



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Tackling Racism at a Broader Community Level

Submission to the Australian Human Rights
Commission

Brotherhood of St Laurence

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1 The Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Ecumenical Migration Centre

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is an independent non-government welfare organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile on matters of disadvantage, the BSL continues to influence in achieving its vision of an Australia free of poverty. The BSL's service activity, research capability, policy development and principles of advocacy are geared to influence social policy and support social change in ways that genuinely achieve the full social and economic inclusion of all in the broader community. It is this perspective that the BSL brings to the work it does with refugees, immigration and multiculturalism (RIM).

The BSL has developed a broad portfolio of work that falls across four life transitions: children and families in the early years, youth moving through school to work, adults in and out of work and older people facing the challenges of retirement and ageing. Within this framework, the BSL also has expertise in themes that are integrated across these life transitions such as RIM and financial inclusion.

As part of its philosophy of inclusion, the BSL has a specialist refugee and settlement centre, the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), which since 1962 has been at the forefront of work with recently arrived emerging communities as well as longer-settled disadvantaged groups to ensure their full access and participation in Australian society.

In 1999, the EMC and its core areas of RIM were integrated into the BSL to reflect the belief that refugees, settlement and the principles of multiculturalism should be part of mainstream thinking, welfare and social policy responses. This union sought to bring together EMC's history of specialisation in the areas of refugees and humanitarian entrants and the BSL's 80 years' experience in service delivery, research capacity and social policy thinking. The benefits of this union are twofold: the BSL has incorporated settlement issues within its life transitions framework to ensure that social justice, equity and recognition concerns for recent humanitarian entrants are integrated with the broader mainstream effort while simultaneously strengthening the EMC's capacity to contribute to a deeper understanding of exclusion and disadvantage experienced by migrants and refugees through 'forced migration'.

This submission focuses on four of the questions outlined in the terms of reference (TOR), namely providing useful information for inclusion in an anti-racism campaign (Objective 1, Question ii); priority areas in which we should be addressing racism (Objective 2, Question iv); examples of successful strategies in preventing and reducing racism (Objective 2, Question viii); and tools and resources at the community level which could be better utilised in the fight against racism (Objective 2, Question ix).

2 Campaign to Prevent and Reduce Racism

Australia is a country that has largely been built on migration. However, new and emerging migrant communities often experience racism and discrimination, with higher levels of discrimination reported by Australians of Muslim, Middle Eastern, African and Asian backgrounds. These social experiences of exclusion are not only felt by adult populations but by young people

from refugee and migrant backgrounds as well. To be subjected to racism in community settings is equally reflected within institutional settings including schools.

Consultations with communities we work with identified a set of factors that contributes to the prejudice felt by them. These include being subjected to:

- public resentment and a growing mainstream concern over the more pronounced ethnic mix of Australia especially as the new arrivals are coming from non Western/European regions;
- an ongoing public discourse and concern about border control;
- public anxiety concerning terrorism post 9/11; and
- misrepresentation of communities' in the media.

Consequently, experiences of racism can adversely affect migrant and refugee communities by impeding their optimal growth and functioning. Those experiences have a negative impact upon the settlement and transition of new arrivals, leading to psychological distress and inevitably affecting their belonging to and inclusion in the wider Australian society.

Many of the challenges of inclusion such as poverty, under-achievement in education and limited workforce participation are to some extent similar to those confronting disadvantaged socio-economic groups in the mainstream community. However, these challenges are exacerbated for refugee and migrant groups by the politics of difference (us and them) and an increasingly populist rhetoric affirming the notion of a common homogenous identity, where any form of 'otherness' is viewed as threatening. Furthermore, the global financial crisis, and the prospect of renewed recession, adds additional pressure leading to the further demise of social cohesion as social divisions harden in competition of scarce resources.

The Brotherhood recognises the importance of building social capital in ethnically diverse communities and particularly with the host community to address issues of isolation that results from the prejudice held respectively by both newly arrived communities and the host society.

Evidence shows that whilst immigration and cultural diversity brings many benefits, it can also foster isolation and reduce social capital. According to Robert Putnam, people living in ethnically diverse communities appear to 'hunker down' and "pull in like a turtle." It is therefore important to have the right mix of policies to overcome these effects.

To break down racial stereotypes and foster a sense of shared citizenship, Putnam suggests the following:

- Strengthen shared identity by creating more opportunities for meaningful interaction across ethnic boundaries where people learn, work, recreate and live (e.g. community centres, sports clubs and schools).
- Expand public support for English language training, especially in settings that encourage ties among immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Focus these efforts in diverse neighbourhoods with high levels of disadvantage.

The Brotherhood recommends:

- **The development of local, culturally specific, social assistance groups that focus on reaching out to new immigrant communities. These groups would build bonding social capital as a prelude to bridging social capital.**
- **A National Campaign to Prevent and Reduce Racism**

A protective strategy against the effects of racism includes having a national campaign of intervention. The aim of this campaign would be to address divisiveness and intolerance by resolving concerns and anxieties about ethnic diversity and national identity, belonging, and emphasising our collective responsibility to fostering harmonious community relations and a strong society. The campaign's intended target audience is to be the whole Australian community, with particular focus on perpetrators of racism. The campaign needs to have two strands, public awareness and community education.

An example of a successful campaign is the Transport Accident Commission's (TAC) road safety campaign, which has been running for 23 years in Victoria. Showing the impact of speed and drink driving and recognising it as unsafe, dangerous and irresponsible (ie. "If you drink & drive, you're a bloody idiot"), has been an intrinsic part of the cultural change that led to behavioural change. This subsequently led to a substantial reduction in road trauma with a fall in accidents and road deaths. Being racist needs to be just as culturally frowned upon as drink driving and speeding with people being made aware of the impact it has on its victims.

Information that would be useful to include in a campaign to prevent and reduce racism encompass the following:

- Recognition that everyone is equally capable of having biases and that prejudice is not a characteristic flaw. Additionally noting the development of stereotypes about one's own and other cultural groups and the implications of doing that.
- An explanation of racism, how it occurs, and its human and emotional impact. This includes illustrating common racist situations, and describing how the construction of 'otherness' based on stereotypical characteristics of race difference is placed as humour and justified as 'jokes' yet can be very damaging to those at the receiving end of it. Evidence must be presented on how racism is being expressed and experienced in the current Australian context.
- Identify contributions to racism and prejudice and the levels at which they arise. Whether at an interpersonal level (interactions between people that result in unfair inequalities across different groups); institutional level (the lack of substantive equality across ethnic groups); intergroup level (entrenched stereotypes exhibited among the staff of institutions, e.g. the police force, towards particular community groups in the form of over policing and extended surveillance); as well as racist incivilities enacted at a societal level by ordinary people in their dealings with minorities.
- Resource Australians with facts by presenting the reality of racism in Australia to bridge between expert opinion on the issue (informed by empirical research) and the views of ordinary Australians. This reality relies on sharing facts on the heightened experience of discrimination reported by newly arrived migrant and refugee groups.
- Highlight serious repercussions of racism on the victims, their immediate families and the community. Use direct quotes from newly arrived refugee and migrant groups, to show the

multiple forms of disadvantage racism creates and the difficulties these groups face. A powerful message would involve stories that show the serious negative impacts of racist bullying. For example, a young student's loss of trust in fellow students and community involvement or an older person from a refugee background attesting to their preference to return to a war-torn nation due to the hostile reception that they have experienced and the difficulty in establishing a secure and stable living environment in Australia.

- Inform public opinion by emphasising that refugees are ordinary people fleeing extraordinary circumstances, so that public perception of the refugee as an individual can be clearly separated from the perception of the conditions they are fleeing from. As a large majority of Australians have little understanding and knowledge of immigrants coming from the Middle East and Africa, they hold negative views about these immigrants and associate them with the chaotic conditions of the countries they fled from. It is crucial to allay fears of ordinary Australians about these chaotic conditions and the panic they experience with regard to the resettlement of migrants from Africa and the Middle East. This requires a need to recognise refugees and migrants as a heterogeneous group that have similar dreams and aspirations to everyone else's. These commonalities would be entry points.
- Present actions to redress racism for victims and bystanders. This includes recognising a spectrum of responses and bystander approaches to reduce discrimination and its associated harms. These responses must be explored in relation to the varied forms and levels of racism, and across multiple levels and settings.
- Adopt a story-telling approach with a consistent message.

3 Priority Areas to Address Racism

In responding to the Term of Reference, community consultations identified that discrimination affects people in multiple contexts including employment, education, housing and the media.

Employment

Early consultations with refugee and migrant jobseekers who attend the Brotherhood's Centre for Work and Learning Yarra (CWLY) has revealed a number of barriers to finding sustainable employment.

We have found that despite attaining education or participating in vocational training, many community members have not been able to utilise their skills, share their expertise and actively participate in the Australian job market. One of the most significant barriers identified was discrimination in recruitment. Even when community members do participate in training recognised in Australia, they still experience problems obtaining suitable and sustainable work in their area of expertise.

In some community groups, especially from African and Middle Eastern countries, it is common that many feel compelled to anglicise their names in order to give themselves a better chance of having their job applications considered. At the Brotherhood, we are aware that job applicants from refugee and migrant backgrounds would need to apply for more jobs than Australian-born candidates in order to receive the same number of interviews.

Such incidence of racism in employment has serious implications not only for the job applicant but their families as well. Unemployment results in lower self-esteem and self-confidence. Shame associated with not providing for their families and concern about the possibility of perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage are common areas of distress for communities.

An example of innovation arising out of our extensive work looking at successful and sustainable responses to reverse the significant unemployment rates of refugees and address racism is *Given the Chance* (GtC) program. The work of the Brotherhood here presents a strong argument for more effective investment to assist newly arrived refugee and migrant communities in the labour market.

Recommendation: Government to invest in employment programs that engage employers and provide mentors.

Given the Chance

The GtC is an adaptable employment pathways program that was developed in 2002 by the Brotherhood to generate employment pathways for refugees. The GtC program was designed to respond to a range of barriers for refugee job seekers including: discriminatory attitudes of employers, labour market conditions in regional areas of settlement, lack of understanding of the cultural issues in the Australian workplace, and lack of employment history and networks.

The program has remained flexible, being developed over a number of years, to remain most responsive to employer and industry recruitment requirements, as well as the needs of jobseekers. Critically, the program has been tested with a variety of key partner employers over consecutive years. It is now recognised, amongst several industries, to be a successful approach to recruiting motivated staff, and a means for creating diverse workplaces that reflect the communities in which they operate their businesses.

The GtC program relies on a set of integrated support strategies including partnering with employers to develop pre-employment training for jobseekers (in line with business and industry need) to prepare new workers for paid work placement opportunities. Key program elements include intensive training in English as a second language to enhance understanding of Australian workplace culture; training for participating employers; supported business mentoring; as well as traineeships and direct job placement with large and medium-sized businesses. Clients of the GtC program also receive case management from experienced and highly qualified caseworkers who assist refugee job seekers to find, obtain and keep work.

Mentoring constitutes a large part of the GtC: refugee job seekers, based on their individual career aspirations, are matched to a Brotherhood-brokered mentor with relevant business knowledge and skills. The mentors provide community connections and open the door onto Australian workplaces and everyday culture. They also provide guidance and support throughout the job search process as well as valuable insights into accessing desired industries.

Overcoming Structural Disadvantage

Partnerships established with national employers like the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ) and Woolworths bring a direct 'line of sight' to paid employment as well as building employment-related skills. The Brotherhood exhausts organisational, mentoring and industry networks to source individual opportunities that best matches a jobseeker's pathway plan. We acknowledge that among several structural factors that obstruct labour market participation of

newly arrived communities; some are due to employer attitudes. Hence we see the value of job brokerage and offering customised preparation and support for employers to prepare supervisors and allocated 'buddies' with the knowledge and tools they need to ensure a successful experience for both the employer and the jobseeker.

The second line of sight to a real job is through an on-the-job support by setting up internal support structures to clarify requirements as well as preparation traineeships in a community enterprise or with a host employer. An evaluation of the GtC employment model conducted in 2007 by the BSL's Research and Policy Centre demonstrated success in the development of social, educational and employment outcomes for people from refugee backgrounds. Many participants found mentoring to be a beneficial aspect of the program, particularly in expanding refugees' social networks and overcoming social and economic barriers. The involvement of these volunteer community mentors has added considerable value to refugee job seekers, representing a significant benefit in building social capital. The GtC training has enhanced employment-related skills and understanding of Australian workplace norms. The work placements have proven to be beneficial in promoting employment opportunities and securing jobs. There were less tangible benefits as well, such as refugees and mainstream Australians becoming more trusting of each other.

To this end we recommend:

- **Continuing support of mentoring programs that helps connect members of new and emerging communities with mentors from various industries to guide them. Contacts formed from mentoring quite often lead to work experience and/or employment outcomes as well break down stereotypes and broaden networks.**
- **Job brokerage as successful individual brokered opportunities often lead to expanded commitment and employer partnerships over time.**
- **Government to develop a strategy to address racism in the workplace by acknowledging the above mentioned barriers and increase their efforts in supporting entry-level type of positions within the private sector; and act as a role model by boosting opportunities in the government sector.**

Education

Our consultations reveal that newly arrived communities believe that education is an essential part in their successful settlement in Australia, however these communities often encounter negative experiences when attending educational institutions. Experiences of discrimination were regularly highlighted including bullying or alienation that leads to disrupted schooling, a lack of cultural competency amongst school staff, low expectations regarding the capacity of new arrivals to learn as well as poor engagement with parents. In relation to adult learners, it was reported that barriers encountered to English language acquisition are common.

To this end, to improve access to education we recommend the need for:

Within Schools;

- **Professional development for school staff and an increased support for teachers to develop effective and culturally appropriate strategies so as to enhance understanding of cultural backgrounds of students and ensure that certain stereotypes were not reinforced. This includes developing the capacity of principals and teachers by**

engaging in whole-school initiatives to combat racism and reduce the impact of racism on the wellbeing of students.

- **Ongoing targeted professional development for teachers to enable them to identify issues of racism active in the school (i.e. bullying).**
- **Positive ties between parents and schools. This requires both parents and teachers to be proactive and participate in regular orientation sessions to identify concerns and work collaboratively to address them. Where possible these should be offered with interpreters.**
- **People from ethnic communities to register and offer to visit schools in a *Community Speakers Program* to share their experiences and raise awareness of their cultures, question attitudes towards race and diversity, and build rapport.**
- **Increase funding for schools to use translators and interpreters.**

Within the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

- **AMEP to adequately cater to the needs of communities, by providing a range of learning options and strategies rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.**
- **English language teachers and aides to develop an understanding of the refugee and settlement experience, including the impacts of torture and trauma so that they are able to provide a more appropriate and effective learning experience.**
- **AMEP to target and assist this group by involving community members in designing the content of the curriculum and in selecting an appropriate style to its delivery. This would involve training community members to teach introductory level of AMEP.**

Housing

In attempting to secure suitable and permanent accommodation, our clients are challenged by discrimination and/or a lack of cross-cultural awareness on the part of real estate agents. While there are programs currently operating that seek to build cooperative relationships between community groups and estate agents, we believe there is still a need to showcase and reward the services that support newly arrived communities.

Recommendations:

- **Broker relationships and liaise with real estate agents to enhance understanding of the housing needs of our clients and the challenges they face.**
- **The Government to better resource and award agencies that demonstrate an inclusive, fair and equitable service.**

Media

There are occasions when the image of an ethnic, cultural or religious community finds itself under intense public scrutiny due to actions or comments of an individual or individuals associated with that community group, especially with the aid of the media. For newly arrived communities without an established knowledge of how to handle such pressure, this experience can be

overwhelming, isolating and disenfranchising. It can also lead to deep mistrust of the mainstream media.

The continued over-emphasis of ethnicity as physical descriptors in media reporting reinforces discriminatory perceptions that a person's race, religion or ethnicity is a primary factor of importance related to their conduct, beliefs or personal attributes. This type of reporting across a sustained period increases broader community mistrust of particular religious or ethnic communities, heightening incidents of harassment and racism. While there have been positive improvements by media outlets reporting in accordance with the Australian Press Council's Guideline No. 248 'Reporting on Race' and Guideline No. 261 'Religious Terms', these guidelines were still breached by a few incidents last year where the impacts on the affected communities were substantial.

Recommendations:

- **Better representation and reflection of communities in the Australian media.**
- **Showcase and promote the positive contribution that newly arrived communities make to the social, economic and cultural life of Australia.**
- **Provision of cadetships in media for newly arrived communities.**

4 Examples of Successful Strategies in Preventing or Reducing Racism

Mentoring

At the Brotherhood, we actively involve volunteer mentors in our programs to increase social interaction, and enhance community confidence and social participation. As previously explained, the GtC model is an example where mentoring was applied as a successful strategy in bridging between mainstream and newly arrived communities to enhance cross-cultural understanding and knowledge sharing. Facilitating an interaction between different groups where know-how is presented, personal information is shared and cooperative work towards goals is fostered has shown to maximise changes in stereotyped and prejudiced thinking.

Stepping Stones

Mentoring is also a key feature of the Brotherhood's *Stepping Stones* program. The program promotes and provides mentoring opportunities for women. It recruits and trains successful women in the business sector to mentor newly arrived women from refugee backgrounds on a one-on-one basis. The aim of mentoring is to increase the women's social interaction, knowledge acquisition and to facilitate understanding of the requirements and implications of starting a new business in Australia as a way of offering a flexible and empowering income-generation alternative for refugee women who face barriers to economic participation in Australia. The program recognises refugee women's entrepreneurial skills and experiences in micro-enterprises overseas and matches them to mentors so that their ideas for businesses in Australia are supported. Through the mentoring sessions, refugee women are supported to achieve their goals by understanding and interpreting

their needs/strengths and aligning those with a viable business opportunity. Mentors during the one-on-one sessions not only share knowledge of financial systems and business structures in Australia but they motivate the women, providing guidance with goal setting and improve their communication skills. All women involved in the program commit to attending their one-on-one mentoring sessions at least once a fortnight for a year.

In *Stepping Stones*, we recognise the importance of monitoring mentoring activities and offering mentors with opportunities to access group support and enhance mentees' learning outcomes.

Relationships formed between mentors and the refugee women have created opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, skill development support, connections with the wider community and expansion of networks. These relationships are a step to overcoming racism as they encourage acceptance, enhance cross-cultural understanding and reduce prejudice.

Homework Club

A further example of a Brotherhood program that recognises the value that volunteer tutors bring to secondary students from newly arrived refugee and migrant backgrounds is the *Homework Club*. The BSL *Homework Club* provides a venue for learning which is more appealing to disengaged and disadvantaged students. It is an intervention program that aim to provide low-income, at-risk young people with the opportunity to develop the academic and social skills needed to ensure a positive school experience.

The program has been crucial in addressing students' low school attachment which results from rejection or a strained relationship with teachers, or from racist bullying, and poor self-esteem.

At the *Homework Club*, students have access to a wider range of free resources such as reference books and computers and most importantly they get assistance with their school work from volunteer tutors. As volunteer tutors make a regular, long-term commitment with assisting the students, rapport is built and trusting friendships are formed while building study routines that would help young people throughout high school.

Volunteers have made a major contribution by tutoring in high-demand subjects, as well as taking on mentoring roles, providing vocational and personal or life advice. The relationships they formed with students have been found to increase student interest in learning and build self-esteem and study routines while reducing risk behaviours. Students' access to role models and mentors who are available to discuss issues related to careers and life in general has been very valuable as it more effectively addressed the familial and environmental barriers which hinder full participation in learning.

Students with regular and sustained attendance at the *Homework Club* demonstrated an improvement in their attendance and academic performance at school, including an increased student interest in learning, confidence, homework completion and learning skills. Other immediate benefits from the volunteer mentor and student relationship has been an improvement of students' social skills and the cross-cultural significance of these relationships, as in many cases they are the students' strongest relationships with people whose first language is English or who were born in Australia. There are broader community benefits resulting from volunteer engagement particularly around the development of links with the students' parents and the growth of trust and understanding across cultures which promotes social cohesion.

Peer-to-Peer

At the Brotherhood, we use a peer education model with young people because it guarantees the connection of life experiences shared by young people with other young people. The Brotherhood has an established history of delivering peer education models to newly arrived young people. At present we are funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to deliver the *Youth 2 Youth* program, which is training and employing young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to facilitate workshops for “newly arrived young settlers” to improve settlement outcomes for this group. The approach is proving to be successful in engaging young people and in bridging between established and emerging communities.

The peer educator model is used to recruit young people to become educators. We provide extensive training to a pool of young people, who have to undergo a formal recruitment process with the Brotherhood, with the successful candidates involved in planning and delivering information workshops. Those recruited to become peer educators will co-facilitate workshops delivered to their peers (newly arrived young refugees). Following the training and recruitment processes, the peer education content is piloted and delivered. This resource is then evaluated and adapted based on strengths and implemented in the following training/workshops. Following the workshops, graduation ceremonies are held to celebrate the achievements of young participants. These ceremonies act as sites where young people pledge to be leaders campaigning for a range of messages.

We found that the peer-education model strengthens the leadership and communication capacity of young people from refugee backgrounds. It enables peer engagement in discussions about a range of topics including racism and conflict resolution, examining related issues identified by young people and supporting them by sharing information about available support options.

The peer educator model also assists young Australians of migrant and refugee backgrounds to become more amenable to engaging in conversations with young people from the wider society. The success of the model is that messages are transmitted in ways that are relevant to youth (peer) cultures, with peer educators communicating messages that are meaningful to other young people. The peer educators also act as “insiders”, drawing upon their peer networks to get other young people engaged in these topics.

A key benefit of the peer education model is its ability to train and support young people as they play an active role in preparing and changing public opinion or readiness within their communities. Furthermore, there are precedents for the use of peer educator model to address topics such as racism. We found that it provides a holistic approach for young people as it enables them to become pro-active about prevention through the development of leadership and communication skills and the provisioning of support structures to encourage greater involvement in social activities that prevent racism.

At the peer level, the peer education model creates a cultural change by supporting young people in groups to examine a whole set of ideas, enabling the creation of new cultures amongst peer circles. Peer education also addresses community attitudes and ideas by:

- a) Developing a pool of young leaders who champion anti-racism messages within their peer circles, cultural and linguistic communities and wider community

- b) Strengthening the capacity of young people (as a collective group) to take action to prevent the perpetration of racism
- c) Building networks of young people who seek to challenge social norms about racism and promote alternative forms of conflict resolution
- d) Delivering a range of targeted and creative campaigns for other young refugees and migrant people disseminating anti-racism messages
- e) Providing a structured community program (extracurricular from school) where they can interact with pro-social peers, learn skills, and interact with adults in a positive way.

Utilising the peer educator model, we acknowledge that young people are expert learners and have much to contribute to the field of primary prevention. Nurturing young people's ownership and incorporating community led solutions into our approach develops a strong and clear commitment by them to not engage in forms of racism. Building communication and leadership skills in young people, will ensure cultural appropriateness and enlist them as champions who can disseminate their knowledge to the wider community.

5 Tools at the Community Level for Better Utilisation in the Fight Against Racism

Upon consultations with our clients, we identified several tools that would be effective to break down racism and prejudice. These include:

- Maximising use of resources by tapping into existing networks and bringing communities together from across locations to identify successful community driven initiatives, capture best practice projects and identify opportunities for partnerships. By drawing on these networks, positive role models will be identified to promote a sense of empowerment to their community groups.
- Developing an accessible resource for communities that include best practice projects. Young people could be resourced to assist members in their community in capturing what they do well.
- Harnessing community resources by recognising that the community has tools and skills and that they are best placed to address the racism encountered by members in their communities. Community elders/leaders play an essential role in facilitating the process of change, thus it is important to work with them, give primacy to their perspectives and involve them when developing solutions and action plans.
- Provision of support to communities by resourcing them with a liaison person whose responsibility is to build community capacity in addressing racism and reducing social isolation.

6 Conclusion

Thank you for staging this worthwhile inquiry and the opportunity to make a submission. We look forward to your recommendations contributing to a more equitable society.