

10. Australian Audit of Grass-roots & Local Government Initiatives

Initiative Title: Living in Harmony in the Hills District

Organised by: The Hills District Muslim Society Inc.

Contact Details: Tarek Akkari, PO Box 8078 Baulkham Hills NSW 2153, Ph 04 00484882, Email: antpharm@tpg.com.au

Funded by: Self-funded through donations

Time Period of Initiative: February 2007-Present, Weekly prayer gatherings, Monthly picnics other functions on an intermittent basis.

Number of participants involved: Approximately 100 members

Target Group: Currently Muslims from various ethnic groups in the area and will expand to include non-Muslims.

Project Description: The Hills District Muslim Society is an independent organisation. It seeks to bring the Muslim community in the Hills closer together. Its aim is to support and protect the Muslim community in the Hills District and to be the best Muslims and Hills citizens. It draws guidance from Islamic scripture and attempts to bring about harmony and peace throughout Hills District community. This project aims to generate mutual understanding about cultural diversity in the Hills District. It is designed to assist different religious and cultural groups to live together as one community by offering advice and organising social functions.

Established in 2007, The Hills District Muslim Society is still a growing organisation which is currently raising funds to have their own place of worship. They have members from diverse ethnic groups including Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Afghans which has brought many of them closer together. In the future, they plan to reach out to non-Muslims in the community through organised group activities such as barbeques and similar events to break down any barriers between them. They foresee their events being open to the public, so that their neighbours and friends can also take part in their activities, creating a cohesive society.

Successes and Challenges: One of the successes has been in attracting members from diverse ethnic groups, making it one of the mostly ethnically diverse Muslim groups in Sydney, and getting all of them to sit together and have a common agenda to promote the cause of Islam in society. Challenges involve breaking down typical stereotypes and the initial ignorance barrier.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Feedback has been mostly in the form of direct comments from members and participants, which have been positive. The organisation also receives emails commending them on their programs.

Initiative Title: Sawt: Voices of Women – The National Conference of Australian Muslim Women

Organised by: Canberra Islamic Centre

Contact Details: Shakira Hussein, 221 Clive Steel Avenue (cnr Isabella Dr & Clive-Steele Ave), Monash ACT 2904, Ph (02) 6125 4522/ (02) 62920602 Email: Shakira.Hussein@anu.edu.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Time Period of Initiative: Annual, since 2006.

Number of participants involved: Approximately 120

Target Group: Muslim Women

Project Description: This annual National Conference of Australian Muslim Women brings together Muslim women from around Australia to promote their positive participation, representation and wellbeing both in their own communities and in the wider Australian society. *Sawt* provides Muslim women with an opportunity to have their say on the important issues affecting their lives at this critical time for Australian Muslims.

Planning for the conference includes consultation with internal and external stakeholders, service providers and decision makers. A national database of Muslim women's organisations, service providers and individual mentors as well as web facilities identify issues to be addressed at the forum.

This year's *Sawt* conference was launched by Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward. Speakers and participants included:

- Sydney lawyer, author and academic, Jamila Hussein
- Melbourne social researcher and manager of the Grassroots Muslim Youth Initiative, Susan Carland
- Victorian constable of police, Maha Sukkar
- Sydney author and lawyer, Randa Abdel Fattah

Successes and Challenges: Dynamic participation from Muslim women who discussed issues important to their identities and roles in society. The Conference also brought significant attention to the status of Muslim women and their active participation in society, helping challenge prevalent stereotypes.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Online and physical surveys were conducted with thoroughly positive response from participants.

Initiative Title: My dress, my image, my choice

Organised by: Eve Consulting in collaboration with Islamic Council of Victoria

Contact Details: Saara Sabbagh, 161 Victoria Parade, Collingwood, Vic 3066, Ph 0433131667, Email: saara@eveconsulting.com.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Time Period of Initiative: Over 50 shows since 2001.

Number of participants involved: Approximately 200 each

Target Group: Non-Muslim Women

Project Description: *My dress, My image, My choice* is a women only community education program, with the intention of bringing Muslim and non Muslim women together to increase harmony and understanding about Muslim women and Islam in general; necessary we believe in today's political climate. The ingredients of this program are what make it so successful... great food, conversation and of course fashion! The education process happens in a fun, comfortable and relaxed environment where women are able to engage in discussion, ask questions and as a result, break down barriers and any pre-conceived ideas they may have had about Muslim women and Islam in general.

The program began quite humbly in Women's Health Week March 2001 in the City of Manningham, Melbourne. *My dress, my image, My choice* has received overwhelming success both within Melbourne and across country Victoria. The program has been conducted across cities within Melbourne and regional Victoria, as well as Sydney and Adelaide this year and will move to Brisbane and Tasmania in 2008.

My dress My image My choice is a non profit project operating under EVE, a women's only community initiative aimed at initiating and promoting dialogue between women of different faiths and backgrounds to create a truly harmonious intercultural Australian society. The program has been conducted at girl's only schools as part of the cultural and religious studies syllabus.

Successes and Challenges: The project has done a lot to help non-Muslim-Australian women understand the culture and religion of Muslim women. It has broken down stereotypes and helped change people's preconceived notions of Muslims, especially in country towns. One of the challenges has been in finding adequate funding for the project.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Surveys conducted showed 98% positive response from participants at the events.

Initiative Title: Self-esteem, Identity, Leadership and Community (SILC) for Women Workshops

Organised by: Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV)

Contact Details: Joumanah El Matrah, 169 Fitzroy Street, FITZROY 3065, Ph: (03) 9419 7888, Email: iwwcv@vicnet.net.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship and Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

Time Period of Initiative: 3 years

Number of participants involved: Approximately 150 people each.

Target Group: Muslim women living in Shepparton, Cobram, Coburg, Broadmeadows, Brunswick, Glenroy, Carlton, Fitzroy, Newport and Dandenong.

Project Description: The SILC project aims to facilitate women's recognition of their rights and responsibilities as human beings, women and Muslims. SILC is a three-year project and provides opportunities for Muslim women to develop their self-confidence and sense of well-being as they enhance their strengths and leadership skills. On completing one or more of the workshops, participants will have the capacity to support other women, both formally and informally or serve as resource persons, mentors or leaders to the community if they choose to do so. Women may also access the SILC workshops solely to enhance their awareness of issues that are important to them.

Women are able to choose from any or all of the following streams- General Leadership, Leadership in Education & Skills, Leadership in Parenting, Leadership against Domestic Violence. Each module will provide Muslim women key frameworks that support them in recognising their rights and role as community members in the context of Australia. These frameworks include human rights, Islamic writings, citizenship rights and gender justice.

IWWCV is a community welfare organisation established and managed by Muslim women for Muslim women. Their belief is that any meaningful change in the status of Muslim women is to be achieved through the improved situation of Muslim women individually and collectively. To this end, the Council developed the SILC initiative which lies at the heart of IWWCV's commitment to increase women's participation and voice in their community.

Successes and Challenges: The workshops have helped broaden the horizons of Muslim women and encouraged their participation in wider Australian society, thereby reaching out to non-Muslims as well. This enhancement of awareness was the central aim of the workshops and it has been a huge success.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Evaluation involved surveys and direct feedback, all of which substantiated the successful role played by SILC in helping Muslim women.

Initiative Title: 'Did you Know? The Role, Position and Rights of Australian Muslim Women' – Production of booklet

Organised by: Muslim Women's National Network of Australia (MWNNA)

Contact Details: Aziza Abdel-Halim, PO Box 213 Granville NSW 2142, Ph 0402 778 366, Email: info@mwnna.org.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Time Period of Initiative: Booklet to be launched and distributed by end of 2007.

Number of participants involved: N.A.

Target Group: Muslim women as well as men, non-Muslims. To be distributed through Islamic organisations.

Project Description: This project will develop a booklet to address misinterpretation and misapplication of Islam which affects the role, position and rights of Australian Muslim women. The project recognises the responsibility women have in the family structure and in the transfer of beliefs and practices to youth.

The MWNNA is a peak body representing a network of Muslim women's organisations and individuals throughout Australia. It is a multicultural Muslim women's organisation, welcoming Muslim women of all ages, occupations and ethnicities. Their membership is drawn from a broad mix of ethnic backgrounds from the Middle East, South East Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, Europe and America, as well as members who were born in Australia.

The production and distribution of the booklet on Australian Muslim women is in line with the organisation's aims to educate Muslim women and girls to know and appreciate their Islamic rights and duties, provide advocacy with government and non-government institutions on behalf of Muslims, especially women and children, and maintain good relations with Australians of other faiths and joining with them in interfaith meetings and events. The booklet will not only help Muslim women and men understand their faith better, but also clear any misunderstanding and stereotypes among non-Muslims about Muslim women. They are currently awaiting final clearance of the booklet by DIAC.

Successes and Challenges: One of the challenges is changing the rigid mindset of Muslims who have understood certain cultural and ethnic practices as belonging to Islam when this is not the case. The booklet draws from the Quran to clearly indicate the role of women within Islam rather than just following certain cultural practices attributed to Islam.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: Step-Up!

Organised by: United Muslim Women Association Inc

Contact Details: Maha Abdul, 47 Wangee Road LAKEMBA NSW 2195, Ph: (02) 9750 6916, Email: manager@mwa.org.au

Funded by: NSW Attorney-General's Department

Time Period of Initiative: 2006, Events on an intermittent basis

Number of participants involved: 150

Target Group: Young Muslim women and service providers around Lakemba and neighbouring suburbs.

Project Description: United Muslim Women Association Inc is a registered body working with individual women and women's groups to promote fairness, equity, and justice in the local community. It is a non-ethnic based organisation which caters for Muslim women from any socio-economic, political, and cultural background.

The United Muslim Women Association is currently overseeing a new safety project targeting Arab and Muslim women and young people. *Step Up!*, as the project has been called, is funded by the NSW Attorney-Generals Department and aims to *reduce and prevent racial and religious discrimination and violence against Arab and Muslim women and young people*. Step Up! also aims to build the capacity of Arab and Muslim women and young people in the short, medium and long term to deal with racial and religious discrimination and violence. It also aims to increase the capacity of government and non-government organisations and small businesses to respond effectively and appropriately to the racial and religious discrimination and violence experienced by Arab and Muslim women and young people.

For example, in light of the moral panic fuelled by the media and other parts of society, following the London bombing, MWA recently took the initiative in gathering prominent members of the Muslim community to discuss issues and concerns regarding the concept of Jihad to Muslims and their condemning of terrorism. Through regular events like these, the organisation tries to not only reach out to Muslims, but also the wider Australian society.

Successes and Challenges: All the programs has received good response from the public with substantial turnout. The organisation through their programs are playing an active role in improving the level access & equity participation of Muslim women into all facets of Australian life, improving the quality of service provision, as well as provide information, education and training on Islamic Practices and beliefs with a view to correct misconceptions.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: Campus Conversations

Organised by: Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations (FAIR)

Contact Details: Kuranda Seyit, PO BOX 1013, Strawberry Hills, NSW, Ph: 0412 318 045, Email: info@fair.org.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Time Period of Initiative: Since 2006, six programs have been conducted.

Number of participants involved: 30-40

Target Group: Muslim and non-Muslim students in universities in Sydney and Melbourne, academics, journalists

Project Description: FAIR is a community organisation made up of young Australians working to enhance the position of Muslims and to promote a positive image of the grassroots Islamic community in Australia through advocacy, public relations and by engaging the media. This particular project involves lectures in universities in New South Wales and Victoria for tertiary students and the general public. The lectures aim to break down misunderstanding and stereotypes generated by the media, and to make accessible 'Australian Muslims'. They will focus on current issues facing the community and promote critical understanding of Islam and Australian Muslims.

Through Campus Conversations, FAIR tries to educate the community about the differences and similarities between various religious communities and to eradicate ignorance and intolerance towards any one religious group, promote inclusiveness and participation between various inter-religious and ethnic groups, and engage effectively and successfully with the media at all levels pro-actively and responsively. The project has also helped inter-community and inter-faith dialogue and mutual understanding between various groups.

Successes and Challenges: The successes has been in having a strong presence on tertiary campuses and stimulating active intellectual discussions between students and academics, which was also picked up by the media. Through such events, there has been a wonderful opportunity to correct misconceptions about Islam and Muslims among the general public.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Feedback has been almost completely positive with many universities expressing interest in such events on their campus.

Initiative Title: Youth Leadership and Mentoring Program

Organised by: Youth Fusion (division of Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations)

Contact Details: Kuranda Seyit, PO BOX 1013, Strawberry Hills, NSW, Ph: 0412 318 045, Email: info@fair.org.au

Funded by: Self-funded

Time Period of Initiative: 2006; Ongoing on intermittent basis

Number of participants involved: Approximately 100 at each event

Target Group: Young Muslims

Project Description: Youth Leadership and Mentoring Program (under the guidance of internationally esteemed scholar Sidi Naeem Abdul Wali (from the USA) is a series of short certificate courses on Islam including In the Footsteps of our prophet, History of the Hijab, Arabic morphology, Media for Muslims, Resolving conflicts the fun way, Muslim awareness about Drugs and Alcohol, An overview of Islamic history, Introduction to Islam and more.

Islamic Youth camps and weekend Deen Intensives/retreats are also conducted. The aim is to preserve the civil liberties and protect religious and social rights of Muslims, reduce religious bigotry and ignorance about Islam, simultaneously promoting involvement and active participation of Muslim-Australians within the broader spectrum of Australian society. The Youth Leadership and Mentoring program is also designed to empower young Muslims, to provide them with the skills and knowledge to integrate into mainstream society, and leadership capabilities which will eventually see them working effectively with other Australians in all fields.

Youthfusion is about self-reassertion and free expression self-identity. It is about self-confidence and comfort in knowing that youths are valued members of society. It is about securing a safe and stable future for youths and ensuring the inculcation of mutual respect in the community regardless of faith or ethnicity. It has a FITRA centre which is open to youth and adults alike. It also has an internet cafe, Islamic library, games area, all within 3 minutes walk from Auburn station.

Successes and Challenges: People who have gone through the programme developed a sense of direction, as well as began to understand the qualities of being an empowered Muslim in Australia. Programs such as these have a strong potential to bring about positive change in the Muslim community. Challenges include breaking the mould of people's perception of Islam and making them understand the forward looking and empowering aspects of the religion.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Positive feedback from participation; via surveys, direct feedback and by email.

Initiative Title: WimSWIM - Women only swimming program

Organised by: Mission of Hope - Muslim Community Solutions for Health and Well-Being

Contact Details: Manal Nasreddine, P.O.Box 675 Lakemba, NSW 2195, Ph: (02) 9703 1580, Email: womenshealth@missionofhope.org.au

Funded by: NSW Sport and Recreation

Time Period of Initiative: In place since May 2006; continuous batches throughout the year.

Number of participants involved: 150 enrolled in various levels

Target Group: Women and young girls from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds.

Project Description: The WimSwim initiative is a culturally appropriate program for women to continue to keep themselves healthy through swimming either as a sport or leisure activity. The initiative also welcomes non-Muslim women to participate so that there can be more interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim women and the community can benefit from this relationship.

Mission of Hope which organises the program, aims to keep Muslim women healthy through their participation in this women's only swimming initiative for both leisure and sports. WimSWIM has also received a commendation at the highly prestigious NSW Water Safety Awards announced by the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, Sandra Nori. The commendation was received under the Patron's award for the most significant contribution to water safety, with a focus on an under represented group.

WimSWIM recognises that there are many cultures and religions where it is not appropriate for men and women to swim together. The response to the programs has been fantastic with 157 women and girls enrolled in the programs, participating weekly and learning the basics of swimming and developing their skills.

Successes and Challenges: The award received for the initiative is a reflection of the success of the program which has provided opportunities for women and girls to learn to swim and enjoy leisure swimming time in an all female environment.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: The turn-out as well as surveys among participants indicate a wonderfully positive response from the community.

Initiative Title: www.MuslimVillage.net
(formerly IslamicSydney)

Organised by: IslamicSydney.com / MuslimVillage.net

Contact Details: PO BOX A92, Enfield South NSW 2133, Email:
webmaster@muslimvillage.net

Funded by: Self-funded through Advertisements, Contributions

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 2001

Number of participants involved: Over 6,500 registered members.

Target Group: Young Muslims with access to internet as well as non-Muslims

Project Description: MuslimVillage.net (IslamicSydney.com) is a non-sectarian, non-profit web site run by volunteers, and relies on the support and good will of Muslims in the community to survive. It was established to provide a focal point for Muslims living in Sydney, to bind the community together and be an extensive source of information for locals and visitors.

The website keep Muslims in the area informed about Islam and about other important issues in the community. It encourages Muslims to talk to non-Muslim members in their community to raise awareness of Islam as a peaceful and practical religion. It also encourages a strong community spirit through mutual understanding and tolerance.

The website also functions as a source of information for non-Muslims to learn more about Islam, thereby encouraging closer understanding between the groups. The forums on the website form an important discussion avenue for Muslims to address issues of importance to the community.

Successes and Challenges: The website has been tremendously successful in getting over 6,500 members for its forum and it continues to act as a central vehicle where, events, religious issues etc that are important to Muslims in Sydney are discussed on the internet.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: Bi-Monthly Forum for New Muslims and Non-Muslims

Organised by: Australian New Muslims Association

Contact Details: Mohamad EL-Chami, 69 Croydon St, LAKEMBA NSW, Ph: 0410680119

Funded by: Donations from general public

Time period of the initiative: 2004-Present (3 years)

Number of participants involved: 20-25 (Average)

Target Group: Primary target groups are newly converted Muslims as well as those interested to learn more about Islam.

Project Description: Australian New Muslims Association aims to establish a permanent 'open' forum in which new Muslims and non-Muslims could regularly participate and learn about Islam. It wishes to spread the message of Islam through interaction, communication, and dialogue and encourages interfaith interaction and dialogue in order to make the relationship between different groups in the community stronger and more amicable. During the forum, there are lectures on Islam as well as question and answer sessions with the participants. The forum is mainly advertised through email and flyers and it is held on every 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month at 6pm. The 2nd Sunday generally consists of an Islamic film screening (Cinema Islam) whereas the 4th Sunday entails a talk on Islamic topics, followed by a discussion and question and answers.

The Australian New Muslims Association was established by young Australian Muslims to cater for new Muslims needs. It was borne out of the concern in the young Australian Muslim communities for the transition of new Muslims from their old faith to their new Islamic faith. It was also concerned about the level of information available in the community about Islam and therefore Australian New Muslims Association opened its door to non-Muslims who wished to learn about the Islamic faith.

Successes and challenges: The forum has played an important role in bridging the gap between Muslims and the general community. It has helped in expelling misconceptions about Islam and the Muslim community and has garnered some amount of support from the wider community.

One of the challenges as a support organisation is to make its activities accessible to and visible in the community. As there are many Muslim organisations catering to the public, people are not sure which one to approach.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: No separate evaluation was conducted. It's a continuing project and as long as numbers remain consistent it will be carried forward indefinitely.

Initiative Title: Home Encounters Network

Organised by: Affinity Intercultural Foundation

Contact Details: Makiz Ansari, PO Box 496, Auburn NSW 1835, Tel: (02) 9702 0789
Fax (02) 9646 1150, Email info@affinity.org.au

Funded by: Initially funded by DIAC, now a self-sustained project.

Time period of the initiative: 2003-Present

Number of participants involved: Each group involves four Muslims, four Christians and one person acting as a facilitator.

Target Group: Muslims, Christians, Jews irrespective of ethnicity.

Project Description: The Home Encounters Network aims to expand an established network of people interested in continuing their interfaith experience through home meetings. The Network develops innovative projects as well as activities for members to maintain and increase their interfaith dialogue.

The project was comprised of six separate groups having monthly meetings for six consecutive months. Each group was made up of four Muslims and four Christians. A facilitator directed each meeting, which covered a preset topic from both Christian and Muslim perspectives in each meeting.

After each faith's perspective was presented, a respondent from the other faith tradition summarised the presentation in their own words and as they understood it. This was followed by an informal discussion and a question and answer session.

The primary objective of this interfaith dialogue initiative is to help induce positive long-lasting change in people's understanding of the 'other.' There is a need to formulate innovative community-based educational approaches to ensure that participants in Muslim-Christian interfaith encounters leave thinking differently, feeling differently and acting differently.

Successes and challenges: The idea of having house gatherings to facilitate learning at an individual level has worked and resulted in lasting change within the participants. The 'sustained dialogue' experience was a unique community-education initiative as it was a large operation and has the potential to expand to include hundreds of people and over time, thousands. The experience has generated profound understanding of the other within their frame of reference. Surprisingly, it has also led participants to better understand their own faith tradition. The key to success was the establishment of an atmosphere of trust in an informal setting of a home, training each participant to develop better listening skills together with a basic willingness to understand.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Surveys were conducted among participants and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Most of the participants loved the initiative, wanted to keep in touch with the other participants from different backgrounds and wanted more social outings.

Initiative Title: Formal & Private Home Iftar Dinners

Organised by: Australian Intercultural Society

Contact Details: Level 1, 728 Mt. Alexander Rd, Moonee Ponds, Vic 3039, Ph: 03 93262177, Email: info@intercultural.org.au

Funded by: Self-funded through donations by businesses and individuals

Time period of the initiative: Annual. This year from 13 September to 11 October 2007

Number of participants involved: 400+

Target Group: General public, VIPs, Victorian Police, Faith and Community Leaders.

Project Description: Each year during the holy period of Ramadan, the AIS organizes formal and private Iftar dinners for people of different faiths and cultures at designated venues and at the private homes of Muslims. This unique project enables people of all faiths and cultures to socialise and learn about each other's customs in a warm friendly atmosphere. This gives guests an opportunity to share in the experiences of a Muslim family and allows them to share with the Muslim family of their own experiences

The AIS also believes that bringing members of Parliament, Officers of the Victorian police, faith and community leaders and members of the Muslim community together for a Ramadan Iftar dinner is an excellent opportunity to enhance existing relationships and create new ones, encourage interfaith dialogue and promote a greater understanding of Islam in the wider community. The AIS partnered with various organisations during this Ramadan to help bridge the gap between Muslims and the wider community. Such gatherings help Muslims overcome the isolation they feel and help the wider community to overcome the prejudice and misunderstanding that occurs. These events are very social and interactive occasions that allow all participants to interact and learn from the personal experience of talking with one another.

Successes and challenges: People travelled from across Melbourne with people from all different faith and cultural backgrounds. Some people also came in from regional Victoria for a chance to meet with Muslims for the first time. The large turn out at the public home Iftar dinner indicated that the event was a huge success.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Feedback mechanisms in place indicated a positive response from most participants. Some of the feedback included: 'I felt deeply honoured that strangers would extend me such easy hospitality and explain their life and beliefs to me. I went away with a great sense of peace.' 'We feel such gatherings give us a greater understanding of the persons participating, the culture and religion and help to build bridges. We were overwhelmed with the generosity of our hosts.'

Initiative Title: Building Positive Relations between the Muslim Community and Queensland Police Service

Organised by: Al-Nisa's Youth Group

Contact Details: Nazrana Noor Mohamed, PO Box 1586, Sunnybank Hills, QLD 4109, Ph: 0421 890 838, Email: thesecretary@alnisagroup.com.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)

Time period of the initiative: September 2007 - Present

Number of participants involved: 25-35

Target Group: Muslim community and senior women staff of Queensland Police Service

Project Description: Al-Nisa was established in July 2005 to act as an advocacy body and to provide young Muslim women in Queensland with support and opportunities to express themselves. This particular project aims to:

- provide information on and facilitate understanding of Muslim-Australian communities to the QPS, specifically senior Police women;
- develop resources and strategies that the QPS, and in particular senior Police women can incorporate into police education and training;
- develop strategies to create and improve positive relationships between the QPS and the Muslim-Australian communities; and
- identify communication procedures that provide effective management of relationships between senior women in the QPS and the Muslim-Australian communities.

The project is run in partnership with the Queensland Police Senior Women's Syndicate and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Successes and challenges: The project is helping to bridge the divide between the Muslim community and regulatory bodies such as Queensland Police Service. Through the reach-out program to link young Muslim women with senior women staff of QPS, both parties have come to a better understanding of each other, ensuring a better functional relationship as well as closer ties in cooperating with each in the future. One of the primary challenges was overcoming the negative stereotypical image of Muslim women and the project has helped substantially in breaking down these barriers.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Direct feedback at events indicated overwhelming support from participants.

Initiative Title: Young Australian Muslim of the Year Project and Award

Organised by: Islamic Council of Victoria

Contact Details: Bahriye Bol, Islamic Council of Victoria, 66 Jeffcott St, West Melbourne, Ph: 03 93282067/0404153653, bahriye.bol@icv.org.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Time period of the initiative: 2005-Present

Number of participants involved: 700+

Target Group: Young Muslims aged 14 -19.

Project Description: The Young Australian Muslim of the Year Project and Award aims to recognise the positive contribution of Year 9 to Year 12 students of Islamic faith to the Australian community.

The Young Australian Muslim of the Year (YAMY) project supports the development of positive role models for Muslim Youth and recognises and celebrates existing role models. This project will also highlight the importance of contributing to the Australian community through personal achievement and community service. The award is unique in that it places the emphasis on the individual's ability to contribute their skills, talent and time to the community, as opposed to recognising the individual for their skill or talent only.

The YAMY award was initiated in 2005 by Muslim Community Cooperative Australia (MCCA) to facilitate the development of community mindedness in young Australian Muslims and to provide an opportunity to recognise the philanthropic and altruistic efforts of many young Muslims. During this time, 38 young Australian Muslims were recognised for Outstanding Community Service Achievements through the YAMY awards and over 700 young people have been involved in youth conferences, training workshops across Melbourne and Sydney.

Successes and challenges: The YAMY award and project provided young Muslims around the country, opportunities for contribution to the nation and increased awareness of such opportunities and needs. Through the project, hundreds of young Muslims who have been involved have come to realise the importance of unselfish contribution towards society. Furthermore, such contribution to the community has built resiliency and a sense of belonging among young the Muslims who have taken part. The conferences organised during the project were also used to motivate young people to align their strengths with community services related activities. Finally, the YAMY award has also contributed to bringing about a positive change about the perception of Muslim youth as an integral part of the wider Australian society.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A

Initiative Title: Women's Swimming Program

Organised by: Auburn Council

Contact Details: Noelene Rudolph, 1 Susan Street, Auburn, PO Box 118, Auburn NSW 1835, Ph: 9735 1288, Email: noelene.rudolph@auburn.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: CDSE Auburn

Time period of the initiative: 6 months including planning and implementation of 10 week program.

Number of participants involved: 72

Target Group: Low income women living in Auburn LGA were the target, however the program attracted nearly all Muslim women, particularly Iraqi, Afghan and Lebanese women. Some Asian women also attended. This included young women as well as older women. Some mothers and daughters attended.

Project Description: A heavily subsidised learn to swim program for low income women living or working in Auburn LGA. Included 10 weeks of learn to swim lessons with referrals to health promoting programs afterwards. The women-only program was held at Ruth Everuss Aquatic Centre, Church Street, Lidcombe weekly on Wednesdays. Also organised as part of the program was a Bus Trip to Cronulla Beach to learn about surf safety, a women's health talk and lunch at Auburn Community Health Centre, Bus Trip to Villawood for swimming lessons and a free four hour hands on course in Auburn library on saving the lives of infants and adults through resuscitation.

Successes and challenges: Partnership between Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, Auburn Community Health, STARTTS, Dept of Sport and Recreation and Auburn Council worked well. It was challenging getting the pool managers to agree to having a women-only space in the beginning, as there had been controversy in the past when media man Alan Jones raised issues with a previous women-only swim program. That program was closed down and none operated since at the same pool. However as relationships were built and the project was framed in terms of business viability, the pool managers agreed to host the project. There was an extremely high turnout, in fact we had to turn some people away as places were full.

Note: Auburn Council has supported Muslim programs run by the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, by providing free facility use. Auburn Council was also involved in the Peace Forum that Affinity and the Centre for Peace and Justice organised on September 5, 2006 and the 'Inside Out' Muslim Women's project initiated by Auburn Community Development Network.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Surveys among participants were conducted with significant positive response.

Initiative Title: Whittlesea Interfaith Network

Organised by: City of Whittlesea in partnership with Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council.

Contact Details: Rev Noel Whale, St Peter's Anglican Church Bundoora 12 Alma Road BUNDOORA VIC 3083 jonahnoel@hotmail.com, Ph: 9467 4442

Funded by: Inkind support, City of Whittlesea, seeking funds

Time period of the initiative: 1 year

Number of participants involved: 15 – 20

Target Group: Faith Leaders from various religious communities.

Project Description: The Whittlesea Interfaith Network (WIN), has been meeting for one year. The network was brought together and initiated by the Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council and the Multicultural Resource Officer of the City of Whittlesea. It is recognised that Faith leaders are connected to a vast section of the community and that the Faith leaders in collaboration with Council have a role to play in community development, social cohesion and the raising of awareness and understanding between and amongst faiths in general. This is a vehicle for engaging various religious groups and fostering inter-faith dialogue and improving understanding between the leaders in the different communities. Through such an initiative, it is envisaged that the groups can better understand their role within a multicultural society and work with each towards forming an inclusive and cohesive society.

Successes and challenges: The Whittlesea Interfaith Network is in its infancy. Membership is predominantly Christian, that reflects the statistics of the ABS, however we are seeking to diversify and expand the network to include Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and other faiths. We currently have membership from these faiths, but attendance and commitment fluctuates.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: No specific project catering to Muslim community

Organised by: Liverpool City Council

Contact Details: Galavizh Ahmadinia, 1 Hoxton Park Road, Liverpool, Ph: 02 9821 9161, Email: G.Ahmadinia@liverpool.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: -N.A

Time Period of Initiative: N.A

Number of participants involved: N.A

Target Group: N.A

Project Description: The Liverpool Council will continue to provide in kind and financial assistant to plan and implement Harmony Day events in Liverpool. This event is coordinated annually with local organisations.

In partnership with Columban Mission Institute we will be looking at organising a Peace Forum focusing on Christian Muslim relations in Liverpool. The forum will be held during Liverpool's Harmony Day events. The forum will aim to encourage interfaith dialogues. At this stage, the details for the event are still being worked out, planning is expected to start in Novemeber.

Successes and Challenges: N.A

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: No specific project catering to Muslim community

Organised by: City of Casey

Contact Details: Philip Start, PO Box 1000, Narre Warren, VIC 3805, Ph: 03-90755200, Email: pstart@casey.vic.gov.au

Funded by: N.A

Time Period of Initiative: N.A

Number of participants involved: N.A

Target Group: N.A

Project Description: The council is currently meeting with the various community groups with members living within Casey. In particular the Somali/Somaliland as well as Afghan communities. This has been very fruitful and will lead to greater involvement by their community and hopefully new initiatives.

These meetings have shown a lack of awareness of what services council and local service providers already offer. One of the 'hurdles' we were keen to address was the lack of involvement in programs by Muslim women of all ages. We are currently establishing women-only swimming at a venue that can be 'blocked off' from people looking in.

The council's approach has been to ask the various communities and obtain their feedback rather than imposing programs upon them. The response has been very positive and has already led to greater involvement in programs that were already running.

Forward plans include the following:

- Sustainable living program ran by Casey Youth Ambassadors for multicultural youth, who in turn will then help lead the cause in their community
- At least two camps in 2008
- An ongoing CALD youth meeting/forum that will meet monthly and feed back directly to local governments and service providers. This will be regional.
- Programs targeting Muslim young women
- Various in-school and after-school programs.

Successes and Challenges: Smaller numbers in programs has been much more successful with retention. Credibility is a big issue which the council officers have worked hard to establish. This has resulted in a close working relationship with all community groups the council has met with so far. Another hurdle is the spread of members of the various communities across many local government borders. Not all councils offer the same services or are able to include those that live outside their boundaries.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: No specific project catering to Muslim community

Organised by: Bankstown City Council

Contact Details: Miguel Ferrero, PO Box 8, Bankstown, NSW 1885, Ph: 02-97079863, Email: miguel.ferrero@bankstown.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: N.A

Time Period of Initiative: N.A

Number of participants involved: N.A

Target Group: N.A

Project Description: While the council is not currently involved in any projects directly catering to the Muslim community, it has previously been involved in events to increase interaction between various ethnic groups. This included a weekly program of cultural awareness and harmony activities to increase participation by Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in which the Council funded Bankstown Area Multicultural network. Another similar event involved an interactive luncheon and workshop encouraging CALD women to come together to celebrate their diversity in which was funding was granted the organisers – the Lebanese Communities Council. Furthermore, the council also funded the production of a 'Bankstown Council Harmony Day' DVD which involved interviews with young people of diverse ethnic and religious communities, residing in Bankstown.

Successes and Challenges: N.A

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: No specific project catering to Muslim community

Organised by: Blacktown City Council

Contact Details: Tony Barnden, 62 Flushcombe Road, Blacktown NSW 2148, Ph: (02)98396054, Email: Tony.Barnden@blacktown.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: N.A

Time Period of Initiative: N.A

Number of participants involved: N.A

Target Group: N.A

Project Description: Currently not actively involved in any Muslim specific projects. The Council actively supports refugee communities from many countries through our Blacktown Emerging Communities Action Plan programs - but these are not Muslim specific events. It also undertakes harmony day type events - but again are focussed on many communities

Successes and Challenges: N.A

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: The Interfaith Network

Organised by: City of Greater Dandenong

Contact Details: Michele Watts, PO Box 200 Dandenong, Victoria 3175, Ph: 03 9239 5100, Email: Michelle.Watts@cgd.vic.gov.au

Funded by: The Interfaith Network is a voluntary network with some funding provided by the City of Greater Dandenong and other funding bodies for specific projects.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 1989; ongoing monthly meetings.
Number of participants involved: Approximately 60 faith members & representatives.

Target Group: Leaders and members of various faith communities in the Springvale, Dandenong, Keysborough and Noble Park areas.

Project Description: While the council does not currently oversee any Muslim community-specific project, it has an active interfaith group which has its origins in 1989. The council has formed a close partnership with The Interfaith Network which is a group of diverse cultural and religious faiths, who have chosen to work with the City of Greater Dandenong Council to promote peace and harmony within the municipality. The network consists of leaders of the Baha'i, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh faiths and their communities as well as the spiritual organisations of the Sathya Sai and the Brahma Kumaris. Some of the activities of the Interfaith Network apart from their monthly planning meetings include:

- An Annual Gathering of Faith Communities, held in October and an interfaith Annual gathering of local schools including Islamic schools.
- Monthly public tours and specially tailored tours for schools and other interested groups of the various places of worship within the City of Greater Dandenong
- Informal get-togethers.

Previously known as The Faith Communities of the City of Springvale and of Dandenong, the Interfaith Network is an opportunity for dialogue and understanding between various religious groups, a way of living with mutual respect and tolerance, and a celebration of individuality and identity of each tradition. Although the network is not specific to Muslim groups, it forms an excellent avenue for leaders of Muslim groups to interact with those from other backgrounds and forge closer ties with the wider community.

Successes and Challenges: A major success of the Interfaith Network is the longevity of the Network and the commitment by its volunteers to work for peace, harmony, and understanding in the City of Greater Dandenong and beyond. The Network of faith leaders along with the City of Greater Dandenong have been in existence for 18 years now and continues to grow in response to community need. Other successes include the continual avenue of community education that the Network provides. This education is extended to adults and children through a number of events and initiatives.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Evaluation mechanisms included surveys at organised events as well as face to face feedback.

Initiative Title: Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project

Organised by: Darebin City Council

Contact: Dalal Smiley, 274 Gower St, Preston, Vic 3072, Ph: 03 8470 8888, Email: mailbox@darebin.vic.gov.au

Funded by: Living in Harmony community grant from Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (now DIAC)

Time period of the initiative: Period of one year in 2003

Number of participants involved: 700 households surrounding Cramer Street in Preston, Victoria.

Target Group: Ethnically diverse groups living in the Cramer Street neighbourhood

Project Description: The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project was a partnership between the Darebin City Council and representatives from the Cramer Street neighbourhood. The central aim was to tackle racial tension amongst people from diverse backgrounds living in the project area. The project aimed to build understanding of diverse cultures through dialogue by bringing local people together in social settings. The overall aim was to develop resilient neighbour relations that can withstand external pressures such as potential negative media reporting of international crises.

The need for the project was identified to address heightened tension experienced by residents living near the Mosque and which is due to a number of reasons including:

- Increased usage of the mosque on Fridays and during Holy day celebrations,
- International events linked to terrorism that can contribute to backlash and violence against Arab and Muslim communities, and
- Hostile media reporting of domestic events that involve Arab and Muslim communities.

The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project set out to achieve the following:

- Develop a neighbourhood focused program which creates opportunities for neighbours to socialise, mix and enjoy cultural, social and educational activities,
- Minimise isolation and segregation between neighbours which arise out of differences in ethnicities, culture, religions and languages,
- Reduce conflict in the neighbourhood due to intolerance of difference,
- Increase understanding and appreciation of difference,
- Promote the concept of inclusive neighbourhood whereby the Mosque, like the local church and the primary school is accepted as an integral part of the neighbourhood,
- Bring key stakeholders together from the neighbourhood to lead the project's process and outcomes.

It did so through a bundle of associated activities under the banner 'Cramer Street Project' including celebrations, Mosque open days, community BBQ's and seminars. This

gave participants the opportunity to learn about each other in a friendly environment and subsequently reduce previously held prejudices and misconceptions.

Successes and challenges: By concentrating attention on building neighbourly relations, together with communication and information and social events there has been an increased acceptance of the Mosque and its community and less complaints from neighbours. Darebin Council recorded an eighty per cent decrease in the level of complaints by neighbours during the month of Ramadan, which is one of the Mosque's peak times for the year. There was also a fifty per cent decrease in the number of traffic infringement notices.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Evaluation was conducted through verbal feedback and questionnaires, a random household survey and a Project Reference Group (PRG) was set up with representatives from the local school, church, mosque, TAFE College, local Police, community organisations and relevant Council Officers. Several residents from the project area gave positive feedback on the event and expressed interest in staying informed about the project. They also said it was important to facilitate interaction at festival displays and performances to actively engage participants in dialogue.

Initiative Title: Lismore Living Library

Organised by: Lismore City Council

Contact: Shauna McIntyre, 43 Oliver Avenue, Goonellabah NSW 2480, Ph: 02 66250458. Email council@lismore.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: Self-funded through an investment of \$3,000 for development of resources and program costs

Time period of the initiative: Monthly, November 2006 – Present.

Number of participants involved: 170 attended the launch; 15 'living books' available at each session and corresponding readers.

Target Group: General public within the council's region.

Project Description: Lismore's Living Library is Australia's first Living Library. The Living Library is like a normal library, however, the books in the living library are people representing groups frequently confronted with prejudices and stereotypes and who are often victims of discrimination or social exclusion. Lismore's Living Library is based on the successful European model, which began in Denmark in 2000 and has spread to libraries and festivals across Europe. The Living Library is a community-based initiative that aims to bring people together through one-to-one conversation and interaction and thereby encourage understanding, challenge negative stereotypes, and reduce prejudice. Lismore's Living Library aims to use the simple yet powerful strategy of Living Library to build social cohesion. The visitors to Lismore's Living Library are ordinary community members who have the opportunity to 'borrow' a 'living book' for an informal, half-hour conversation. The Library creates a safe environment where people who would not normally meet, can engage in constructive dialogue. When diverse members of the community are brought together in this way, understanding is increased and social cohesion is built.

On the day of the launch, over thirty living books were available in the catalogue. They represented a range of groups in Lismore including: multi-faith communities (Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish), people with disability (intellectual, physical, mental health, visual impairment), the multicultural community (Italian, German, Sudanese refugees, Filipino), Aboriginal people (Bundjalung Elder, community member, young people), young people, older people, gay men and lesbians, a farmer, an environmentalist, police officers, and a man living with HIV/AIDS.

Successes and challenges: Initially meant as a one-off event, one hundred and seventy people visited the Living Library launch between opening hours of 10am and 3pm. 80 people borrowed books and around 120 borrowings occurred. Following the success of the launch, Lismore's Living Library has become a monthly occurrence each month beginning December 2006. Feedback from participants have been overwhelmingly positive. 37 libraries and other organisations from around Australia have contacted the Lismore City Council and Lismore City Library seeking information about Lismore's Living Library

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: To assess how successful the Living Library has been, an evaluation form was provided to Books and Readers during the launch. 78% of Books and 60% of Readers completed the surveys and responses were very positive. The surveys revealed that the sessions helped challenge and breakdown assumptions and stereotypes. It was overwhelmingly clear both parties felt that, through talking, they had gained an awareness of their mutual responsibility to social cohesion and community belonging. The Living Library Committee intends to have Southern Cross University conduct an independent evaluation of the project after the completion of a one year period.

Initiative title: Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project

Organised by: Canterbury City Council

Contact details: Joanna Stobinski, Canterbury City Council, PO Box 77
Campsie NSW 2194, Ph 02 9789 9472, Email: joannas@canterbury.nsw.gov.au

Funded by: Department of Immigration, Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs under *Living in Harmony* Strategy, 2003

Time period of the initiative: October 2003- February 2005

Number of participants involved: Over 600 people (275 in tours of places of worship, 200 in school forums, over 100 in school arts competition & over 30 representatives of religious organisations)

Target Group: Leaders of local religious organisations, general public and high school students

Project/Initiative Description: The Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project involved a cross-section of the diverse religious and faith groups in Canterbury discussing issues of inter-faith to strengthen community relations. A group of over 19 religious organisations with over 30 representatives were brought together to promote personal contact and information exchange. The group met on a bi-monthly basis to listen to guest speakers on inter-faith relations, to engage in discourse on religious harmony and develop appropriate strategies. It developed a Vision Statement for dissemination through local and ethnic media; and to over 60 religious organisations in our City.

Other highlights of the project have included extremely popular and successful tours of places of worship for the general public and local schools (275 participants), inter-faith discussion groups in local high schools (200 participants), good news inter-faith and human-interest stories submitted through the website and a community harmony poster competition - all of which have received very positive coverage from regional media.

These strategies were designed to encourage respect for people of diverse faiths by the community at large and the right to free religious expression of all residents.

In the latter part of the campaign, local high schools were invited to host discussion groups or forums on religious diversity and inter-faith harmony with the help from Council. As a result, a morning event called 'Harmony Experience' was arranged on 23 November 2004 at St Ursula's Catholic College where students from Malek Fahed Islamic High School in Greenacre joined St Ursula's community for shared prayer, small group discussions, a netball game, a morning tea and a final large forum at the conclusion of the program. This activity was part of the Canterbury Inter-Faith Harmony Project and the Religious Education Program for Year 9 students, *Faithful to God, Faithful to People*, which acknowledges the importance of inter-faith dialogue.

Another school strategy was to hold a poster competition among local high schools around the themes of religious diversity, harmony, respect, partnership and peace. The

winning entry was developed into a poster for distribution to Council facilities and services, community organisations, schools and religious sites.

Successes & challenges: The success of the project surpassed everybody's expectations with waiting lists developed for future tours, communities continuing to arrange inter-faith activities and improved general awareness locally evident. Over 200 students and 7 teachers from both schools took part in the experience. Feedback from the students and parents with whom they shared their perceptions of the day, was highly positive and the forum proved to be both educational and enjoyable.

As with any project which involves engaging busy community leaders, securing their commitment can be difficult. On this occasion it is obvious that local commitment was strong enough to ensure excellent participation levels throughout the range of project initiatives. The Steering Committee which guided the project provided of its time willingly and this was vital to the success of the project. In recognition of the project's success, a case study about this initiative was incorporated in the Community Relations Report 2004 of the Community Relations Commission of NSW.

The project was also showcased during a workshop presentation at an International Conference 'Transformations', convened by Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils (FECCA) and the Australian National University. It became evident during the inter-faith stream of this Conference that this project was very creative and one of the few such projects in Australia.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: The final meeting of religious leaders focused on the evaluation of the activities undertaken and on future directions. The group requested of Council to be kept informed of any new inter-faith activities and were happy to come together for special gatherings hosted by the Mayor from time to time.

During each tour of places of worship and at the inter-faith forum at St Ursula's Catholic College evaluation forms were distributed to all the participants.

Initiative Title: Muslim Community Discussion Forums
Organised by: Brisbane City Council

Contact: Sumathy Selvamanickam, 266 George Street, Brisbane Square QLD 4000, Tel: (07) 3403 4051, Email: sumathy.selvamanickam@brisbane.qld.gov.au

Funded by: Multicultural Affairs Queensland

Time period of the initiative: Five one-off sessions in five regions within the Council in 2007

Number of participants involved: Varied from 15-20 in some regions to larger crowds in others.

Target Group: Both Muslims and Non-Muslims.

Project Description: The Brisbane City Council Muslim community discussion forums grew out a number of smaller projects that were initiated after awareness of tensions between Muslim and Non-Muslim communities in wider Brisbane, especially in the aftermath of overseas terrorist attacks. Some of the earlier projects which informed the development of the current project are 'Coping in a New World', 'It's not all Black and White: An African Story', and 'Getting to know Brisbane' all of which have aimed to help immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Brisbane.

Recently, a forum 'Islam Unveiled' was held, which was mainly a profile of Islamic women and aimed at encouraging open discussion. It had such a good response that the Council encouraged to apply for funding through Multicultural Affairs Queensland. They received \$5000 and developed a 5-pronged approach project, with initiatives in the east, west, and north, central and south of Brisbane. All these projects were a 'one off' and was organised after discussions with key Muslim organisations in the region. Part of all these projects involved building relations with community leaders and groups. The discussion forums took various forms in different regions:

South: Women's discussion group involving a local community centre and participants from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds. East: Morning tea between Muslim customers and Coles' employees to encourage understanding between them, especially with regards to their wearing of the Hijab. West: Cross-cultural dialogue on Islam between high school girls from three schools in the Western suburbs. North: Organised a Muslim panel of speakers in conjunction with annual Harvest Festival. Central: Post-Eid festival celebration with Muslims and Christians also included a Muslim-Christian panel of speakers.

Successes and challenges: Very well received by the participants and public. Succeeded in changing prevalent stereotypes about Islam and Muslim among the participants. Some of the involved groups expressed interest to continue organising such events.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Feedback evaluation forms were given out at some of the events, all of which received overwhelmingly positive response. Many of the attendees also provided positive direct feedback immediately after the events.

Initiative Title: Moreland Interfaith Gathering/Network

Organised by: Moreland City Council

Contact: Eugenia Grammatikakis, Locked Bag 10, Moreland 3058, Ph: (03) 92401225, Email: egrammatikakis@moreland.vic.gov.au

Funded by: Self-funded

Time period of the initiative: Bimonthly, 12 years in operation

Number of participants involved: On average, 10-15

Target Group: Key faith leaders in the community

Project Description: Moreland has a culturally and linguistically diverse population with more than 44% from a non-English speaking background. There is also a wide variety of religious groups including Catholics, various Christian groups, Bahais, Muslims, Hindus Buddhists and Sikhs. The Interfaith gathering seeks to bring together key religious leaders from all these groups on a bimonthly basis to discuss issues relevant to their communities and initiatives to strengthen ties between the various religious groups. The meeting generally takes place in the council venue and sometimes at other faith centres. The group is currently planning to do more outreach programmes which will involve members of the their communities, to ensure that Moreland has a tolerant and socially cohesive population.

Apart from the Interfaith Gathering, there is also a Moreland Multicultural Advisory Group which plays a key role in discussing issues affecting certain cultural groups and putting in place solutions to such problems. Moreland is also known as a 'Refugee Welcome Zone' and for the purposes of integrating these groups, the council organises a Refugee Day as well as Harmony Day annually.

The Council has been proactive in community development, working closely with the community leaders. Many among the 100 community groups organise activities in partnership with each other such as lunch or afternoon tea gatherings and the council gives out community grants to approved projects apart from offerings its facilities. The Migrant Resource Centre also plays an important role in organising activities to bring communities together

Successes and challenges: Despite having a very diverse population, through the activities of the council and the various community groups, Moreland has managed to stitch together a socially cohesive population. Some of the challenges lie in continually promoting understanding between different cultural groups, engaging and developing relationships with isolated groups, and strengthening cultural awareness training within Council and the community sector.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: A consultation process with external and internal stakeholders was conducted and this evaluation has substantially informed the development of the Moreland Multicultural Policy and Action Plan 2006-2010. Council consulted widely with a range of community organisations, ethnic community groups including new and emerging communities, agencies, service providers, Councillors and Council staff.

Initiative Title: Hume Inter-Faith Leaders Network

Organised by: Hume City Council

Contact: Kristine Mueller, PO Box 119 Dallas 3047, Ph (03) 9205 2200, Email: KristineM@hume.vic.gov.au

Funded by: Funded by Council as well as through funding from various other sources on specific projects

Time period of the initiative: Established in 2001; Bimonthly meetings

Number of participants involved: 15-20 on average

Target Group: Faith leaders, diverse religious communities including Muslims

Project Description: The Hume Inter-Faith Leaders Network aims to develop understanding and harmony across the many faiths and cultures represented in Hume City. Members include leaders from a diverse range of faith communities including Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Sikh communities. They have conducted various interfaith projects including this year's creative collaborative partnership with Hume City Council, and the community that gave rise to the design and development of *The Garden of Friends*. With funding support made available from the Australia Council, Parks Victoria, Myer Foundation and Community Support Fund, a modern courtyard garden was created at the VisyCares Learning Centre, Meadow Heights. *The Garden of Friends* project took its inspiration from a traditional Islamic courtyard garden, reflecting the diverse cultures of the local Meadow Heights community. The concept of the courtyard garden, with its 5 geometric designs, water features and symbolic planting is shared and understood by many cultural groups, particularly residents from Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon. The development of *The Garden* originally arose from the unique cultural and religious profile of Meadow Heights, a community particularly affected by global events such as September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The purpose of the project was not only to reflect the diversity of cultures and faiths within the Meadow Heights community, but to create a place that would evoke an atmosphere of social harmony, peace and contemplation.

Apart from the Inter-Faith Leaders Network, the Hume Multicultural Issues Forum was also established to provide a voice for Hume City's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Each forum has a distinct focus, these include transport, arts and cultural activities and problem gambling. Currently the Council is also committed as a partner organisation in a 3-year interfaith and intercultural project with the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University. At the heart of the Centre for Dialogue's proposal is a best practice model for the establishment of a locally based interfaith and intercultural network within the Northern Region of metropolitan Melbourne. In essence, the information gained from the project and the proposed establishment of the Northern Regional Network would further inform and promote the overall objectives of social connectivity, belonging and mutual respect.

Successes and challenges: The Inter-Faith Leaders Network has over the past 6 years played an indelible role in encouraging inter-faith dialogue as well as fostering activities to bring together various religious communities. The Council's focus on inter-faith and intercultural activities is obvious in the breadth of activities undertaken in recent years.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.