

CONSULTATION REPORT

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTICULTURALISM, IMMIGRATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

BACKGROUND

On 2 September 2020, the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council (the Council) held a consultation with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds in Townsville to find out more about their attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity.

While there is significant research about general community attitudes towards social cohesion and multiculturalism in Australia, there is limited information specifically about young people's attitudes.

The Scanlon Foundation's Social Cohesion survey (the Survey) indicates that young people are less likely to hold negative attitudes towards multiculturalism than older generations. Compared to people aged over 65, young adults (18 to 24) display a more positive attitude towards meeting and getting to know new people from other cultures and of regularly spending time with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This factor helps contribute to an increased positive attitude towards multiculturalism and cultural diversity, as does the higher number of friends an individual has from culturally diverse backgrounds.

According to the Survey, education levels are also a significant factor in attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity. The 2016 Census indicated that almost 40 per cent of young adults now have a university level qualification, compared to 15 per cent of those over the age of 65 years.

As at 30 June 2018 the number of Townsville youth aged 15 to 24 was approximately 30,289 (15.6 per cent of the population) compared to approximately 656,630 (13 per cent) in Queensland.¹ According to the 2016 Census, approximately 2,396 (8 per cent) of this age group in Townsville were born overseas compared to approximately 110,021 (18 per cent) in Queensland.²

According to the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Youth CENSUS Report 2014³:

- 16.5 per cent of Queensland's working age population were aged 15 to 24 years.
- Young people aged 10 to 24 years made up one-third (33.7 per cent) of all net overseas migration arrivals to Queensland in 2014–15.

¹ Queensland Government Statisticians Office – Queensland Regional Profiles, report generated 24 July 2020

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, (downloaded 24 June 2020), General Community Profile - Townsville

³ The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) Australia – CALD Youth Census Report 2014

PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

The purpose of the consultation was to explore young people's attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and people from diverse backgrounds and identify ways to promote and maintain positive views on multiculturalism in Queensland.

The consultation occurred during a time of rising racism and unemployment, COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, all of which can impact on people's attitudes.

STRUCTURE

Twenty-two young people from across Townsville participated in the consultation, which commenced with a panel discussion. The panellists were Ms Nadia Saeed, from the Queensland Youth Engagement Panel, Ms Ramla Abdirahman, from the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) and Ms Anne Franzmann, Regional Manager of the Queensland Human Rights Commission. The panel was facilitated by Mr Nkosana Mafico, a member of the Council.

The panel discussion was followed by small group, round table discussions facilitated by members of the Council. Within these groups, participants had approximately an hour and twenty minutes to discuss several consultation questions (**Appendix 1**). Staff from the former Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs and Advisory Council members recorded participants' responses.

The afternoon finished with a call to action by the Queensland Human Rights Commission for future engagement opportunities in the region.

Participants were asked their thoughts on the Australian way of life and culture.



KEY RESPONSES

The key themes arising from the consultation were:

- overwhelmingly young people have positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity
- young people experience racism
- factors influencing positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity
- factors influencing negative attitudes, and
- actions that could be taken to promote multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity.

“Education about other cultures is an important part of acceptance.”

THE DETAIL

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTICULTURALISM, IMMIGRATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

Young people see multiculturalism as benefiting Queensland society by providing opportunities to:

- celebrate and express our sameness and differences including language
- bring different cultures together to interact and build relationships
- respect and accept difference
- educate and learn about other cultures and build understanding
- challenge old ways of thinking (e.g. assimilation, fear and racism), and
- experience new foods.



“When I see all the different faces of the world, I see Australia.”

There was also discussion on how migrants had helped to advance the Australian economy through bringing new skills and talents in different fields of endeavour, creating jobs and providing links to the global economy. Migrants have helped make our society more resilient and able to bounce back in times of crisis by coming together (the Black Lives Matter movement and the response to the Christchurch massacre were cited as examples). Migrants also bring different traditions and beliefs, which add more colour to the Australian way of life. It was also noted that Australian culture is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and Australia is a nation made of people from around the world and while it is important to maintain the Australian way of life, it is also important to embrace other cultures.

On the question of whether ethnic minorities should be given government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions, most young people’s views were positive. In a multicultural society, like Australia, government programs encourage people to embrace different cultures and diversity and allow minority groups to feel fully included and appreciated. Everyone’s culture should be valued and sometimes assistance is needed to help people to maintain their culture and traditions and pass it onto their children who may struggle navigating both cultures. Programs that support cultural maintenance, such as festivals, also give us all an opportunity to learn about each other.

One participant did speak about how the Australian culture should be valued more but that it was also the Australian way for all cultures to be treated equally. Another participant spoke of how we elect people to represent us therefore the Australian culture is for everyone, no matter where they were born.

Young people from diverse backgrounds also experience challenges including navigating the differences in beliefs at home and at school, learning about their own culture in a safe way, overcoming language barriers and other barriers due to their visa status.

YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE RACISM

Many of the young people who participated in the consultation had experienced racism, some of it overt, others more covert. Participants spoke about the long history of difficult race relations in Townsville, which impacts on the experiences of refugees settling in the region, including being mis-

“Even though I am Aboriginal, because of the negative experiences of my mum, she said ‘I’m glad you are white’, because I look white.”

identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Experiences in education were highlighted with one participant sharing his story of a teacher assuming, as a refugee with some language difficulties and an accent, he was less educated than the Australian born students and encouraged him into lower ranked subjects.

Challenges when looking for work were also discussed. Young people are careful how they present their name, often anglicising them, and many spoke of experiencing discrimination by employers and recruiters. Coupled with the more limited work opportunities for people living in regional areas compared to capital cities, many participants had struggled to find work. Even when young people were able to get a job, they felt their progression in the workplace was limited.

Young people feel there will always be racism but that attitudes are changing. Events, such as the Christchurch terror attack, bring out entrenched prejudices. There is also the ongoing stereotyping of people from certain backgrounds and the expectation that everyone speaks English.

“What defeats racism isn’t big statements, its everyday little corrections. It’s exhausting, daunting. It would be easier if the environment wasn’t conducive to racism. The media creates a hostile environment.”

The impacts of racism on mental health was discussed as well as some of the strategies young people use to deal with racism such as *“Try to be strong and tell yourself it’s not everyone”*.

FACTORS INFLUENCING POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Schools

Participants spoke of their experiences at school which have helped to promote a positive attitude towards multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity. Some schools have embedded learning about other cultures in home room classes, although participants were keen for more Indigenous history or Pacific history, such as the treatment of Australian South Sea Islanders. Participants spoke of multicultural art projects, Indigenous dances before class and during parade. Some schools also celebrate Harmony Day inviting different cultural groups to perform for students. Hospitality students organised a street food festival featuring food from different cultures.

At one school, students pledge to stand together in humanity, while another student spoke about how the Principal read the stories of students from refugee backgrounds at the graduation awards.

Young people feel they have a voice at school, for example some students helped create a Black Lives Matter movement.

Most of the young people participating in the consultation had friends from different cultural backgrounds and felt this helped shape their attitudes. Some school cultures actively promoted interactions.

Social media

Most of the young participants expressed they never watched mainstream television, but relied on social media for their information, as it provided a lot more perspectives and a platform to share their views.

While young people acknowledged that it can be difficult to determine what is true or false on social media, if in doubt they will look for hard evidence elsewhere. It also provides an opportunity to spread good news.

Most young participants expressed positive experiences on social media, but some did advise they often self-censored, not posting negative or inflammatory stories or changing what they post publicly as opposed to privately. Online discrimination was an issue for some young people, and it was acknowledged that there was a need for more accountability on social media especially when it is used to fuel hate.

FACTORS INFLUENCING NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

There were strong views from participants on the role of mainstream media in shaping public opinion on migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, by:

- creating the impression of overwhelming numbers of migrants arriving in Australia
- drawing links between some cultural groups and gang activity
- unbalanced reporting of people from certain cultural backgrounds breaking the law but failing to report on the good work of the community
- inaccurate reporting of people's cultural background
- sensationalising reporting
- skirting the legal line e.g. blocking out the eyes of individuals accused of a crime but still leaving them identifiable, and
- selective reporting of good 'mainstream' kids.

“What the media perpetrates is very different to my lived experience. My lived experience is much more positive.”

It isn't just the media that shapes opinions and attitudes. Other influences discussed were:

- seeing members of the same community gather in large groups in one area, including in traditional dress, can be confronting
- the language used by government creates the view that refugees are not Australian
- Fear of losing anything they have to others and fear of change

- a lack of education and limited opportunities to experience and understand cultural diversity
- attitudes of older generations influenced by old and outdated policies such as assimilation

Participants spoke of their experience living in a regional area and how this can also influence attitudes. Residents are more spread out and more likely to stay within their local area, which helps build community but can also cause isolation. It was also expressed that larger cities may experience more discrimination and be more divided than smaller regional communities.

It was also discussed how COVID-19 has had an eroding effect on social connections and the work that has been undertaken over many years to address these issues.

ACTIONS THAT COULD BE TAKEN TO PROMOTE MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Participants spoke about how local governments have a role in bringing people together through funding for multicultural festivals and events, and projects that bring different cultures together. Positive messaging by all levels of government and media representation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were also important factors.

Opportunities for human engagement and interaction, including through everyday activities like the car wash, or going to a café, provide an opportunity for people to meet and develop an understanding of what it takes for people to get through every day (e.g. getting kids to school, mental health etc).

Participants also spoke of Harmony Day events at their schools and the local multicultural festival, Culturefest, as providing opportunities to see how people live in other parts of the world.

Volunteer organisations were spoken about as a good way for new arrivals to connect with their new community. However, work is needed to build the cultural capacity of some volunteer organisations, including working with local cultural organisations.

WHAT ACTIONS ARE NEEDED TO STOP RACISM?

- Educating people.
- Support those who experience racism.
- Language support groups.
- Guidance / pastoral support.
- Programs in school.
- Intercultural understanding embedded in curriculum.
- Access to legal help.
- Promote anonymous complaints.
- Calling out racism.
- Active bystander campaigns.
- Promote anti-discrimination toolkit.
- Knowing your rights.
- Storytelling.
- Bringing people from different cultures together.
- Be a positive stereotype / challenge stereotype.
- Report racist actions.

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Other suggestions included:

- making sure people feel included in the workplace
- challenging mainstream media reporting and political messaging
- everyday calling out of racism, modelling compassion and embracing multiculturalism will create cultural change over the long-term
- sustainability of funding for programs that promote and support multiculturalism, support anti-discrimination initiatives and provide assistance for cultural groups to promote understanding and opportunities to walk in their shoes
- quotas for employing people from culturally diverse backgrounds at senior levels in government and business
- teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history in schools (local histories relevant to the region), involving elders and learning about their languages and the loss of culture
- creating a safe place for people from the same cultural background to feel comfortable to practice culture and traditions, and
- using social media and sharing stories, attitudes and activities.

Participants from the Townsville Youth Council spoke about their activities in mental health, domestic and family violence and access and inclusion.

Overall, the young people involved in the consultation had a positive view for the future and are looking forward with hope.

“I want to learn about my culture in a safe way.”