



Sample Project Model

Connections: Culturally Diverse Youth Development Project

Background

The racial and cultural conflicts of 2005 that spread from Cronulla and Brighton Beaches have been identified as ongoing issues in the Sutherland Shire and St George Region¹. Local council plans have highlighted the need for strategies to increase cultural awareness and improve understanding of diverse cultures to prevent such conflicts in the future².

Consultations and focus groups with young people provided feedback about how to best address the intolerance and cultural conflicts. In their feedback, the young people indicated preferences for educational workshops, cultural harmony activities and networking conducted in a safe space where young people from diverse cultural backgrounds can speak out, share ideas and learn from each other³.

Connections: Culturally Diverse Youth Development Project applied a model to engage secondary school students from diverse backgrounds in actively finding solutions to issues around racism and creating social change. The project adopted a peer education model where the students were trained in leadership skills and the skills and knowledge to implement and facilitate an anti-racism forum for peers from secondary schools across the St George and Sutherland regions. The young people created and own the slogan for the anti-racism forum, 'We all smile in the same language—stop racism!'

¹ Consultations with various youth services, media releases, Anti-racism Subcommittee 2009/10, evaluation reports from 2003, 2007 and 2009 Anti-Racism Project: St George Youth Services.

² Rockdale, Hurstville, Kogarah and Sutherland 2004, 2005 and 2009 Social Plans and Community consultations and/or focus groups with young people.

³ Evaluation report 2003 Anti-racism Project, St George Youth Services; feedback to the future focus groups 2004; feedback participants from Anti-racism Forum 2007 and 2009 with St George Youth Services, as well as cultural diversity workshops with schools in the St George and Sutherland areas.

Peer education model

The peer education model was implemented with the aim to promote youth participation, which is a proven and effective way to deal with sensitive issues and engage and educate young people in a non-threatening way. Peer education typically involves the members of a given group effecting change among other members of the same group, through discussion and an exchange of ideas between equals, according to social learning theory.

Peer educators are positive role models who share their knowledge and encourage and inspire other members of their peer group. In this document, the peer educators are referred to as youth leaders.

The youth leaders were aged 15–18 years and attended secondary schools within the St George and Sutherland regions. After completing training in leadership skills, the youth leaders developed and facilitated an anti-racism forum with the support of local community services mentors.

Implementing the project

Stage 1 Scoping the local regions

Scoping was an essential part of the project. Scoping was done prior to recruiting the youth leaders and mentors. Scoping involved identifying and consulting with the key stakeholders in the local regions, including secondary schools and other relevant organisations. The scoping stage helped to identify any issues that could arise during the project implementation; it also promoted the project.

Two regions were targeted for the project: Sutherland and St George. Therefore, contacts were developed with the Shire Wide Youth Services at Sutherland and with the St George Youth Services (where the project officer was located). Other important contacts were developed through Centrelink, police services, youth services, local councils, the NSW Department of Education and Training, Migrant Resource Centre, and TAFE. The secondary schools in both regions were contacted directly. Most schools have an anti-racism contact officer (ARCO) and while some ARCOs were difficult to engage, a request to the Department of Education and Training (which coordinates the ARCOs) to promote the program to ARCOs proved successful. It would have been beneficial for the project officer to attend the training of ARCOs with the Department of Education and Training to promote the project in the early stage (this was being negotiated for future projects).

Stage 2 Recruitment of youth leaders and adult mentors

Youth leaders

Young people aged 15–18 were recruited from the St George and Sutherland regions as members of the volunteer working team to facilitate workshops at the anti-racism forum and help organise

the event. The project officer regularly attended youth networks in the Sutherland and St George regions to promote the project, and flyers were distributed to youth and community services, schools newsletters, local newspapers, and the local Koori radio station. The project officer visited secondary schools, presenting information about the program at school assemblies, speaking with relevant staff and meeting students. In this way, the project officer successfully recruited participants.

Young people registered their interest in participating in the program, and at interviews they were asked to explain why they wanted to undertake youth leadership training for the anti-racism project/forum.

Adult mentors

Adult mentors were recruited from the various networks developed during the scoping stage. Adult mentors with vast experience in the youth sector and related fields were selected. The role of the mentors was to support the project officer with training the youth leaders, and to support the youth leaders with facilitating the workshops at the two-day forum. The mentors were given an outline of their role and were invited to contribute their expertise and skills to the training process.

The role of adult mentors included the following:

- being familiar with the project's aims and objectives (including the methodology and facilitation of the forum)
- supporting youth leaders in running workshops/activities
- giving encouragement
- prompting the youth leaders, if needed
- addressing challenging group behaviours and assisting with problem solving
- distributing materials
- assisting group members and youth leaders with time-keeping
- debriefing with youth leaders at the end of each day, and providing positive feedback and encouragement.

Mentors were rostered to attend after-school training sessions held during the three-month training period. This gave the youth and community workers the opportunity to get to know the youth leaders, to develop a positive rapport with them, and so better support them during the two-day forum. It is necessary to get a strong commitment from the mentors to attend as many of the training sessions as possible so that they can develop strong relationships with the youth leaders.

Stage 3 Youth leader training

The youth leaders attended training one afternoon per week from 4.30 to 6.30 pm. To ensure the youth leaders equally shared travelling time, the training was held at alternate venues: St George

Youth Services at Rockdale and Shire Wide Youth Services at Sutherland. Transport (community buses), refreshments and dinner were provided on each training day. The training focused on developing the necessary skills for conducting the anti-racism forum. The training sessions covered topics such as group agreements, icebreakers, facilitating and prompting discussion, and effective communication skills (i.e. active listening, appropriate body language, paraphrasing, etc.). Most of the training was conducted by the project officer, as well as some of the adult mentors.

Other topics covered in the three months of training included:

- leadership and group facilitation
- mediation and conflict resolution
- interpersonal and effective communication skills
- working with media and Internet publishing
- cultural diversity, including Aboriginal studies
- event organisation.

During each training session, the youth leaders helped develop the activities to be presented during the forum. Over the three months, the youth leaders developed the skills and confidence necessary to effectively conduct the anti-racism forum.

To increase links between the project officer and youth leaders and to encourage cohesion between the youth leaders, a Facebook page was developed called 'Anti-Racism Project for St George & Sutherland'. The project officer and two volunteer staff monitored the Facebook 'wall', posting relevant news and suggesting educational websites and/or materials. This was a successful way to keep the young people engaged, supported and motivated between the training sessions.

During the training, the youth leaders were paired—one young person from St George with one from Sutherland and, where possible, one male with one female. This pairing required some of them to step out of their comfort zone, further adding to their personal growth. An adult mentor was then matched with and assigned to each pair, supporting the pair up to and including the forum. This process of pairing the youth leaders and assigning the adult mentors involved careful consideration of the knowledge, confidence and personality of each person.

Stage 4 Anti-racism forum

The youth leadership training culminated in the two-day anti-racism forum. The forum was facilitated by the youth leaders with support from the mentors.

Anti-racism forum participants

The forum targeted male and female participants aged 14–18 years who were residing or studying in the St George or Sutherland regions. The forum was initially promoted through the two youth networks in these regions, followed by promotion through school newsletters,

presentations at school assemblies, the local Koori radio station, newspapers, and flyers hand delivered to local businesses and schools. Word-of-mouth and presentations at various meetings and networks also contributed to the promotional activities. The project officer sent an information package that included the project's aims and objectives and forum details to all schools in both areas and to the members of the Youth Anti-Racism Network for St George and Sutherland and the multicultural officer with the NSW Department of Education and Training who had direct contact with the schools' ARCOs. Closer to the date of the forum, the information package was re-sent to relevant contacts in each school (i.e. ARCOs and welfare teachers, Student Representative Council coordinators, school principals, etc.). This later mailing included the parent/guardian's permission form and the registration form requesting relevant medical/photo consents for the forum participants.

Each school was asked to send up to ten participants/representatives and to aim for gender balance. Some schools have indicated more students were interested in attending than were accommodated once the numbers of participants was arranged equally between interests in both areas. Eighty-five young people attended the 2010 two-day anti-racism forum.

At the end of each day, the participants completed evaluation forms, which included feedback on the workshops, activities, entertainment, venue, and youth leaders. They were also asked to include any changes in their attitude about learning, the issue of racism, improvements, etc.

Forum outline

The first day of the forum included an Aboriginal elder and activist as guest speaker, a hip-hop artist and entertainer, a hip-hop dancing group, a drumming workshop, and large and small group activities, as well as fun and thought-provoking workshops. The first day was designed to provide participants with information on the subject of racism, including the different types and origins of racism, the causes of racism and its effects on people. After the large group activities and icebreakers, the youth leaders took their groups to the separate venues, which were divided with the panels and named after continents, each group carrying the name of a country on that particular continent. Food and entertainment were provided at morning-tea and lunch, as well as a spontaneous hip-hop dance performance from the Hurstville Boys High School hip-hop group who were guest entertainers as well as participants.

The second day's format focused on debriefing and re-enforcing the group agreements made on the first day, confirming the knowledge, and exploring solutions to the issues of racism in different settings. The workshops included strategies and case studies, as well as large and small group activities to deal with and combat racism, such as a trivia competition and playback theatre, as in previous years. At the end of the forum, participants were given show bags with gifts and relevant information on services to help address the issues.

Stage 5 Youth leader debriefing

At the end of each day of the forum, debriefing meetings were held with that day's youth leaders, mentors and volunteers to reflect on and discuss their day and to provide support on any issues that had arisen.

At the final debriefing and get-together, there was a special presentation to say thank you to the youth leaders and to acknowledge their hard work and dedication to the project. The leaders received gift vouchers, certificates, and personal character references. The final debriefing aimed to learn what had and had not worked during the project and to discuss any personal issues and/or feelings post-project.