

**ITEM-9 LMM 23/03/21 - RACISM NOT WELCOME CAMPAIGN**

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**MOTION**

**That City of Newcastle:**

1. Proudly reiterates our long and proud history as a progressive, welcoming city, including our official status as a Refugee Welcome Zone, and consistent advocacy as a local government leader when it comes to providing support for refugees and migrants settling in Newcastle.
2. Notes that our official Citizenship Ceremonies often see people from as many as 50 different nations welcomed as new Australian Citizens and Novocastrians, signifying the incredible cultural diversity of our city.
3. Endorses the 'Racism Not Welcome' campaign, as recently endorsed by the City of Sydney and Inner West Council, and headed up by former Socceroos Captain, SBS commentator and human rights campaigner, Craig Foster;
4. Explores partnership opportunities with local multicultural organisations and peak bodies as well as grant funding opportunities to support the delivery of the campaign;
5. Promotes the 'Racism Not Welcome' campaign on our website, social media channels and in our communication material.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Anti-racism street signs delivering powerful message throughout Sydney's inner west**

Can a street sign end racism? Not likely, but it can start a hard conversation.

That is the sentiment behind an anti-racism campaign that has seen red street signs with a simple but confronting message appear around Sydney's inner west.

When Yaa saw a bright red street sign with the words "Racism Not Welcome" in Marrickville it was an emotional moment for the 5-year-old.

Two years ago, on the first day of pre-school a group of girls told her she couldn't play with them because she was brown.

Her mother, hip-hop artist Kween G said the ramifications are still being felt.

"Even transitioning to kindergarten has been challenging. She says she doesn't want people to look at her.

"It's hard to undo."

Despite having many conversations about racism with her daughter, it was the sign that triggered a deeper acceptance that what happened was "not welcome" in her community.

"That day when I saw her so happy, with a big smile, taking pictures with it, I felt she got her justice."



*Anti-racism street signs have been popping up around Sydney's inner west.*

When Councillor Pauline Lockie brought the motion to Inner-West Council to erect 50 of the street signs last November, she was heartbroken to hear that what had happened to Yaa.

Ms Lockie said it could have been lifted from her own childhood in the 1980s, growing up with Indonesian heritage.

"I definitely went to sleep each night hoping I'd wake up with white skin, blond hair and blue eyes.

"It killed me to hear that. That three decades later it's still happening to somebody in Marrickville, that really underlined for me why we need this campaign.

The signs are part of a wider #RacismNotWelcome community campaign devised by the Inner West Multicultural Network.

It was created in partnership with Addison Road Community Organisation who funded the street signs, which cost about \$85 each.

There will also be a video, an art exhibition with an anti-racism theme, stickers and signs for businesses, and a major community event revolving around the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21.

The campaign was conceptualised after a string of racist attacks against the Asian community during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Asian-Australian Alliance documented 377 reports of COVID-19 related racism between April and June 2020 alone in their "I Am Not a Virus" report.

Following coronavirus-related vandalism of a Chinese-Australian home in Melbourne last April, the Federal Government urged Australians to call out racist attacks when they see them.



Rosanna Barbero wants the campaign to be taken up in all LGAs across Australia.

Rosanna Barbero, CEO of Addison Road Community Centre, said the street signs visually confront people daily of the racism that exists and encourage the community to talk about it.

"We've seen the inequality of the impact that this virus has exposed and now we're at a crossroads as we come out of this virus," she said.

"We want to say, 'this is the community we want to live in'."

Ms Barbero said she wants to see the campaign taken up in all 536 local government areas across Australia but it hasn't come without backlash.

During the motion's debate, the single opposing councillor, Julie Passas, rejected it, arguing, "there is no racism in the inner west".

For some locals, the signs have felt accusatory.

"While most of the feedback has been positive, some have asked, 'why have you put this up? Are you implying we're racist here?'," Ms Barbero said.

"But that's a complete misinterpretation, we're saying, 'having this here means we're comfortable standing up against it'."



*Yaa was told by a group of girls she couldn't play with them because she was brown.*

Ms Lockie has found that, even if the first response isn't a comfortable one, it's still leading to conversations.

"The signs are bringing to the surface that a lot of people don't realise racism still exists even in a place as diverse and accepting as the inner west," she said.

"What that exposes is that we'll continue to have this is an issue because you can't fix a problem you can't see."

As for 5-year-old Yaa, a sign has been erected on Livingstone Road in Marrickville, the same road as her primary school where she's just had her first day as a kindergartener this week.

For Yaa and her mother, the sign is a simple reminder of the Australia she wants to live in.

"When I see that sign, I just feel like, wow we are living in a different time," Kween G said.

"How honoured are our children to be able to see that, to see their community stick up for them."

## **City of Sydney set to support 'Racism Not Welcome' street signs campaign**

The City of Sydney is set to become the latest council to support a new campaign spearheaded by Craig Foster which could see symbolic anti-racism messages pop up on street corners in iconic locations around the country.

Councillor Linda Scott will put forward a motion on Monday to endorse the #RacismNOTWelcome movement, created last year by the Inner West Multicultural Council and fronted by Foster, the former Socceroos captain, SBS commentator and human rights campaigner.

The Inner West Council has already passed a similar motion - and over the last month, red street signs bearing the #RacismNOTWelcome message have been erected around Sydney's inner west - while Waverley Council jumped on board last week.

Cr Scott, who is also president of the Australian Local Government Association, is hopeful it will become a national trend.

"I'm so proud to stand beside Craig Foster AM and our City's multicultural communities to launch the #RacismNOTWelcome campaign," she said.

"I'm confident local governments across the nation, as the closest level of government to our communities, will continue the good work we do to ensure all people feel a sense of belonging and are equal. Together, we can stand up, call out racism and create places where decision making is shared, and diversity is valued and celebrated."

Foster said he agreed to front the campaign last year as stories of racism began to pile up at the Addison Road Community Centre, where he volunteers, and described the street signs initiative as a public demonstration of how the issue should no longer be hidden or taboo but visibly acknowledged.

"These signs are the physical manifestation of the underlying principle that racism exists, it is real, damaging and deeply harmful to many Australians and that we all have a responsibility to confront it, every day," he said.

"I don't experience racism as part of the racial majority in Australia, but I see it every day. When I speak about asylum seekers and refugees, I see it. When I support the Uluru Statement, I see it.

"When I listen to powerful indigenous leaders talk about the historic racism that underpins generations of First Australians back to colonisation, I see it and better understand how Indigenous Australians face barriers that I will never have to.

"We all have a responsibility to change that. And I believe that social change is best led by the people. From the grass roots, communities, by changing our daily interactions all across the country."

## Newcastle reaffirms support for refugees

02 Sep 2018

Reaffirming its support for refugees, the City of Newcastle is calling upon the Australian Government to improve and expand its refugee community support program (CSP).

Council noted the government's positive decision to support refugees but said the program doesn't do enough in the context of the international humanitarian crisis.



"Newcastle has proudly been a Refugee Welcome Zone since 2015 and our city has long been at the forefront of local government when it comes to providing real and symbolic support for refugees settling in Australia," said Lord Mayor Nuatali Nelmes.

Community sponsorship is a model where ordinary members of the community are able to sponsor refugees who wish to begin the process of rebuilding their lives, in safety, in Australia.

"While we support the intention of the CSP, the reality is that the costs are prohibitive, the intake numbers are capped at 1,000 per annum and the eligibility criteria are far too restrictive.

"Also, every place filled under the CSP is taken off the humanitarian refugee intake, so there is no net increase in the number of refugees accepted into Australia. We are asking for significant improvements to be made."



*Lord Mayor Nuatali Nelmes and Kevin Sweeney of Amnesty Newcastle*

The motion, proposed jointly by eight Councillors, urged the following changes:

- Ensure that the intake of refugees under community sponsorship is in addition to the existing humanitarian intake
- Adopt a more affordable visa fee structure
- Broaden the eligibility criteria for the CSP
- Increase the annual intake of refugees to 27,000 by 2025 through the CSP and humanitarian intake
- Provide support services including access to Medicare, education and English language tuition to assist refugees to integrate successfully into our communities

"City of Newcastle should be commended on recognising and responding to our local community's commitment to supporting refugees," said Kevin Sweeney, Convener of the Newcastle branch of Amnesty International.

"An expanded and improved CSP will give groups in Newcastle, like churches and sporting clubs, an opportunity to play a greater role in supporting for people in need who we would love to welcome to this city," he said.

Newcastle is always ready to step up for refugees, said the Lord Mayor.

"We are willing to do even more to assist new Novocastrians but we can't do it alone," she said. "The international refugee crisis also demands increased action and support by the Federal Government."

City of Newcastle is one of almost 150 local councils across the country that have declared

themselves Refugee Welcome Zones.

There are currently 65 million displaced people in the world and 22 million of these are refugees.