

SPEAKER NOTES

Darebin City Council Presentation MAV Conference

From Multiculturalism to Inclusion, Wed 31st August 2016, 1.00pm

Breakout Session 1: Countering Racism & Islamophobia

Mandy Bathgate, Coordinator Equity and Diversity, Darebin City Council

Note to readers: This is a summary of Mandy's speaker notes - please bear this in mind when reading.

Introduction

Context, examples learnings and observations of interrelated initiatives that Darebin has been engaged with:

- Darebin Anti-Racism Strategy
- Say NO to Racism Training package
- Report Racism project
- Darebin Community Inclusion Plan

Background

The City Darebin is in the inner northern region of Melbourne. Over 148,728 people call Darebin home and approximately 20,000 people visit, work or study there each working day. The community is characterised by great cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and diversity in age, gender, socio-economic background, employment status, housing needs and sexual orientation.

29% of Darebin's residents were born in non-English speaking countries and came to Australia from over 140 countries. Darebin has one of the largest proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in metropolitan Melbourne with many Aboriginal controlled services and organisations in the municipality. While overall disadvantage has decreased marginally (due to gentrification) many communities still face entrenched disadvantage. Housing affordability is a critical issue with people forced out of the area.

When it comes to the Islamic community, 4.4% (around 6,000) of residents identify as Muslim, the fourth most populous religion in the municipality. Darebin has mosques, Islamic colleges and organisations, and a world-class museum; the must-see Islamic Museum of Australia. The Preston Mosque is one of the largest congregations in Melbourne, was the Seat of the former Mufti of Australia, and is the current office of the Board of Imams in Victoria.

Darebin could be called a 'mature city'; it has a long history of migration and diversity. The *Scanlan Foundation Survey 2015 – Mapping Social Cohesion* showed that Australia remains relatively a highly stable and cohesive society – albeit with variation in attitudes and issues across regions and sections of our community – and with increased concerns in relation to level of discrimination and impacts. Darebin is in one way a microcosm of this and it is important in this context to balance isolated incidents and understand issues within our own community, and not get caught up in the 'white noise' - so we can effectively monitor and ensure a commensurate response.

Investment

Darebin has seen decades of investment by council around social justice and diversity in its efforts to foster and build greater social cohesion within our local communities. This commitment is underpinned by Council's Charter in their Council Plan, Community Health and Wellbeing Plan (both legislated documents setting out our work and priorities) and evidenced through allied strategies and plans such as the Equity and Diversity Policy, Darebin Anti-Racism Strategy, Human Rights Action Plan and Prevention of Violence Against Women Action Plan.

This work has seen significant investment by Council – including the appointment of a dedicated Interfaith Officer and advisory committee structures and networks to ensure they remain agile and responsive to community needs and aspirations. So Darebin, as with many other councils at the conference, has a long history of advocacy in response to emerging issues –showing leadership where they can – for example the case of Children in Detention and provision of Sanctuary.

1. Darebin Anti-Racism Strategy

In Darebin itself, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity is closely linked to its municipal identity, from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the second largest in metropolitan Melbourne, through to the newly arrived communities that made Darebin home.

Early in 2011 Council was alerted to the findings of a national research project which suggested that the levels of racism in Darebin were higher than the State average, while paradoxically, residents' views of multiculturalism were also more positive than average.

So when national research hinted at local issues, Council took a proactive approach. They launched a local Racism Inquiry to investigate and hear from the community about their experiences of racism in our municipality and their ideas to tackle it. It contained positive findings such as very strong support for cultural diversity, which should be celebrated. But it also pointed how too many individuals and communities still experience prejudice, racism, and discrimination in employment, education, or simply walking down the street.

Racism has a significant impact not only on the individuals who experience it, but on the wider community, as it undermines social cohesion and works against Darebin's commitment to a diverse and inclusive community. So Council took preventive measures: building on the knowledge acquired through the Inquiry and the work under way at the Federal level to develop the National Anti-Racism Strategy, to create a local response to address race-base discrimination, strengthen community relations and continue to foster harmony and dialogue.

Scope

Their local Racism Inquiry enabled Darebin to understand and unpack findings, investigate race-based discrimination and hear from the community about their experiences of racism in the municipality and their ideas to tackle it. The aim was to document experiences in Darebin and gather evidence from citizens (understood as anyone who lives, works, studies or recreates in Darebin), with a view to building a response.

The Inquiry focused on race-based discrimination (whether direct or indirect, interpersonal or institutional¹) i.e. “those behaviours or practices that result in avoidable and unfair inequalities across groups in society based on race, ethnicity, culture or religion”, with a view of racism as “these behaviours and practices, along with the beliefs and prejudices that underlie them”². This broad definition, inclusive of religion and distinct from a strictly legal definition, was thought to be more reflective of people’s understanding and experiences.

The views of the community and results of the Inquiry are presented in the Darebin City Council Racism Inquiry Report 2012 (available on request).

Some key findings from the Darebin City Council Racism Inquiry

In summary, the report contained positive findings such as the **community’s very strong support for cultural diversity** in Australia in general and in Darebin in particular. But it also points to elements of concern. The strong commitment to cultural diversity in principle is at times more uncertain in practice. Some citizens express reservations about aspects of multiculturalism based on perceptions of divergent values and practices amongst and between some groups in the community. Above all, **too many individuals and communities in Darebin still experience prejudice, discrimination and racism** in a number of settings.

In that regard, while the vast majority of Darebin citizens (eight in ten or more) have not personally been victims of racism within the last five years, two in ten have experienced some form of racism or race-based discrimination (name-calling, racist jokes or teasing, but also threats or assault, as well as institutional racism).

This is across the whole population, so **for some groups, the proportion is much higher**. The most common experience is being confronted with racist material in the media (almost one in two residents). The places (settings) **where race-based discrimination occurs most often in Darebin** *(at that time in 2016) are:

- the workplace and employment (9% of residents have experienced it there);
- educational settings (8% of residents);
- the public space:
 - o 7% of residents experienced racism in a shop or restaurant;
 - o 7% experienced racism at a sporting or public event;
- at lower levels,
 - o in dealings with agencies or government service providers (4%);
 - o with police (2%);
 - o in the housing market (2%).
 - o

Since the Inquiry, new issues and concerns have emerged that have impacted the local level and perhaps the findings –Islamophobia, polarisation, nature of discrimination, violent extremism et cetera.

Out of the Inquiry the **Darebin Anti-Racism Strategy** was developed - it sets out actions and commitments across three settings – the workplace, council services and programs, and community.

¹See definitions in part 3 below

²Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), *Building on our strengths: A framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria - Summary report*, Melbourne, 2009

The Strategy is implemented through the Aboriginal, Human Rights and Multicultural Action Plans as well as the Community Safety Strategy, community Engagement Framework and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan – an integrated approach. It is supported by the Darebin Anti-Racism Steering Committee which meets half yearly and consists of internal and external members.

The plan also builds on themes identified in VicHealth’s framework for actions and the Challenging Racism Project (University of Western Sydney). It covers training, e.g. Diversity Capability Framework that Council has endorsed; Communications and marketing: e.g. Inclusive Communications Charter; planning e.g. across Council application of our Equity and Inclusion Planning and Audit Tool (EIPAT).

Of note are the 126 projects/strategies that went to Council and underwent EIPAT planning assessment to help ensure inclusion/consideration of key groups and reduce risk of disadvantage/exclusion) and council’s leadership and advocacy – e.g. its commitment to the Australian Human Rights Commission campaign, signatory as a Refugee Welcome Zone etc.

All of Darebin’s Equity and Inclusion plans are being evaluated and reviewed in 2016 to align with their Council plan and strengthen their platform.

2. Development of the Say NO To Racism training package.

Part of the work under the Darebin Anti-Racism Strategy was the development of the **Say NO to Racism Training package**. Funded through the Federal Diversity and Social Cohesion program as part of Darebin’s Anti-Racism Strategy, the training –available to everyone - encourages people to take safe and effective action against racism. It is delivered through a practical, experiential based model, building skills, knowledge and capacity. The training has had positive feedback from people who have undertaken it – however it is fair to say that in relation to longer term impacts – what has it changed? Have we build community capacity through the training? = is less known and Darebin are hoping to look at how to improve longitudinal evaluation.

Darebin are also exploring updates across the public service sector and have committed to running regular sessions for their local community at no cost/low cost through the Darebin Intercultural Centre. They have applied for a grant to deliver training in schools–watch the space. Finally, Darebin entered a license agreement with SA Department for Communities and Social Inclusion to deliver to their public and community sector. This highlighted the need to develop a train the trainer model so the work becomes sustainability and self-generating. This is being scoped further.

If you would like further information about the Say NO to Racism training please visit the Polykala website **www.polykala.com**

Or please contact the Say NO to Racism Program Manager on 0404 868 878 or dure@polykala.com

Information sheets are available from Darebin on request (or via their website) and were distributed at the conference session.

What has been achieved to date:

The following training has been conducted over 2015-2016 Financial Year: 8 sessions completed to approximately 120 individuals

- 5 x Darebin City Council with Council staff and community members
- 1x Yarra City Council with Council staff and community members
- 1x Port Phillip City Council with Council staff and community members
- 1x Mitchel Shire with Council staff and community members

2016 July – Dec: 11 sessions booked with a maximum of 285 individuals

- 1 x Darebin City Council
- 3 x Monash University with 25 students and staff in each
- 1x Moonee Valley with staff and community members
- 1x Hobson's Bay City Council with staff and community members
- 1x Whittlesea City Council with Council staff from both Darebin and Whittlesea
- 2x Faith Communities Council of Victoria with faith-based community members to 45 people in a workshop as well as an additional full-day training session with 20 participants
- 1x Swinburne University with 25 students
- 2 x Supporting Loddon Campaspe to deliver two sessions in the local community of Bendigo

Trends in Demand - new audiences and responding to emerging areas:

The following platforms have emerged and will be incorporated into future planning:

- Sports focused – a pilot session will be delivered specifically for sporting clubs and associations on Tuesday 6 September at the Darebin Intercultural Centre and will roll this out to further sporting groups into the future
- School-based training – An application has been made to OMAC for a Darebin Schools Project funding application that will work with identified schools to deliver tailored Say NO to Racism training students to encourage bystander anti-racism
- Train-the-trainer model for teachers, training providers and youth workers –Polykala has identified the need for a train-the-trainer model to provide ongoing, sustainable bystander anti-racism provided by local services and agencies. Polykala are willing to develop a train-the-trainer model and work closely with grassroots service to implement this.

3. Report Racism Project

Council participated in a pilot project lead by the VHREOC in collaboration with VALS and VICPol to trial a third party reporting system, using the VHREOC anithate website as the accesspoint. The model is based on third party reporting mechanisms developed in the UK.

Focus on Aboriginal communities – research show that this group experiences high levels of racism that are unlikely to be reported

Two sites – Northern Melbourne – launch August 2014 and Shepparton – Launched Feb 2015. Northern metro sites include: VALS, NJC, COD, VACSAL, CO-Health, Bubup Wilam for Early Learning and VAHS.

As a reporting place – Council sits on the local governance group. Trial results were gathered and are being evaluated with recommendations – including possible expansion to include CALD communities. There were 54 reports in total, showing interest and commitment but the model had challenges. Follow up consultations were held with ATSI and ethnic communities to explore interest. Currently, Darebin are looking at a sustainable model and will stay as involved as possible.

4. Community Inclusion Plan – a one year project funded to explore the question:
When it comes to addressing Islamophobia, prevention, protection, extremism, and radicalisation, what is Council's role?"

Darebin's work in this space can be tracked back to when Preston Mosque was threatened with violent backlash in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. The project helped foster community participation, community cohesion and engagement between Darebin's Muslim community and the broader community through dialogue, education, collaboration and participation. Activities included hosting of Iftar dinners during Ramadan; Mosque Open Days; Workshops for Imams; information sessions on Islam; youth camps and peer mentoring and leadership courses for young people - including their coordination of the Darebin Intercultural Cup Soccer Tournament.

A key outcome of the project establishing ongoing collaborative meetings between mosque officials, Victoria Police and council through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which has seen further building of trust and regular two way exchange around issues of community safety and being a vehicle for early warnings from the grassroots to relevant authorities.

The project builds on former work that Darebin undertook, commencing in 2003 with the implementation of the Cramer St Neighborhood Project (the vicinity of the Preston Mosque), the establishment of the Darebin Interfaith Council in 2005 and signing a MoU between Council and the Preston Mosque in 2009. More recently Darebin was funded by the Attorney's General Department's Building Community Resilience Grants Program for the "Salam Alaykum: Darebin's Muslims Reaching-Out" project.

- Early-2015, Mosque Committee requested of Darebin to consider a response to emerging issues
- Funding received to explore this space and in particular: *"When it comes to addressing Islamophobia, prevention, protection, extremism, and radicalisation, what is Council's role?"*

"If Darebin Council was to take a 'business as usual approach', does this feel right for you and your organisation? If not, what is it that we should be now considering and what changes may this mean to the way we do business?"

The project has seen two emerging components.

The first is “**Response**” - looking at their Municipal Emergency Management Plan and Community Safety programs and asking, “*Are these current plans adequate and if not, what needs changing?*”

*A Key outcome is the development of a **Civil Disturbance & Social Emergencies - Sub Plan***

- Inserted into the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP)
- Offers a Council response to help protect ethnic and religious minorities from backlash during civic disturbances and social emergencies
- Civil disturbances, technological disasters, and terrorist attacks often result in conflict, blame, and other forms of socially disruptive behaviour, impacting on individuals, communities, and society as a whole well after the initial trigger.
- Crises that involve actual or perceived human culpability are more likely to result in a breakdown of post-event social cohesion and harmony.
- While civil disturbances may conclude relatively soon after initial flashpoint, social emergencies may linger for weeks and months resulting in clashes and counter clashes between groups.

The second area of the project is around “**Prevention**” - looking at the range of prevention based programs and services provided – and asking “*Should we be doing anything differently from what we are doing?*”

Outcomes: continue investing in and working with communities through funding, services and programs – so core council business continues as a key platform for building community harmony and inclusion. Continue to advocate and lobby and remain agile. Know your community build relations and sustain over the long term. This work has been undertaken by Darebin’s Interfaith Officer, including extensive literature review, research and consultation.

5. Some learnings and observations

- Invest in communities and involve community – listen to community
- Develop evidence base and invest over long term
- Remain agile and responsive – policy/research/data/best practice/sharing
- Strengthen prevention approaches – support services/coal face who have the expertise – avoid duplication
- Work in collaboration –with one another – no right answer
- Ensure the skills are there in your own team and build organisational competencies that reflect the community it serves – at all levels.
- Leadership and commitment - core value –if not there it is really difficult to champion. Political will is critical.
- Be critical – and evaluate and learn from others – be open
- Advocate to other levels of government
- Build in systems that ensure your policy/program/service does not exclude/discriminate – e.g. Apply HR lens to planning processes accessible/mandated.