

Towards a Reporting System for Racist Incidents in Nelson/Tasman: Diverse Communities Speak

Executive Summary



Introduction

A reporting system for racist incidents is internationally recognised as an important step in challenging racism. It provides a voice and directed action for those suffering racial harassment or discrimination. The data collected in a reporting system allows the authorities to act upon individual incidents and develop strategies to address wider trends. It also increases social cohesion and public awareness, which provides community support for those experiencing racism.

Both the UN and the Human Rights Commission have noted that New Zealand provides insufficient recording of racially motivated crime and racial discrimination. The only known regional reporting system for racist incidents is Report-it, a web-based system for international students in Christchurch. In response to the success of Report-it, it was decided that Nelson/Tasman should research the type of reporting system that would best suits its demographic needs.

Background

In 2008, Nelson had the third largest percentage of migrants per population in New Zealand. Since 1991, its Māori population has more than doubled, its Pasifika population has almost trebled and its Asian population has more than trebled. There were 772 international students in the region in 2008, who spent \$13.4 million on fees and living costs.

In recent years, some regional racist attacks have featured in the national media. However, there is also much evidence of proactive community action to support ethnic minorities. This project has been supported by over 30 regional organisations, which shows that the Nelson/Tasman region is committed to addressing the issue of racism.

A questionnaire was designed to find out which type of reporting system would be of most use to those living in the Nelson/Tasman region. Between April and June 2009, 30 focus groups took place, containing 184 participants of 48 ethnicities. The participants' residence in New Zealand ranged from one week to life; their ages ranged from 13 - 82 years old.

Experiences of Racism in Nelson/Tasman

It was found that 81% of participants had experienced racism personally and 86% had witnessed it. Some participants pointed out that they had not experienced racism due to their European appearance or recent arrival in New Zealand. If these are removed from the data, then 92% of participants had suffered racism personally. The frequency varied from once (or not at all) to daily abuse.

Most participants had experienced verbal abuse, often shouted from cars. They sometimes didn't understand, but it was striking that several participants could not speak English and yet knew the words 'f**k Asian'. Many participants had experienced things being thrown at them on the street or from cars. Some participants had been intimidated, experienced damage to property, or experienced physical violence.

Several participants had experienced racism at school, from other pupils or from teachers. Some participants had suffered racism in the workplace, from colleagues, clients or employers. A few racism policies in schools and workplaces were helpful. Several participants described being treated badly in shops, where assistants were suspicious of Māori or Pasifika participants and ignored those of Asian appearance.

Some participants described racist attitudes when renting accommodation or dealing with the public sector. Most participants experienced 'subtle, little things', which showed that they were not accepted by the larger community.

Many participants described feeling afraid or traumatized following a racist incident. These participants often became isolated, and some had to move house or leave the region. However, only 39% of participants felt unsafe or in danger in the Nelson/Tasman region. Some participants did not find the racist incidents to be threatening, because they were "used to it". Others showed a certain amount of bravado which, in some cases, had spilt over to retaliation.

Current Approach to Reporting in Nelson/Tasman

Only 21% of participants who had experienced or witnessed racist incidents had reported them to the authorities. Participants had mostly reported their experiences to schools, community organisations, the police or supervisors. In addition, some had also reported to family or friends.

Many participants had not reported racist incidents, as they believed that the authorities could not or would not act upon the information. Some felt there was no point in reporting, as the incidents were too minor or simply part of life. Some participants had experienced a bad response when reporting in the past. This was universally the case for Māori and Pasifika school students.

Many participants do not report racist incidents, as they do not know where to report. Several cannot, or would not, report in English, particularly after a traumatic experience. Several participants had not reported, as they believed they needed evidence. For some, reporting would take too long.

Several participants would not report a racist incident, for fear of the perpetrators finding out. A few were too traumatized to report. For some, reporting is difficult, due to their culture or past traumatic experiences. Others did not want to make a fuss. Some participants preferred to 'sort out' the problem themselves.

The reasons for not reporting depended greatly on the individual concerned and the incident that had taken place. A reporting system must take into account each of these variables.

Towards a Reporting System for Nelson/Tasman

An overwhelming 80% of participants would be willing to report racist incidents in the future. A further 15% of participants would be willing to report if it were easy to do so or if the incident were serious. Only 5% of participants would not report, mostly due to a fear of their identity being discovered or due to a bad response in the past.

It is believed that this change of attitude was mainly due to the information given to participants regarding the concept and practice of reporting racist incidents. In particular, the advantages of reporting, including low level incidents, were explained in each focus group. Also, the accessibility of an eventual reporting system would be critical to the extent to which it is used.

Recommendation I:

It should be explained, in person, to ethnic minorities living in Nelson/Tasman the reasons why it is useful to report, the types of incidents that can be reported and how the reporting system works.

Recommendation II:

The reporting system should be simple and quick to use, requiring a minimum of information. It should be accessible 24 hours per day and not require payment for use.

Participants indicated that the most popular method of reporting would be by telephone, though some would not report in this way. A large proportion of participants also favoured internet reporting. However, more than a quarter

of participants do not use the internet. Of those who do use the internet, some would prefer not to report online.

Several participants would prefer to report in person, but others found this would be too difficult. Some participants would prefer reporting by text, by filling in a form by hand, or through a third party. Ultimately, the preferred method of reporting would depend on the type of incident and the individual concerned. Several participants asked that a range of reporting methods be available.

Recommendation III:

The Nelson/Tasman reporting system should include a range of reporting methods, including a minimum of internet, telephone and face-to-face reporting. All methods should capture the same information, so that it can be collated in a database.

Several participants would need some support to report a racist incident, such as knowing that their report would be taken seriously or the person receiving the report showing understanding. A few participants believed the latter could only come from their own community. A few participants were not comfortable reporting to the police.

Recommendation IV:

Training should be provided for those receiving reports, as is the case for most agencies dealing with vulnerable individuals. This training would help provide support for those reporting and also for those receiving the reports.

Recommendation V:

A community representative should be appointed for each ethnic minority requiring support for reporting racist incidents in Nelson/Tasman. Training should be provided so that the community representative can explain the reporting system to their own community and also receive reports, where individuals do not feel comfortable reporting elsewhere.

Recommendation VI:

The reporting system should be presented as being separate to, though supported by, the police.

The majority of participants would prefer to report anonymously. Some participants would prefer to leave their

name and contact details, usually to receive feedback. For a large proportion of participants, it would be best to have the option of reporting anonymously or with contact details.

Recommendation VII:

The Nelson/Tasman reporting system should give the option of reporting anonymously, or of leaving a name and contact details.

Most participants felt comfortable reporting in English. However, over one fifth of participants would not be able to report if English were the only language offered. Some participants would be more likely to report in their first language. One participant offered to provide translation voluntarily.

Recommendation VIII:

Where possible, the Nelson/Tasman reporting system should be accessible in languages other than English.

Several participants would report racism in Nelson/Tasman, if they knew how and where to do so.

Recommendation IX:

Provide information on where and how to access the reporting system in public places, particularly some of those suggested by participants.

Responses Favoured after Reporting

The type of reporting system introduced in the Nelson/Tasman region will depend on the service that the community would like to offer and the resources available. The very act of reporting is useful in itself. However, it is also possible to provide further action such as police follow-up, victim support, education, publicity or training. Whichever approach is chosen, it is important for people to be aware of the service that will be offered to them.

Recommendation X:

The reporting system should explain what will happen after a report has been received and the extent of services offered.

For the participants, the most important consequences of reporting were for the racist incidents to stop and for action to be taken quickly. Many participants wanted to receive feedback. This could range from a message of acknowledgement that a report had been received to information about what happened next.

Some participants would want to speak with someone about the incident reported, but usually only if the incident were serious. Some participants hoped to receive restorative justice or another remedy. A few wanted nothing further to occur. Ultimately, the response favoured would depend on the person involved and the perceived seriousness of the incident reported. As a result, some participants would like to be able to choose from a range of possible responses.

Recommendation XI:

The reporting system should provide the possibility for the person reporting to ask for feedback and elect what they would like to happen next.

Some participants suggested that the data from the reporting system be used to inform the public of what is happening, to boost confidence in the reporting system and to build educational programmes based on local experiences.

Recommendation XII:

Periodically publish the data collected by the reporting system.

Conclusion

The recommendations set out in this report describe a reporting system favoured by the majority of participants involved in the survey. In one integral system, it would allow for individuals to report diverse racist incidents, while allowing for differences in personality, background and circumstance. It is believed that the recommendations are also practical and realisable through coordinated community action. This approach would also provide for the most effective reporting system, as it would be imbedded throughout the community and allow for a broad-based approach.

When a reporting system is in place, it is likely that it will record a higher level of racist incidents in Nelson/Tasman than are recorded elsewhere in New Zealand. It should be borne in mind that this would not mean that more racist incidents are experienced in the region. Rather, it would show that the community has introduced an effective system to collect information on such incidents and that it is addressing an issue that exists in all regions of New Zealand.

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Full copies of the report Towards a Reporting System for Racist Incidents: Diverse Communities Speak are available from Nelson Multicultural Council, 4 Bridge Street, Nelson, New Zealand. Tel.: +64 (0)3 539 0030 E-mail: info@nmec.org.nz



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