



# Organising Women of Colour in the Victorian Public Service



## Background

- Women of Colour union members in the public service establish a collective based on their shared experiences of workplace issues.
- In March 2019, CPSU commenced engagement and consultation with union members in the VPS Women of Colour Network established in the Department of Premier & Cabinet.
- Discussions focussed on workplace experiences of racism and discrimination, bullying, difficulty accessing professional development and promotion opportunities, and lack of representation in leadership and decision-making positions.



## Women of Colour Survey

- To explore how broadly and deeply felt these issues were across our membership, CPSU conducted a CPSU Women of Colour Survey in April 2019.
- Survey findings showed issues experienced by Women of Colour are systemic and widespread across all areas of the public service.
- Most common issues reported were poor workplace culture and bullying, racism and discrimination, workload issues, insecure work, lack of diverse representation at management and leadership level, and a lack of development opportunities.



## Survey Highlights – Demographics

- 36% were born outside Australia
- 49% speak a language other than English at home
- 89% were employed at VPS 5 level or below
- 80% were employed in ongoing roles, 20% in fixed term roles
- 65% have caring responsibilities outside work



## Survey Highlights – Key Issues

- 32% of respondents stated they had experienced racism and discrimination at work, however 60% had not reported it.
- 58% had experienced bullying and harassment, however 36% did not report it.
- Numerous anecdotal examples relate to workplaces responding poorly to complaints, difficulty accessing flexible working opportunities, failing to provide culturally safe environments and failing to implement inclusive practices despite diversity and inclusion plans in place.



## Survey Highlights – Barriers to reporting racism and discrimination

- 29% stated they didn't trust their manager/organisation to respond impartially
- 16% were concerned about confidentiality
- 22% were concerned that a complaint would affect their employment and/or promotion prospects
- 33% didn't think complaining would change the situation



## Survey Highlights – Barriers to reporting bullying and harassment

- 23% stated they didn't trust their manager/organisation to respond impartially
- 10% were concerned about confidentiality
- 9% were concerned that a complaint would affect their employment and/or promotion prospects
- 58% didn't think complaining would change the situation



## **Survey Highlights – how could your workplace better support you as a woman of colour?**

- Collect data on cultural background and gender and their VPS awards and qualifications/experience and use this to make workplaces safer and fairer.
- Executive staff should complete mandatory cultural competence training and examine their own unconscious bias, privilege, and leadership and communication styles to create safer spaces for Women of Colour.
- An issue for young women like myself is the severe lack of Women of Colour in leadership positions, which means it is harder to find someone in power who understands structural issues Women of Colour encounter on a daily basis. Having senior leaders to mentor young Women of Colour is crucial.
- Include Women of Colour in the design and implementation of Diversity & Inclusion Strategy Plans.





## **CPSU Women of Colour Conference**

- In October 2019, CPSU held an inaugural conference in partnership to bring an industrial lens to the issues reported by members.
- First step in an important conversation between Women of Colour and the union movement.
- Content informed by survey and by consultation with CPSU Women of Colour Advisory Group.



## Conference Highlights

- Guest speakers included Minister for Women, Multicultural Commission Chair, WorkSafe representatives, members of the VPS Women of Colour Network and Women of Colour leaders and activists in the union movement.
- Conference featured an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caucus.
- Workshops on having difficult conversations, lateral violence, bullying and occupational health and safety and gendered violence



## Conference outcomes

- A set of recommendations to further CPSU's work on behalf of Women of Colour, e.g., consultation with VPSC regarding People Matters Survey demographics.
- An ongoing CPSU Women of Colour Advisory Group to shape CPSU's work.
- Collaboration with Maurice Blackburn to develop professional development seminars for CPSU Women of Colour members.
- Cultural responsiveness training for CPSU staff.



## **Safer Workplaces for Women of Colour project**

- Following the conference, CPSU partnered with WorkSafe Victoria on a collaborative project to address barriers to reporting workplace bullying and racial discrimination as OHS issues.
- Project objectives will focus on developing strategies to record, prevent and respond to issues of racism, discrimination and bullying in the workplace.
- Project workshop held in May 2020 for consultation with members to develop project content.



## Project overview

- Key components are the development of a policy and reporting framework to prevent and respond to race-based bullying and discrimination, the development and piloting of resources to build individual and organisational capacity, and the development of a monitoring and evaluation plan for workplaces.
- Phase 1 features a strong research component to better understand the linkages between racism and discrimination and experiences of workplace bullying.
- Phase 2 will develop tools and resources for employers and employees to be trialled and piloted at seven worksites.
- Phase 3 will produce a project report and evaluation findings.



## Conclusion

CPSU is committed to creating safer and healthier workplaces for Women of Colour through partnerships, collaboration and ongoing consultation.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please contact:

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