

Tuesday 17 May 2011

LOCAL FACES, LOCAL STORIES TO GENERATE LOCAL ACCEPTANCE

Local people and local stories will feature in a new community awareness campaign to increase acceptance of cultural diversity and reduce race-based discrimination.

Launched today (17 May), the *See Beyond Race* campaign will appear between now and August in local newspapers, inside and outside local buses and on bus shelters in the Whittlesea area, as well as other places such as table tops at Westfield Plenty Valley food court.

The campaign, a partnership between VicHealth, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and the City of Whittlesea, is part of the broader *Localities Accepting and Embracing Diversity* (LEAD) Project, which has been running in Whittlesea since 2009.

Mayor of Whittlesea, Cr Rex Griffin said community enthusiasm about getting involved in the campaign had been incredible.

“It’s really exciting to see so many people from a range of cultural backgrounds putting their hands up to raise awareness about the rich, diverse community we have here in Whittlesea,” he said.

“These ads involve local people and their real-life interests – and that was important to us. This campaign is all about looking beyond race, and really getting to know the people who work and live alongside us.”

VicHealth’s Acting CEO Associate Professor John Fitzgerald said the campaign was the first in Australia to be delivered as part of a council-wide program to reduce race-based discrimination.

“While this campaign has been carefully designed to get the message of acceptance out to the community, the LEAD Project also involves intensive training and education for employers, retailers, schools and staff across the council,” Associate Professor Fitzgerald said.

“We’ve worked closely with a range of people in the area – including representatives from some of the key cultural groups in Whittlesea – to develop this campaign, and we’re delighted with the result.

“The campaign highlights the true face of diversity in this local community and is a strong reminder of the importance of looking beyond stereotypes and seeing beyond race.”

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, Dr Helen Szoke said she hopes that the campaign will inspire other communities about the value of challenging stereotypes and tackling racism head on.

“Racism and race-based discrimination can be very damaging to physical and mental health and also the health of the community in general, and I’m very impressed with the willingness of the City of Whittlesea, not to mention the community, to take active steps to combat it.”

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