

Living in Harmony - an overview

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs *Living in Harmony – An Overview*, Canberra, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998.

In August 1998, the Coalition Government fulfilled a promise made in the lead-up to the 1996 election, that it would set up an anti-racism education and awareness campaign. This document is the Government's outline of the program, released at the launch of the campaign.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

Living in Harmony

Minister's foreword ***Philip Ruddock -***

As an Australian, I am proud that I live in an accepting and harmonious society which has remained free from the most serious forms of racial intolerance and strife.

Our innate sense of justice and fair play have helped us to create a very modern, diverse and accepting community in which we celebrate the values we share and respect our differences.

But this is no accident. We have all worked hard to achieve this goal. If we are to maintain our record as one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world, we have to make it clear that there is no place for racism in Australia.

Racism is offensive to all Australians. It prevents people from actively participating in our society and from contributing their talents and skills to our development as a nation.

Everyone shares in the social and economic

benefits of community harmony, but supporting it also takes commitment and effort from everyone - governments, individuals, families, communities and the corporate sector.

The Commonwealth Government confirms its strong commitment through the implementation of the Living in Harmony initiative.

The initiative has been developed as the result of a long process of research and consultation in the Australian community. That research reveals that disharmony is universally perceived as disturbing and destructive and that we believe deeply in the tradition of giving everyone a fair go.

We are proud of our ability to accept our differences and not to measure each other's worth by where we were born, the colour of skin or the nature of religious beliefs.

There will always be some people who will deliberately try, by acts or words of intolerance or bigotry, to undermine the harmony of the Australian community. They will not succeed because the Australian spirit has an instinct for acceptance and goodwill which has always survived and will take us confidently into the next century.

Social harmony is the hallmark of a successful diverse society and the Living in Harmony initiative is designed to engage all Australians in recognising this truth.

Everyone here has a part to play in upholding the best of traditional Australian values - those values of equality, acceptance and living peacefully together whatever our religious, social, cultural and racial differences.

I encourage all Australians to work together to

create a truly inclusive and harmonious society.

Philip Ruddock,
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural
Affairs

Principles

The Living in Harmony initiative demonstrates the Commonwealth Government's serious commitment to promoting community harmony.

National research has confirmed that the overwhelming majority of Australians genuinely respect and value the diverse make-up of our community and support the concepts on which the initiative is based:

Australia has a strong history of many different people living together harmoniously - few other countries have achieved that and many envy our record

there is no role for nostalgia - we are going forward into exciting times and it's vital that we make the journey together

the core Australian values are important and our tradition of giving people a fair go and a helping hand has been the key to our success so far

we have a right to be proud of what we have achieved - our diversity, democratic institutions, traditions and distance from 'old world' prejudices have helped us to develop a progressive and peaceful community

there is some intolerance and prejudice against people based on race, culture or religion and that disrupts community harmony and offends most people

racism is wrong and it's not the Australian way to judge people by the colour of their skin or their religious or

cultural background

diversity has enriched us not harmed us - social division costs us dearly and the benefits of community harmony are substantial.

Objectives

The initiative is designed to challenge all Australians to:

take a stand against racism and intolerance

help build a peaceful and productive future for our children and set an example of how to live in harmony making the most of our racial, cultural, social and religious diversity

put into practice the best of traditional Australian values - justice, equality, fairness and friendship.

Australia is a nation built by people from many cultures. Living in Harmony is not only important and relevant to all Australians, it is what we all want.

Making it happen

The Living in Harmony initiative has been designed so that Australians everywhere can play their part. The initiative will be implemented through three linked elements - a community grants program, a partnership program and a media strategy.

Community grants program

The Living in Harmony initiative is primarily a community based education program. Its centrepiece is a community grants program which provides funding for projects which promote community harmony and reduce racism and bigotry.

The Commonwealth Government acknowledges that communities are in the best position to

recognise local problems and to find locally relevant solutions. But they often need additional resources to help in the development of projects which get people working together.

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$2.5 million to provide financial assistance to community based groups and organisations. Groups such as school communities, non-profit foundations, churches, service clubs, sporting bodies, Indigenous groups, ethnic communities, youth organisations and other sections of the community are invited to participate in the initiative by developing projects which improve social harmony.

The kinds of projects which could be developed include:

a country town group establishing a youth project to involve young people from all ethnic and racial backgrounds to improve their acceptance and understanding of each other's lives

a sporting organisation reviewing its codes and activities or implementing an education program to ensure that everyone appreciates the importance of mutual respect on and off the field of competition

a neighbourhood watch group exploring how to involve a broad cross-section of citizens in its crime prevention activities

a school group developing a local history project to improve understanding of the lives and diverse backgrounds of students and their families...

Partnerships

Governments can never work alone to tackle major social issues like racism and would not succeed if they did. The Commonwealth Government has a strong track record of

working in partnership with State, Territory and local governments, private sector and community organisations to ensure that everyone can play a part in the development of our society.

Through the Living in Harmony partnership program, the Commonwealth Government will work with a small number of organisations to develop demonstration projects which explore different ways of improving social cohesion, tackling racism or generating better understanding, respect and cooperation among people of different backgrounds.

Through a combination of commissioning, co-funding and co-operative ventures, the partnership program will establish projects in fields of national significance - employment, community and social services, education, sport and government - which can be implemented in line with world best practice, monitored and evaluated to ensure that genuine community benefits result and are publicised so that their example can be emulated by other organisations.

The partnership program will focus on:

- working together in harmony -

projects which assist industrial or commercial organisations to realise the productive and economic benefits of a diverse and harmonious workforce

- working together in crisis -

programs which improve opportunities for participation by Australians of all cultural and racial backgrounds in community, emergency or volunteer services

- winning together -

activities which enhance diverse participation in social or sporting activities

- learning to live in harmony -

education projects which explore the social and economic benefits of community harmony

- believing in harmony -

programs which encourage understanding, respect and acceptance of the diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs of Australians.

The Commonwealth Government has committed up to \$1 million to the partnership program and will seek partners from a wide range of organisations throughout Australia...

Media strategy

It is important that everyone knows that the Commonwealth Government believes in the importance of community harmony and is deeply concerned about the personal, social and economic harm caused by racism and bigotry. We can only go forward if we take the journey together.

An integral part of the Living in Harmony initiative is a media program which will be used to promote and reinforce the concepts and practice of acceptance and fairness in our community.

The program is designed to:

raise awareness of the importance and benefits of community harmony

promote debate about the personal, social and economic damage caused by racism and intolerance

celebrate the shared values which unite Australians and transcend difference

challenge all Australians to put into practice the great Australian traditions of giving everyone a fair go and a helping hand.

Further information

Further information about the Living in Harmony initiative can be obtained from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs: 02 6264 1322. The contents of this kit are also on the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs homepage: <http://www.immi.gov.a>