# ANTaR

Justice, Rights and Respect for Australia's First Peoples | Sea of hands

# Submission in Response to the Anti-Racism Strategy Discussion Paper

## May 2012

**Contact:**

**Jacqueline Phillips**
**National Director**

**Email: Jacqui@antar.org.au**
**Phone: (02) 9564 0594**
**Fax: (02) 9564 0195**
**www.antar.org.au**
**PO Box 568**
**Dulwich Hill NSW 2203**

**About ANTaR**

ANTaR is a national advocacy organisation working for Justice, Rights and Respect for Australia's First Peoples. We do this primarily through lobbying, public campaigns and advocacy.

ANTaR's focus is on changing the attitudes and behaviours of non-Indigenous Australians so that the rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respected and affirmed across all sections of society.

ANTaR also seeks to persuade governments, through advocacy and lobbying, to show genuine leadership and build cross-party commitment to promoting rights and addressing disadvantage.

ANTaR works to generate in Australia a moral and legal recognition of, and respect for, the distinctive status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as First Peoples.

ANTaR is a non-government, not-for-profit, community-based organisation.

ANTaR has been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders on rights and reconciliation issues since 1997.

# Executive Summary

ANTaR commends the Government's acknowledgement of racism as an important issue in Australia today.

ANTaR is a national advocacy organisation that focuses on changing the attitudes and behaviours of non-Indigenous Australians so that the rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respected and affirmed across all sections of society.

We have been concerned for some time that racism in Australia has become almost a 'taboo' topic in Australian public debate, often evoking a defensive reaction from those whose behaviour is described in these terms. This has had a stultifying effect on public and media discussion, and has made it very difficult for victims of racism or anti-racism advocates to raise these issues in public. ANTaR is concerned that this has caused many victims to suffer in silence and reduces public awareness and understanding of racism and its destructive effects. For these reasons, a national anti-racism strategy is well overdue. We therefore welcome the Government and the Australian Human Rights Commission's commitment to the development and implementation of such a strategy.

ANTaR has implemented a number of campaigns in recent years designed to counter racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Key campaigns include our 2008 *Racism Makes me Sick* campaign, which highlighted the links between racism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality, and our 2009 *Respect* campaign which used positive images and the tagline 'The best skin treatment doesn't come in the bottle.' These campaigns are discussed below.

In this brief submission, we focus on a number of successful initiatives that have been used to prevent or reduce racism at the individual, community and institutional/ systemic level. We believe that any strategy to prevent and reduce racism must challenge popular myths by identifying and addressing the various forms and manifestations of racism that exist at all levels of society. Such a campaign must move the discussion of racism beyond 'accusations or denials of individual racism'.[1]

Anti-racism strategies require clear political leadership and support from other influential leaders in the community. We believe that the national conversation around Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples presents an important opportunity to combat racism at individual, community and systemic levels.

In this submission, we examine a number of organisations and good practice anti-racism initiatives in the community. From these case studies we are able to identify some key features that are important in combating racism in Australia. These key features include:

- Promoting positive images and creating positive experiences and interactions between different cultural or ethnic groups;
- Ensuring the strategies/ programs used are tailored to individual settings;

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[1] Hollinsworth D. 2006, 'Confronting Racism in Communities: Guidelines and Resources for Anti-Racism Training Workshops', p. 24

- Ensuring a focus on community and youth education;
- Fostering mutual respect, appreciation and understanding of difference;
- Encouraging attitudes that are sensitive to different religious and cultural beliefs; and
- Collaboration between the different cultural groups.

This submission also looks at the practice that a number of organisations have begun of adopting tools or resources that promote different ethnic, cultural and/or religious diversity. Organisational resources or tools recognise that systemic racism is not always overt or intentional. It often occurs when the dominant views and practices of an institution ignore or exclude the expectations and beliefs of some of its clients. When creating organisational tools to combat racism against a particular minority group it is important to collaborate and work with that particular group to ensure the appropriateness and safety of the messaging and approach.

Finally, we briefly discuss the role of advertising and enlisting the help of well-known individuals in countering racism in society.

# 1. Creating awareness of racism and how it affects individuals and the broader community

**Defining racism**

Racism is about attitudes and practices that negatively and unfairly generalise about a group of people on the basis of their race. At an individual and interpersonal level it often amounts to:
- an *instant or fixed picture* of a group of people, usually based on negative and ill-informed stereotypes;
- a *preconceived negative opinion*;
- *limiting the opportunities (intentionally or not)* of certain individuals or groups because of personal characteristics such as race or colour.

Racism uses negative generalisations such as regarding levels of culture and 'civilisation', levels of intelligence and standards of morality[2]. The many current *misconceptions, stereotyping and biases* towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are racist[3] and need to be recognised as such and challenged.

Popular understandings often assume that racism is overt, intentional, malicious, and individual. Not only does this narrow perspective disguise more subtle and pervasive forms of racism, it also makes discussing and confronting racism more difficult.

This submission adopts a broad definition of racism as 'any treatment that results in unequal power, resources or opportunities across racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious

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[2] Bessant, J & Watts, R 1999, 'Sociology in Australia', Allen & Unwin, Australia, p.202.
[3] Finlayson, J & Martin, D 2006, 'Regulating difference: Aborigines in the settler state', in *Sociology: Place, Time and Division,* P. Beilharz & Hogan (*eds.*), pp. 366-370, Oxford University Press,  p. 368

groups'.[4] The final section draws attention to anti-racism initiatives that address both **inter-personal** and **institutional racism**, and acknowledges the interdependence of these forms.

## Racism directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2008 shows that 27% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over reported having experienced discrimination in the last 12 months. The most common situations or places where discrimination was experienced included the general public (11%), by police/security personnel/courts of law (11%), and at work or when applying for work (8%).[5]

Discrimination was higher among specific groups within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, including those removed from their families (45%), the unemployed (41%) and people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. (32%) The same study highlighted the toll racism takes on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, finding that:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had experienced discrimination were more likely than those who had not experienced discrimination to report high/very high levels of psychological distress (44% compared with 26%) and to be in fair/poor health (28% compared with 20%). They were also more likely to engage in binge drinking (42% compared with 35%) and to have recently used illicit substances (28% compared with 17%).[6]

As the Discussion Paper notes, more recent research has found that three out of four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples regularly experienced race discrimination when accessing primary health care, contributing to some people not being diagnosed and treated for disease in its early stages.[10]

## Tools to respond to racism

ANTaR emphasises the importance of equipping and empowering individuals and organisations with the tools to respond to racism.

ANTaR provides tips and resources for speaking up against racism at:

http://www.antar.org.au/issues_and_campaigns/health/racism/speak_up_against_racism

http://www.antar.org.au/no_to_racism_online

Examples of organisational audit tools for assessing and responding to institutional racism are provided in the final section of this submission.

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[4] Trenery B, Franklin H, and Paradies Y. 2010, 'Review of audit and assessment tools, programs and resources in workplace settings to prevent race-based discrimination and support diversity', p. 5
[5] ABS, 4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010 accessed at http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter450Oct+2010.
[6] ABS, 4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010 accessed at http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter450Oct+2010.

**Clear political leadership**

Successful anti-racism strategies require clear political leadership, as well as unambiguous and consistent messages from politicians and other influential public figures.[7]

This is undermined by the maintenance of racially discriminatory government policies, which legitimise racism. ANTaR urges the government to set the example for a 'zero tolerance approach to racism'[8] by:

> a) fully and unequivocally reinstating the *Racial Discrimination Act* with respect to Northern Territory Emergency Response and Stronger Futures legislation through the insertion of a 'notwithstanding clause'; and
> b)  revising the 'Stronger Futures' legislation to ensure that all measures contained within are racially non-discriminatory.[9]

**A unique public education opportunity: Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

The Australian Constitution is our defining legal document. Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been either ignored or subject to largely negative treatment under our Constitution throughout history. Although progress has been made in eliminating some of its entrenched discriminatory provisions, the Constitution remains silent on the history, rights and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Additionally, the Constitution still contains racially discriminatory provisions in the form of Section 25 and Section 51(xxvi).

Constitutional recognition would significantly contribute to the objective of 'better acknowledg[ing] the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identified in the Anti-Racism Discussion Paper.[10]

Constitutional recognition has both symbolic and practical significance relevant to the aims of a national anti-racism strategy. It offers the opportunity to:
- Positively recognise the history, languages and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Engage Australians in a national conversation about racially discriminatory provisions in our Constitution;
- Combat institutionalised racism by removing powers to make racially discriminatory laws;
- Redefine the framework within which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples relate to one another;[11]
- Challenge internalised racism by increasing the confidence, self-esteem, pride and sense of identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through

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[7] Berman G and Paradies Y. 2008, 'Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racism praxis', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33:2, p. 223
[8] Anti-Racism Discussion Paper, p. 1
[9] See ANTaR. 2011a, 'A Better Way: Building healthy, safe and sustainable communities in the Northern Territory through a community development approach'
[10] Anti-Racism Discussion Paper, p. 4
[11] ANTaR. 2011b, Submission to the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, p. 9

formal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prior occupation, languages and cultures. Constitutional recognition would in this way help to overcome the symbolic exclusions and denials of the past.[12]

ANTaR is actively campaigning in support of changes to recognise the First Peoples and enshrine the principle of racial equality in our nation's founding document.

## ANTaR anti-racism campaigns

### *Racism makes me sick*

ANTaR's 2008 *Racism Makes Me Sick* campaign had a number of objectives:
- To raise awareness and impassion people about the link between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality and the need for individual anti-racism action; and

- To change attitudes and behaviour of all Australians, so that they can challenge negative stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; as well as do something positive and respectful to support Aboriginal people.

The campaign was based on evidence that:

- racism has a direct and negative influence on health and helps explain in part Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality;
- Three out of four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racism in their everyday lives.
- Heart disease, premature births, hypertension and mental illness can all result from personal experiences of racism.

The campaign background paper stated that:

'Sadly, racist attitudes and behaviour in Australia are ubiquitous. One study in Western Australia found that 52% of urban residents and 69% of residents of a regional centre revealed prejudice against Aboriginal Australians.

Racism is a life stressor. It directly and negatively affects the cardiovascular system causing high blood pressure/hypertension and heart disease, and seriously affects mental health causing depression, anxiety and other psychological and psychiatric disorders. Racism is directly linked to infant low birth weight and premature birth.

Just one example of how racism directly and negatively affects health is the finding of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, which found that *nearly a quarter* of the Indigenous *children under 12* years surveyed had *experienced racism* in the previous 6 months. This was associated with increased cannabis and alcohol consumption in these under 12 year olds.' (references removed)

In launching the campaign, ANTaR National Director Gary Highland stated:

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[12] ANTaR. 2011b, cited above, p. 12

'Standing up to racist attitudes in workplaces, schools and family is a fundamental step in overcoming the Indigenous health crisis in Australia'.

'There is a 17-year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Improved healthcare alone may not close this gap, unless positive changes occur in attitudes and behaviour towards Indigenous Australians'.

The campaign involved posters and bookmarks on display in The Body Shop stores nationally and educating store staff about the links between racism and health inequality so that they could engage consumers in conversations about these issues in an informed way.
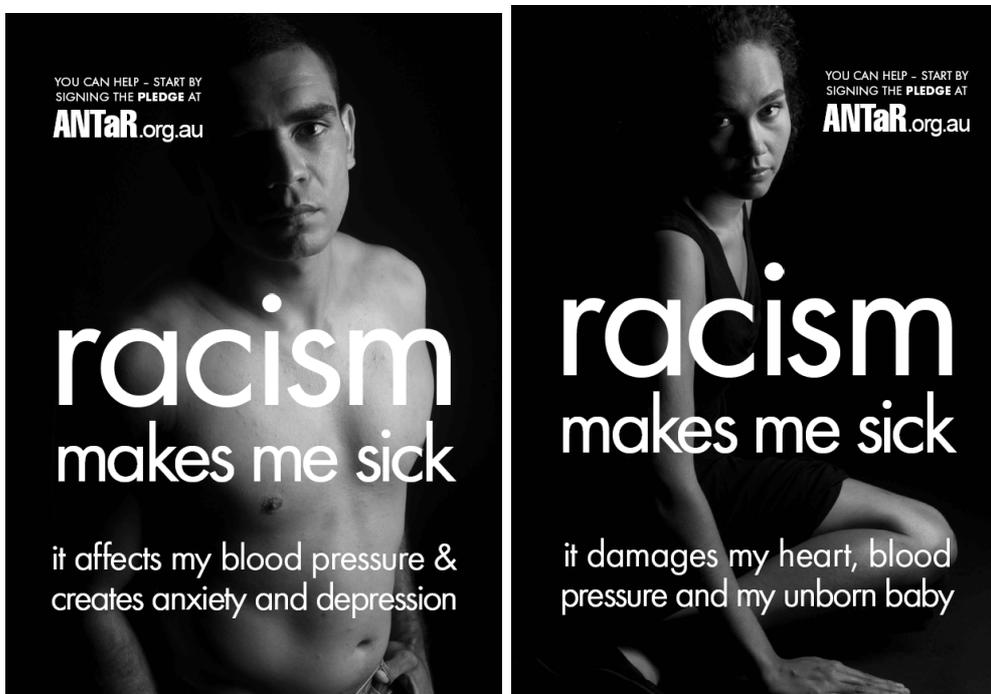


**Image: *Racism makes me sick* campaign posters**

The campaign asked individuals to combat racism by:
1. Reading the facts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
2. Challenging and speaking up to racist stereotypes and misinformed comments; and
3. Taking positive action in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Image: *Racism makes me sick* campaign poster**

**Key lessons**

Engaging people in a discussion about racism was difficult and it was important to keep the messaging simple and clear. We also learnt the importance of creating a safe space in which to discuss these issues, and the need to prepare the campaign messengers with the right information and strategies to deal with negative reactions.

*Respect*

ANTaR launched the *Respect* campaign on 19 May 2009. The Respect campaign was a national campaign that focused on challenging stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.  The campaign used positive images of an Aboriginal person in the target demographic range (females aged 25-45).

The end goal of the campaign was to get people to sign up to the pledge "I believe in a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people based on mutual Respect". By signing up, supporters would receive additional information from ANTaR about Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

Like the *Racism makes me sick* campaign, this campaign involved the display of posters and postcards in The Body Shop stores around the country and staff engaging customers in conversation about the campaign. Though the messaging was much 'softer' in this campaign, we still received feedback that the issue was confronting for people we sought to engage. This highlights how potent and challenging it is to discuss racism publicly in Australia, and the urgent need to find effective ways to do so.  Racism

in Australia is a serious and pervasive problem, and we cannot maintain a national silence on its destructive effects on individuals and communities.

# 2. Identifying good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism

This section describes some positive initiatives that address racism at the interpersonal, community, and institutional level.

### 1. Addressing racism at the interpersonal and community level

### Reconciliation Groups

The NSW Reconciliation Council supports various local initiatives aimed at increasing understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures among non-Indigenous people and providing opportunities for positive engagement and socialisation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people through various events and projects. This is a key part of education strategies aimed at combating racism.

Reconciliation groups combat racism through:
- Community and youth education;
- Fostering mutual respect, appreciation and understanding of difference; and
- Positive experiences and interactions between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There are currently 24 Local Reconciliation Groups in Sydney and surrounding areas. For example, The Bennelong Residents for Reconciliation is currently running a 'Voices for reconciliation' program where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers and presenters lead workshops for students of local primary schools. Children at participating schools have a chance to positively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which can serve to prevent or break down stereotypes and negative prejudices at a young age.[13]

### Localities Accepting and Embracing Diversity (Lead)

LEAD is a pilot anti-discrimination program being run by local governments in Whittlesea and Greater Shepparton. The program 'comprises a coordinated range of actions within a specific locality' and aims to reduce race-based discrimination and support cultural diversity in local communities and organisations:

> The participating councils are working with local workplaces, retail operators, sporting clubs, and schools – as well as within the councils themselves. Their aim is to strengthen policies and cultures to minimise unfair treatment and ensure that cultural diversity is valued. The strategies used are tailored to individual settings.[14]

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[13] NSW Reconciliation Council. 2012, 'Small Grants Projects', http://www.nswreconciliation.org.au/projects-1/small-grants (accessed 2 May 2012)

[14] VicHealth. 2012, 'Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD)', http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Programs-and-Projects/Freedom-from-discrimination/Localities-Embracing-and-Accepting-Diversity.aspx (accessed 2 May 2012)

LEAD is being accompanied by *See Beyond Race*; a community awareness campaign that uses television, radio, billboard and print advertisements featuring people from Shepparton and Whittesea to challenge racial stereotypes and emphasise common humanity. These initiatives will be evaluated[15] and warrant tracking.

### A.R.A.B. Anti-Racism Action Band

A.R.A.B. is a culturally diverse community-based youth performing arts program in Melbourne's northern suburbs. It currently works with 250 young people from 50 cultural backgrounds, fusing traditional and street dance forms with theatre, spoken word, original music and video. Young people are engaged in the program through school and community partnerships and all A.R.A.B performances are underpinned with local stories and concerns relating to cultural and suburban identity, struggles and aspirations.

A.R.A.B was originally established by the Victorian Arabic Social Services as a creative outlet for Arabic young people in Melbourne experiencing racial vilification. However, it is now open to all young people, with the aim of raising self-esteem and combating racism, gang culture and discrimination against and between young people through creative outlets and positive social experiences with diverse people.

The initial results were very positive and the ensemble quickly expanded in size and form: 'A.R.A.B is now a large multi- disciplinary program that works actively to raise self-esteem and confidence, challenge racial tensions and promote social inclusion whilst imparting performance, event management, social and life skills and crucial employment pathways.'[16]

### 2. *Addressing institutional or systemic racism*

Institutional or systemic racism is not necessarily overt or intentional but occurs when the dominant views and practices of an institution ignore or exclude the expectations and beliefs of some of its clients.

ANTaR believes that organisational audits can play a important role in countering racism in institutions or systems.

> 'Organisational audits provide information about the current status of diversity and anti-discrimination through an assessment of workplace practices, policies and procedures. This process assists organisations to understand current practice and provide a baseline assessment from which further activity can be developed and measured against.'[17]

There are a number of cultural competency tools designed to aid health and community services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities that have been designed by, or in collaboration with, Aboriginal organisations:

- 'Making Two Worlds Work: building the capacity of the health and community sector to work effectively and respectfully with our Aboriginal community',

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[15] VicHealth. 2012, cited above
[16] Anti-Racism Action Band (ARAB). 2012. 'About Us', http://arab-vass.com/about/project-description/ (accessed 1 May 2012)
[17] Trenery B, et al. 2010, cited above, p. 6

developed by Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East.[18]

- 'Koori Practice Checklist: A Cultural Audit Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Sector', developed by Ngwala Willumbung Cooperative.[19]

The Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission's 'Needs and Impact Assessments' focus specifically on assessing race-based discrimination in public sector departments. The tools were developed as part of the Western Australian Government's Policy Framework for Substantive Equality.[20] While innovative, this State program is sector-specific and under-resourced.[21]

**Effective organisational responses: what the research tells us.**

Some valuable lessons can be learnt from a 2005 study which aimed to identify organisational responses to racism towards Aboriginal people in health services and tertiary education settings, and strategies that promote resilience on an individual level.[22]

**The Study found:**
- Employing less confrontational coping strategies that required the perpetrator to self-examine, rather than lecturing or berating them, were less stressful on the victim, built more collegial support and were more effective in changing the views of the perpetrator;
- Collegial and family support is critical to coping with racism. Participants reported turning to these groups for emotional support, to escape to a safe place, to reinterpret an experience of racism, or to develop an appropriate response;
- Effective institutional responses to racism were critical in enabling individuals to develop self-confidence and cope with racism personally;
- A strong knowledge base and conceptual understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history was seen as integral to breaking down racism and facilitating effective responses; and
- Perceived successes dealing with racist events promoted optimism and self-confidence among victims.[23]

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[18] Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East. 2008, 'Making Two World Work: building the capacity of the health and community sector to work effectively and respectfully with our Aboriginal community'
[19] Ngwala Willumbung Cooperative. 2007, 'Koori Practice Checklist: A Cultural Audit Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Sector'
[20] Substantive Equality Unit. 2011, 'Needs and Impact Assessments', *Equal Opportunity Commission Western Australia*
[21] Berman G and Paradies Y. 2008, cited above, p. 225
[22] Grant M, Felton-Busch C, Elston J et al. 2005, 'Bulletproofing Indigenous health students and staff against racism', http://10thnrhc.ruralhealth.org.au/papers/docs/Felton-Busch_Catrina_E7.pdf (accessed 2 May 2012).
[23] Grant M, Felton-Busch C, Elston J et al. 2005, 'Bulletproofing Indigenous health students and staff against racism', http://10thnrhc.ruralhealth.org.au/papers/docs/Felton-Busch_Catrina_E7.pdf (accessed 2 May 2012) p5

### 3. Using Mass Media

### Advertising

Advertising can also be used as a positive tool for combating racism and stereotypes. In the 1990s a two-week advertising campaign funded by the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission was targeted at reducing negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and employment. The campaign focused on 'Aboriginal Employment Week' in Bunbury. A post-intervention study demonstrated a significant change in beliefs about the proportion of Aboriginal people in long-term paid employment.[24]

However many researchers acknowledge that anti-racist advertising can sometimes backfire.[25]To overcome the problems associated with advertising Vrij et al (1996) argue that three factors are important;

1. The similarities between the mainstream population and the ethnic groups are stressed;
2. That a number of ethnic groups are used instead of just one; and
3. Commentaries are provided about the communication.[26]

By providing these three things prejudice is reduced.[27]

### Using well-known public figures

Another tool for combating racism is using well-known and admired public figures, such as musicians, sports figures, actors, popular politicians to promote positive, anti-racist messages. The benefit of using well-know figures is that the public often feel a connection to them, which puts them in a unique position to promote change.

An example of this is Urthboy, who is a Hip Hop artist from the Herd. He is very vocal about Aboriginal rights, has participated in a number of public Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights campaigns and communicates anti-racism messages in his lyrics.

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[24] Donovan R J and Leivers S. 1993, 'Using paid advertising to modify racial stereotype beliefs', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57, 205-218
[25] Murdoch University , 'Anti-Racism, What Works, An evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-racism strategies' (2003)  http://www.multicultural.wa.gov.au/resources/clearinghouse/antiracism_what_works.pdf

[26] Vrij, A., Van Schie, E., & Cherryman, J. (1996). Reducing ethnic prejudice through public communication programs: A social-psychological perspective. Journal of Psychology, 130(4), 413-420.  Quoted in Murdoch University , 'Anti-Racism, What Works, An evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-racism strategies' (2003) http://www.multicultural.wa.gov.au/resources/clearinghouse/antiracism_what_works.pdf

[27]Murdoch University , 'Anti-Racism, What Works, An evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-racism strategies' (2003)  http://www.multicultural.wa.gov.au/resources/clearinghouse/antiracism_what_works.pdf

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Ngwala Willumbung Cooperative. 2007, 'Koori Practice Checklist: A Cultural Audit Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Sector', Melbourne: Ngwala Willumbung Cooperative Ltd. Available from http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources?lid=15938 (accessed 4 May 2012)

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