



## Social Inclusion Forum Communiqué

### Summary

On February 20, 2009 16 young people attended a statewide forum in Hobart on social inclusion: this was the first state government initiated forum with the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF).

The Department of Premier and Cabinet's Danielle Campbell from the Social Inclusion Unit and Paul Levett from the Office of Children and Youth Affairs were facilitators. The group participants were 10 people from the south, one from the north-west and five from the north.

Participants came to the forum from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences with some still in high school, others at the new polytechnic or academy, studying at university and some already out in the workforce.

The majority of young people were interested in attending the Australian Youth Forum that afternoon and many young people present were already involved with other youth participation mechanisms.

### The Process

Some key questions guided the discussions:

- What is social inclusion?
- What does it mean to be included in society?
- What does it mean to be excluded?

The responses to 'inclusion' and 'social inclusion' involved themes such as belonging, acceptance, connection/connected, respect, community, communication, unity, involvement and cooperation, having a place to stay, security, growth, linked together for a common goal, equality, sense of equity, unity in diversity and strength in togetherness.

When asked about 'exclusion' the groups mentioned words such as isolation, discrimination, discarded, worthless, disconnected.

From this the participants formed the theory that those who do the excluding become righteous in their capacity to exclude.

There was a common belief or view that louder groups tend to get better access and recognition, that social exclusion happens throughout people's lives with age having little to do with it, that there is always a cutoff point to accessing goods and services, and people's ability to accessing these goods and services effects their capacity to join in and be involved.

## Overview of Resources and Reading Materials

Participants were provided with an overview of the role of the Social Inclusion Unit and what it aims to do in the future, as well as an outline of what is used to measure social inclusion.

Participants reviewed the following resources and materials before developing ideas and visions:

- Social Inclusion reference documents from Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Principles of Social Inclusion – Australian Social Inclusion Unit

Following this a discussion was initiated regarding how many people the group knew who would not meet the five social inclusion aspects which include:

- secure a job;
- access to services;
- connect with family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- deal with a personal crisis; and
- have their voice heard.

Participants formed the theory that those who do the excluding become righteous in their capacity to exclude.

This led to a discussion on the issues and barriers to social inclusion that the young people present recognised within their own communities. These views were collated to form a list of barriers to social inclusion.

Barriers to social inclusion identified were: unemployment, confidence in oneself, access to public and private transport, finances, language and communication, knowledge, mobility, ability, racism, gender, age and sexuality, social status, geographical positions, racial barriers, bullying and religious beliefs, prejudice, inequality, upbringing, lack of motivation, distractions and lack of time.

Overall it was decided that individual differences is what prevents people from being socially included.

The strengths of their communities were also discussed. Some of the strengths of communities listed were: the programs they provide, the networks within communities, traditions and celebrations, having a sense of belonging, similarities within a group and their ability to provide support to one another and the opportunities that a community provide.

## Visioning

Participants were asked what results they wanted from their ideas:

- people need to realise that it's not just a local issue and needs to be tackled at all levels, there is a need to ensure everyone has their basic needs met as too many people are living below the poverty line.
- There was a common belief that more awareness amongst the community of the facts is needed, as people have a responsibility to know what is going on.
- Ongoing support is needed to prevent people from relapsing into poverty.
- More needs to be done to recognise people at risk of being socially excluded – but this needs to be done in a way that empowers people and does not patronise them.
- Local poverty needs to be a local concern.
- More should be done to get people employment within their communities – not just handouts.
- There should be more opportunities for people to get experience in areas that interest them.
- Solutions will only be found when we start thinking differently.

## Refining Our Ideas

To improve community connectedness and social inclusion the group suggested:

- more communication within communities,
- more opportunities for social involvement,
- a wider range of groups represented in council leadership positions,
- more involvement with schools and between schools,
- more interaction between local businesses and job seekers,
- more community facilities,
- more awareness of community activities,
- more community based assistance for people in need,
- less bureaucratic red tape and
- community internet access at broadband equivalent speeds.

## Potential Ideas

Once the group worked out what they wanted to achieve they started discussing how they could achieve their ideas. These suggestions included:

### Community Breakfasts

Everyone brings a plate of food or a contribution to share, and politicians are invited. This event is an informal way for diverse members of the community to get to know each other. This would also provide the opportunity for people to raise topics and concerns with those in parliament who have the capabilities to change their lives. It was suggested that free transport should be provided to make this event accessible to all.

### Community Gardens

This would be an opportunity for the wider community to work together on a project which would benefit many. Land could be sought from the local council, equipment and seeds donated by the local community and manpower on a volunteer basis. A playground could also form part of the plans, in a fenced off area, so as to include younger members of the community. This would also assist people to develop skills through volunteer work in the garden and help in providing healthy food to those who cannot afford to purchase them.

### Increased Council Involvement

The purpose of this project was to ensure that more information about services and supports reached more people in the community. With support from the Department of Education and local schools, council members could take a greater lead in schools and help to prevent prejudices in young people before they are developed, perhaps by allocating a specific member to each school. Together these groups could organise community events, which aim to socially include as many people as possible.

These opportunities should also be seen as a two-way process where-by the opportunity for listening to community members is also taken.

### Tackling Poverty

Participants believed that individual communities each needed to have a greater awareness and to take more responsibility regarding the issue of poverty in order for it to be confronted effectively.

Through community education of the number of people facing disadvantage in their communities it was hoped that more people would realise that this is an issue that is their responsibility. This would be further complimented through the development of local relationships with businesses, schools and other organisations. The result being that local people offer jobs to local people, or fundraise to assist those in their own communities.