

Hobart City Council's Role in Human Rights: A speech made at the Human Rights Week Forum "Past, Present and the Future: Celebrating a decade of the operation of the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998"

Town Hall Thursday Dec 10 2009, Deputy Lord Mayor Helen Burnet

"In the spirit of reconciliation I'd like to acknowledge the original custodians the Mouheneenner people whose descendants have a continuing association with the land upon which we meet.

I'd like to say how pleased I am to attend and participate in this forum celebrating a decade of the operation of the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998. I would also like to take this opportunity in wishing the outgoing ADC Sarah Bolt all the best in her new role in South Australia. Lord Mayor Rob Valentine could not be here and sends his apologies. I would like to acknowledge my colleague Alderman Bill Harvey*.

It is a fundamental right of every individual to have the opportunity to participate equally socially, culturally, economically, physically and politically in society. The exercise of this right benefits everyone and is the fundamental building block for healthy and whole communities.

For Council, this means the deliberate actions we take as an organisation to remove or reduce barriers to inclusion and to create opportunities that facilitate and encourage full participation. Hobart City Council has been both active and pro-active with regard to Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights over the past 20 years through a wide range of mechanisms.

There is a long-standing commitment to celebrate Human Rights Week by Hobart City Council and involvement continues beyond this. A number of these I would like to share with you today. I'll include just some of the many activities Council undertakes in order to strive to attain a just and fair society.

We have a number of community development strategies in place that indicate the Council's long-standing commitment to anti-discrimination and human rights. These include strategies for Equal Access, Youth, Positive Ageing, Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. In May 2009, Council supported the framework for development of a Children and Families Strategy. This strategy will be developed in 2010 and will focus on the themes of resilience, learning, health, safety, creativity, and diversity.

Council's approach to anti-discrimination and human rights issues is now being consolidated through the development of a Social Inclusion Strategy. The draft Strategy will be presented to Council on Monday evening. This strategy embodies the Council's aims and states the following:

- In recognition of the fundamental right of all citizens of Hobart to have the opportunity to participate fully socially, culturally, economically, physically and politically in the life of their community, Hobart City Council is committed to:

- Recognising that diversity in the community is one of its greatest strengths
- Acknowledging that all individuals and communities have strengths and building on them through a whole-of-community approach
- Ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the most disadvantaged people in the community are addressed in partnership with other key stakeholders
- Understanding and being informed about the community
- Engaging the community as identifiers of community needs and aspirations and participators in the responses
- Identifying and understanding the root causes of disadvantage and giving priority to supporting early intervention and prevention approaches
- Promoting and providing equity and access to all Council's activities, programs, facilities and services
- Ensuring Council practices, policies and procedures actively build social inclusion and do not contribute to social exclusion
- Utilising a whole-of-organisation approach to address the barriers that exclude people from full participation in community life through the implementation of the Social Inclusion Strategy

I want to provide you with the history of the genesis of one of our strategies – the first Tasmanian Council to introduce an Equal Access Strategy - presented as an action plan, in 1998. The current Equal Access Strategy of 2004 has recently been reviewed, with a draft Equal Access Strategy 2009 - 2013 being presented to the Council on Monday evening. The Equal Access Strategy ensures that the Council responds to all the relevant United Nations declarations relating to the rights of people with a disability and meets its requirements under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992, and the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1999, as a provider of goods and services and as an employer.

As you can see, it is an evolving process. But it is the action and engagement of people which bears this out. The Council convenes a very active Access Advisory Committee, of which I am a member. This committee comprises representatives from groups who have an interest in access issues in Hobart, including people with a variety of disabilities, older people, and people from many cultural backgrounds. The committee has helped in the development, implementation and review of Council's Equal Access Strategy. Some of the on-ground activities have included celebrating each year the International Day of People with a Disability involved theatre workshops, culminating in a wonderful performance of *Voyages* in the Town Hall.

Council has reached out to engage youth, starting in 2002. *Futures* was formed in 2004 and provides young people with a direct voice to council staff and elected members. This - another - very active committee has been instrumental in the coordination and delivery of a number of key youth consultation forums and significant cultural events, including *Attitude Live* as part of the Taste Festival. With programs and activities such as these, Council plays a major role in breaking down negative stereotypes of young people.

From the young to older people - In 2002, Council led Tasmania by developing the Positive Ageing Strategy. The positive ageing approach focuses on an individual's quality of life and encourages continuing participation in all aspects of community life. This strategy has recently been revised and a draft of the Positive Ageing Strategy 2009 - 2013 will also be presented to the Council on Monday evening.

Part of these more recent changes includes the development earlier this year, of the Hobart Older Persons' Reference Group. This group provides advice and opinion to the Hobart City Council on a range of issues, including those that specifically relate to older people. The group comprises individual representatives from the greater Hobart community who have an interest in the issues that face older people and are keen to ensure the voice of older people is heard as part of the Hobart City Council decision making process.

The *Shared Heritage* project has been developed and implemented by members of many community groups who will host a series of discussions, lectures, demonstrations, workshops, visits and walks with many opportunities to promote new ideas, share interests and skills - to be held on 23 and 24 February 2010.

I want to now speak about Council's role with the CALD communities. This year, Council developed the Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Strategy

Hobart City Council activity in relation to cultural diversity is focused through its *Networking for Harmony Committee*, to address the issues of racism and cultural isolation in the community. These have included projects such as *Bridging the Gap* - a partnership with Kickstart Arts and Elizabeth College, with \$50,000 funding from the Australian Government through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship *Living in Harmony* fund. The project engaged over 20 African and Tasmanian born college students in the development and production of an original play, *Madame Tojo's Café*, which explored cultural and personal identity. It was performed to over 1,200 southern Tasmanian students in Hobart, Sorell and Nubeena. A documentary of the play's development, a full recording of the play and an 18 page teacher resource to assist exploration of cultural diversity have been compiled onto a DVD, with copies distributed to all Tasmanian High Schools, Colleges and Tasmanian Councils.

Since Harmony Day 2001, the Lord Mayor has welcomed many international, migrant and refugee students from TAFE was held in the Elizabeth Mall. The event was developed in response to harassment incidents that had been experienced by TAFE students in the Mall. It was seen as important to develop a positive activity in this very public space in the City to counteract such a negative experience. It has now been extended to include both Government and independent schools and colleges in the Hobart area, the University of Tasmania and Tasmanian Polytechnic. Up to 500 students participate in this event.

Hobart City Council is strongly committed to the rights of all to be safe and to feel safe in our community. This has been recently demonstrated through the establishment of the *Safer*

Hobart Community Partnership and also through its involvement with University of Tasmania's Cultural Awareness and Safety Taskforce to address the issues of safety of our international students.

Lord Mayor Alderman Rob Valentine signed the declaration on behalf of the Council that made Hobart a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2004. That declaration, made five years ago, is still very relevant today as the world deals with some 19 million refugees in over 116 countries.

I think that one of the beacons of Council's commitment to human rights was last year's ceremony in this very room to acknowledge the Salamanca arrests of 1988. The Lord Mayor made a formal apology to the GLBTI community many of whom were arrested at Salamanca Market 20 years ago. This, I believe, was a reflection of our societal shift in acceptance.

I hope you would agree that Council has many achievements in addressing discrimination over the past 20 years and that the draft Social Inclusion Strategy provides Council with a strong, focussed structure detailing how we intend to work with the community in addressing discrimination and promoting a society that is fully inclusive of all people.

We as a Council will continue to meet the challenges of making our city free of discrimination. We must continue to not only listen to those of disadvantage but be prepared to also represent them when called upon to do so.

I hope to be here to play a part in these ongoing commitments to these basic principles of human rights."