

Youth and Family Services | December 2023

Summary Report

Understanding young people's experiences of Racism and Discrimination in Greater Dandenong



BACKGROUND

The Greater Dandenong Young Leaders program provides a unique opportunity for young people aged 16-25 years to develop leadership skills and increase their participation in the economic, social, cultural, and business aspects of the community. The Young Leaders program features two main components:

1. Capacity Building

Participants develop skills across a wide range of topics including leadership, communication, public speaking, advocacy, and conflict management. Young people are also introduced to the role of local government and attend a Greater Dandenong Council meeting and meet the sitting Councillors.

2. Community Projects

The second part of the program involves supporting participants to explore and understand the needs of young people in the local community. Using the skills, they develop through the program, the leaders plan and deliver community projects that address identified priority issues.

In 2023 the priority issues of 'racism and discrimination' and 'climate change' were assigned to Young Leaders as their project topics. These priority topics were chosen in response to the findings from consultation activities and feedback from young people in the Greater Dandenong community.

This report presents the summary findings of the Young Leaders' Racism and Discrimination project which sought to further investigate, identify, and understand young people's (12-25 years) experiences of racism and discrimination in Greater Dandenong.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Greater Dandenong is Australia's most culturally diverse municipality. In Greater Dandenong there are approximately 20,300 residents aged 12-24 years, representing 17 percent of the total population. The 2021 ABS Census data shows that 39 percent of these young people were born overseas, coming from 86 different birthplaces, with 66 percent speaking languages other than English at home.

Whilst Council celebrates its vibrant and diverse community, it is also aware of the ongoing challenges of racism and discrimination and the need for further action in supporting its community members. The 2022 Mission Australia Youth Survey, young people rated equity and discrimination as their second-highest issue of national concern¹.

Council's Youth and Family Services (CGD YFS) have led several initiatives that evidence that racism and discrimination are issues experienced by young people in Greater Dandenong. These findings have been cited in several self-published studies, including CGD YFS's submission to the Anti-Racism Taskforce Paper, published in 2021. This paper was informed by a range of consultation activities with local young people, including a youth project group, Changemakers appointed in June 2021, a Youth Leadership Forum held in March 2021; and the 2020 Greater

¹ Mission Australia Youth Survey 2022

Dandenong COVID-19 Research Project which principally engaged young people and families. It is this latter paper that specifically cited that:

- 20.7 per cent of young people in Greater Dandenong are ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ concerned about discrimination in their community.
- 9.3 per cent of young people in Greater Dandenong are concerned that discrimination will be a barrier to achieving their post-school goals. This is three times higher than the average level of concern across Victoria.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on young people’s experiences of racism and discrimination with increased incidents of racism occurring during this time.

This illustrates that young people may experience racism in all aspects of their lives, from their working and learning environments, including their commute on public transport, as well as in the community. The prevalence of settings where young people can be exposed to, or experience racism highlights the profound negative impact racism can have on their sense of community belonging, safety and their feelings about their future.

In 2022, the City of Greater Dandenong and City of Casey partnered with Victoria University to conduct a place-based project aimed at improving responses to racism in the local community. The study, *“Towards improved anti-racism support in Casey and Greater Dandenong²”*, found that:

- Three-out-of-five participants or their families had experienced racism in the previous 12 months, mainly at work, when shopping, or at school.
- Four-out-of-five respondents who experienced racism did not report it.

31 percent of the respondents from this study were aged between 18 and 35 years. Building on the themes of Victoria University’s Report, the 2023 Young Leaders were interested to further explore a younger cohort’s experience of racism and discrimination, that is 12-25 years. [*Whilst the Victoria University study did include young people aged 18 – 25, there was no targeted approach to garner the individual and specific experiences of young people, and the experiences of young people under 18 years were not captured].

The 2023 Young Leaders Racism and Discrimination project featured two parts.

1) Understanding Young People’s experiences of racism and discrimination in Greater Dandenong Survey; and 2) The Diversity Rise Youth Forum.

This report focusses on the results of the survey.

² Peucker, M. and Clark, T. (2023) *Towards improved anti-racism support in Casey and Greater Dandenong*. Melbourne: Victoria University. <https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-04/anti-racism-report-2023.pdf>

The Key Objectives of the Racism and Discrimination in Greater Dandenong Survey were to:

1. Obtain personal insights, and feedback on the experiences of racism and discrimination of young people (12-25 years) from Greater Dandenong.
2. Identify the barriers which prevent young people from Greater Dandenong reporting incidents of racism and discrimination.
3. Formulate recommendations to improve reporting pathways and supports for young people from Greater Dandenong who have experienced racism and discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

The project sought to engage with young people aged 12-25 with a connection (live, play, work, study) to the City of Greater Dandenong.

The 2023 Young Leaders led the development of the survey with support from Youth Services staff. The Young Leaders proactively distributed the survey through their peer networks and communities.

The survey conducted included the following six key questions:

1. How often have you experienced or seen an incident of racism and/or discrimination that involved young people?
2. From your experience where do (mostly) incidents of racism and discrimination occur for young people?
3. Would you report an incident of racism and discrimination?
4. If yes, where would you report it?
5. If no, why would you not report an incident of racism and discrimination?
6. What would encourage you to feel safe and supported as a young person, to make a report of racism and discrimination?

The survey was administered online and accessible for a 6-week period, between August and October 2023.

A total of 326 young people completed the survey.

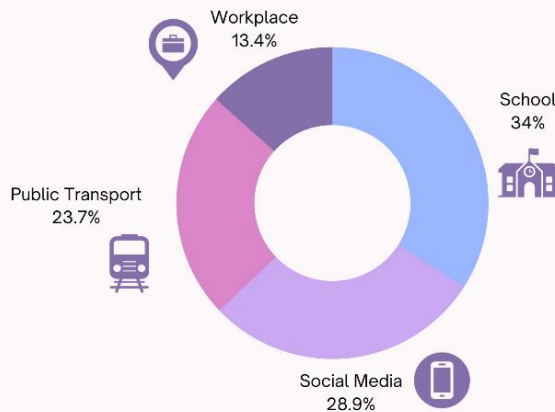
Youth and Family Services supported the Young Leaders with the analysis of key findings, with staff preparing the following report based on the survey responses.

KEY FINDINGS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION



Over 90% of respondents stated that they had seen or experienced an incident of racism that involved young people

Respondents stated that incidents of racism and discrimination occur for young people mostly at school, on social media, and on public transport and the workplace.



Respondents also stated that incidents of racism and discrimination occur in public places such as in shopping centres, during organised sport or within family settings

These results are congruent with the findings of previous Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services consultation activities. Young people identified a range of settings in which racism occurs, however, they agreed that racism can (and does) occur across all facets of society. These findings are also consistent with the findings of the 'Towards Greater Anti-Racism Support' study whereby respondents identified the workplace, shopping centres, education/schools and social media as being where racism occurs most frequently.

“Within social settings between friends. Although small remarks are made as jokes, they still affect you on a subconscious level”

“I was crossing the road and this lady called me a racial slur and told me to get off the road.”

“Especially online, or in small remarks by people in school”

“It's kinda integrated into Aus culture. I feel like it's very normalised in just everyday talk.”

KEY FINDINGS: REPORTING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

When asked “Would you report an incident of racism and discrimination?” 55% of participants responded “Yes”. However, when prompted with subsequent questions, the level of confidence for reporting an incident reduced, with a discernable number of respondents citing they did not know where or how to report, or did not feel confident reporting.



Figure 1. If no, why would you not report an incident of racism and discrimination?

Respondents rated ‘to be able to report anonymously’, and for the report to be dealt with cultural sensitivity as leading factors when reporting racism and discrimination followed by access to information about where to report experiences of racism and discrimination.



Figure 2. What would encourage you to feel safe and supported as a young person, to make a report of racism and discrimination?

These results align with the findings of the Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services consultation activities that evidence that reporting channels are underutilised by young people who experience racism, either because they are not aware of these options, or due to a level of distrust in these processes.

These findings are also congruent with the findings of the ‘Towards Greater Anti-Racism Support’ study as most respondents stated that they would not report because they didn’t think it would change anything or they didn’t know where to go to report. Participants of this study would be more likely to report racism if reporting services were offered by organisations they already knew and trusted, or were better qualified to respond, more culturally sensitive, and offered advocacy, empathy, and support.

27 per cent of respondents stated that they would report racism to their school. Access to such familiar and trustworthy places to report may have the potential of being more effective and lead to more immediate outcomes for the individual. The ‘Towards Greater Anti-Racism Support’ study recommended that safe and supportive processes of reporting should also be established and promoted within workplaces and schools.

Some respondents to the survey discussed that racism was normalised in Australian culture and that people did not realise that their comments could be hurtful. Participants also highlighted that racism and discrimination occurred in many different social situations where young people frequent including friendship circles, family settings, within sporting clubs and online via social media and gaming.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

"I get scared and feel sort of guilty to report discrimination as it is constant and isn't going to end after I report a singular person"

"It depends where it's taking place, if it's at school then I'll be reporting it to the teachers."

"If it's school. The school administrator or leaders. Out in public I wouldn't bother as the police don't really do anything"

I'm not sure, most forums don't feel safe"

- Majority of respondents (90%) cited having experienced or witnessed an incident of racism and/or discrimination involving young people.
- These experiences mostly occurred at school, on social media, and/or in public places including on public transport.
- 47 per cent of respondents stated that they wouldn't file a formal report of racism and discrimination
- If the respondents were to report racism and/or discrimination, it would be to a trusted person or institution such as a school, or a place that they perceived held power such as Police.
- Respondents that stated they would not report racism, cited they didn't know where to report and felt that nothing would change if they reported.
- Respondents were more likely to report racism and discrimination if they knew where to report, could report anonymously, that report would be dealt with cultural sensitivity and that would lead to change.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Council

1. Work with Schools to Share the Findings of this Report

This report found that education settings were the place where young people were more likely to experience racism and discrimination, however despite this, schools were also identified as a place where young people felt more inclined to report incidents of racism and discrimination. The findings suggest that education settings would benefit from increased education and awareness amongst staff and students about what constitutes racism and discrimination, the profound negative impact racism can have on a person's sense of community belonging and safety; and what mechanisms are available to report this when it occurs.

This report recommends that Youth and Family work with schools to increase support for students and teachers through:

- Sharing the findings of this survey with secondary schools in Greater Dandenong and holding conversations with school leaders about what supports they require in relation to reducing racism and discrimination and promoting social cohesion.
- Linking services that currently do this work, such as Centre for Multicultural Youth's Standing up to Racism program, to secondary schools in Greater Dandenong.
- Explore the possibility and the interest of reinstating the Youth and Family Services "Creating Change" program, which aims to strengthen social cohesion by creating opportunities for young people to make meaningful connections across diverse cultures and faiths.

2. Continue to promote reporting pathways and supports to young people, related addressing and responding to incidents of racism and discrimination

More than half of the respondents in the survey did not know where or how to report an incident of racism. This highlights that young people are largely not acquainted with available reporting mechanisms. Awareness raising activities tailored to young people about where and how they can report incidents of racism and discrimination, including how to report online through social media platforms or online portals, is required.

This promotion can be done through:

- Integrating information about racism and discrimination reporting into existing youth services programs
- Creating a social media campaign about what constitutes racism, how racism is harmful (including humour and microaggressions), and how young people can report racism and where to access support after an incident of racism and discrimination.
- Joining national and local campaigns such as "Racism. It Stops with Me."

Recommendations for Policy Makers

1. Advocacy for improved reporting mechanisms

There is lack awareness amongst young people about where to report incidents of racism and discrimination, coupled with a lack of trust that reporting will lead to an investigation - outcome. Young people, overall, cited as part of this study, not feeling comfortable nor confident to report acts of racism and discrimination.

The writers of this report recommended that:

- The findings of this report be shared with the authors of the “Towards Greater Anti-Racism Support” study to complement their work and to further their understanding of the experiences of local young people under 18 years.
- That City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services advocate for collaborative anti-racism work with key internal / external stakeholders including running local awareness campaigns, and promotion of reporting pathways and available support and support for young people.

CONCLUSION

This report is the second building block in looking at the experience of racism and discrimination for young people authored by Youth and Family Services and the findings remain consistent. Racism and discrimination remain a key issue of concern for young people in Greater Dandenong. Young people state that racism and discrimination occur in many locations that young people commonly frequent including, schools, public spaces, public transport and online. Young people report that racism can occur under the veil of humour in social settings with friends or can be more overt such as comments in the street or online. This means that racism and discrimination is pervasive, and the effects of these incidents can lead to negative short term and long-term outcomes for young people.

Despite this, young people, overall, do not report racism and discrimination as they do not know where, or how to report; and do not feel that reporting incidents will lead to an investigation or follow up.

Survey respondents identified both Council and secondary schools as having a critical role to play in supporting young people to report racism and discrimination; and advocating for community to better understand what constitutes racism. Young people suggested they would be more likely to report an incident of racism and/or discrimination if it were to a trusted person or institution, if they could report anonymously, and that the report would be followed up and taken seriously.

These identified recommendations provide a pathway for local government, secondary schools, and policy makers to create an environment where young people feel encouraged to speak out against racism and discrimination and seek support.

Following the release of this report, Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services will be collaborating with relevant Council departments and local secondary schools, to implement the above recommendations.

Any agency or organisation with an interest in working collaboratively to support the implementation of the reports' recommendations is encouraged to contact Youth and Family Services on 9793 2155.