm. The existence of racism among immigrant women can be linked in part, to recent attacks on multiculturalism, the rise of Pauline Hanson, attacks on immigrant communities in the and the creation of 'ethnic conflicts' in the media (eg the Lakemba shooting and the stabbing of Edward Le at Bankstown). It is also linked to the lack of engagement with the reconciliation process. Little work seems to have been conducted in this area, and it needs redress: not only to challenge racism and perceptions of indigenous people, but also to link up with women who do want to become involved and support Aboriginal reconciliation. Of the small sample of women who took part in the project, we estimate at least 75% of women were keen to learn about indigenous Australia. This was particularly so with young women who had already formed a sophisticated understanding of Aboriginal issues.

A little documented area of the dynamics of racism has been its impact on newly arrived immigrants and refugees. Anecdotal evidence from youth and community workers suggests that those who are recently arrived are unable to recognise racism as such. For example, they may interpret certain events as personal behavioural traits rather than acts of racism (i.e. being yelled at in the street or being patronised). This is an area that merits further research and community education.

A further finding of the project is the importance of continuing specific information campaigns about rights. Generally, women were unaware of anti discrimination laws and how they could use them. They were also surprised to learn about them and about other services which could assist them in this area.

Another feature which was evident from workshops including Anglo-Celtic women, was a high degree of anger and resentment from Anglo-Celtic women suffering other levels of disadvantage. This is another area which warrants further attention.

Challenges & Obstacles

Funding

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW
(Now Community Relations Commission NSW)

Images

