

9. What Councils are Doing: Top Twenty Muslim- Australian LGAs

Introduction

The role of local city councils in building bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians is complex and multifaceted and involves everything from consultation processes, access and equity policies, internal anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training, to community based festivals, initiatives and projects. This project has primarily been interested in the latter approaches which we view as 'capacity building' at the grass roots level to foster stronger inter-ethnic social capital between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians through partnerships, community engagement, community based activities and revitalising local communities. Socio-economic and cultural changes are transforming local communities and local municipal councils play a pivotal role in both facilitating as well as managing the change processes brought about by immigration and cultural and religious diversity. Community capacity building involves;

- Developing the capacity and skills of the members of communities so that they can:
 - Identify and help meet their needs
 - And participate more fully in society

- And is underpinned by the development of:
 - Skills and capacities
 - Community leaders
 - Education through practice and participation
 - Networks of information, knowledge and support
 - Human, social, physical and financial capital
 - Partnerships

It is this community capacity building role that interests us here and is the focus of this chapter. Through this lens, we will look at community-based initiatives and programs of local councils from the top twenty Muslim-Australian Local Government Areas to improve relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians.

Religious Vs Secular Role of City Councils

Local city councils in Australia are still based on rigid secular foundations. They often distance themselves from religious or faith-based issues and programs in an attempt to preserve the secularity of the council. Such a position is not surprising; after all Australia is a modern secular capitalist society, and religion, if anything, is perceived as a 'private affair'.

However, despite religion being a private affair, local city councils, particularly those in large capital cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, are increasingly finding they need to pay attention to communities with religious needs and strong religious convictions. Since local city councils are the first point of community contact in a three tiered government system in Australia, they will inevitably need to incorporate 'religion' in their agenda for community development and management.

Relation Building Activities in the Top Twenty Muslim-Australian Councils

This section identifies what councils with relatively large Muslim-Australian populations are doing to build better relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians at the local level. These are referred to as the top twenty Muslim-Australian Councils in the report for the very reason that Muslim numbers in these LGAs are relatively higher than elsewhere in urban and rural centres in Australia.

Rank	LGA	No. Muslims
1.	Bankstown	25996
2.	Hume	19688
3.	Canterbury	17792
4.	Auburn	16111
5.	Liverpool	13740
6.	Blacktown	12463
7.	Parramatta	12120
8.	Brisbane	10868
9.	Moreland	10618
10.	Greater Dandenong	9875
11.	Rockdale	8897
12.	Brimbank	8407
13.	Fairfield	7896
14.	Holroyd	7478
15.	Casey	7475
16.	Whittlesea	6763
17.	Campbelltown	6371
18.	Darebin	4848
19.	Stirling	3921
20.	Wyndham	3656

*Table: Top Twenty councils in terms of number of Muslim residents
ABS 2006 Census*

BANKSTOWN CITY COUNCIL - NSW

Contact Person: Miguel Ferrero

Department/Section: Community Development Officer

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 25/07/2007

Tel: (02) 9707 9863

Fax: (02) 9707 9554

Address: 66-72 Rickard Road BANKSTOWN NSW 2200.

Outcome of the Visit: Currently the council is not engaged in any Muslim specific relation building projects. However, in the past it has organised events to increase interaction between various ethnic groups in which Muslims also participated. The following were the programs the council organised in its LGA:

- (i) organised by Bankstown Area Multicultural Network and funded by the council a weekly program of cultural awareness and harmony activities to increase participation by Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities,
- (ii) organised by the Lebanese Communities Council and funded by the council a similar event involving an interactive luncheon and workshop to encourage CALD women to come together to celebrate their diversity, and
- (iii) the council funded the production of a 'Bankstown Council Harmony Day' and a DVD was produced containing interviews with young people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds about their experiences and viewpoints about living in Bankstown LGA.

BLACKTOWN CITY COUNCIL - NSW

Contact Person: Tony Barnden

Department/Section: Manager - Community Development

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 12/06/2007

Tel: (02) 9839 6054

Fax: (02) 9839 6578

Address: 62 Flushcombe Road BLACKTOWN NSW 2148.

Outcome of the Visit: *Blacktown City Council* was not involved in any specific projects catering to the Muslim community. In council's view, the Muslim-Australian communities in the LGA, have been living among themselves and in larger Blacktown community in a harmonious and peaceful way. Council argues that because Blacktown is home to a large diversity of cultural groups, there is frequent and on-going interaction between them in their neighbourhoods, shopping centres, workplaces, and public places such as parks and bus and train stations. This has generated, according to the council representative, a strong sense of 'tolerance and understanding' in the community.

Muslim-Australians in the area have actively participated in this process and consequently are benefiting from such participation. The good rapport that exists between the council and Muslim communities in the area and the on-going interaction among the Turkish Muslim mosque community in Mount Druitt, the Subcontinent Muslim mosque community in Rooty Hill, and the Afghani Muslim mosque community in Blacktown have, according to Tony Barnden, helped keep 'racial and ethnic' problems to a minimum in Blacktown.

Although Blacktown City Council is not involved in any Muslim specific community development projects as mentioned above, it is involved in other community projects such as:

- (i) a community development program called **Harmony Action Plan** in conjunction with various government agencies and the Migrant Resource Centre to combat crime in the LGA,
- (ii) another community development initiative called **Blacktown Emerging Communities Action Plan**, which was an important project in light of significant increases in new and emerging communities particularly from African countries such as Sudan,
- (iii) Harmony Day, and
- (iv) Refugee Day.

CAMPBELLTOWN CITY COUNCIL – NSW

Contact Person: Louise Polikarpus

Department/Section: Community Development Coordinator

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 26/06/2007

Tel: (02) 4645 4903

Fax: (02) 4645 4111

Address: Corner Queen and Broughton Streets CAMPBELLTOWN NSW 2560.

Outcome of the Visit: *Campbelltown City Council* hasn't developed any projects targeting Muslims in its LGA due to a perception in council that there are no religious tensions in the area, and therefore no need for religious-based projects. Council believes that this is perhaps due to 'good' social planning and on-going consultation with Macarthur Diversity Services and Migrant Resource Centre.

However, the council engages extensively with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups including Muslim communities through supporting services offered by various community organisations in the area. It supports Muslim community events through their presence and input. The council also supports large community events such as:

- (i) the annual Fisher's Ghost Festival and River Fest in Campbelltown in which various ethnic and religious groups participate in unison,
- (ii) The Arts Centre Project which continues to incorporate visual and performance arts of various groups including Muslim-Australians, such as the screening of an Arabic film festival earlier this year, and
- (iii) a women-only time at a local swimming pool, which has encouraged women from conservative cultures including Muslim-Australians to engage with others during swimming times.

The council is currently waiting for funding from the federal government (Attorney General's Department) for a 2008 project aimed at increasing social cohesion between various ethnic and religious groups including Muslim-Australians.

FAIRFIELD CITY COUNCIL – NSW

Contact Person: Debbie Cameron
Department/Section: Community Project Manager
Initiatives/Projects: None
Date of Visit: 05/07/2007
Tel: (02) 9725 0704
Fax: (02) 9609 3257
Address: 86 Avoca Road WAKELEY NSW 2176.

Outcome of the Visit: While the Council is not currently overseeing any community development projects focused on the Muslim community, it takes an active on-going part in the Multicultural Eid Festival and Fair organised by Muslim groups in the LGA.

Currently the *Fairfield City Council* is in the process of devising three projects in which Muslims will play a role. These are:

- (i) a project to foster social cohesiveness through the input of its Multicultural Advisory Committee. Suggestions put forward during the bimonthly committee meeting forms an important part of the Council's programmes. The Multicultural Advisory Committee consists of members from local communities including the Muslim community,
- (ii) a new project currently being planned is expected to foster grassroots-level engagement between people of diverse cultural and religious communities. This will be done through involving people of different backgrounds in the social activities of other groups. This project is expected to take off in 2008,
- (iii) a workshop in December, 2007 to review its activities and further strengthen them for the following year by setting new targets and activities which will bring together people of various cultural and religious groups.

HOLROYD CITY COUNCIL - NSW

Contact Person: Lucy Maguire

Department/Section: Ethnic Community Development Officer

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 06/06/2007

Tel: (02) 9840-9840

Fax: (02) 9840-9734

Address: 16 Memorial Avenue MERRYLANDS NSW 2160.

Outcome of the Visit: Currently the Council is not actively involved in any Muslim specific projects. The Council actively supports non-specific broad multicultural programs. Due to an absence of faith-based problems in the area, the Council does not see any need for Muslim specific or faith-based community project. It feels that the vast majority of its Muslim population is linked to the Gallipoli Mosque in Auburn and any issues which may emerge are addressed at the mosque community level there.

Holroyd City Council over the years has undertaken umbrella community development projects in which Muslim-Australians have been participants. These have been:

- (i) Harmony Day project and
- (ii) Refugee Day project.

LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL – NSW

Contact Person: Galavizh Ahmadinia

Department/Section: Community Development Worker

Initiatives/Projects: Peace Forum (Proposed)

Date of Visit: 05/06/2007

Tel: (02) 9821 7779

Fax: (02) 9821 9333

Address: 193 Macquarie Street LIVERPOOL NSW 2170.

Outcome of the Visit: *Liverpool City Council* has no direct involvement in projects or initiatives that seek to develop relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians. However, it is planning, in partnership with various key stakeholders, to organise a Peace Forum focusing on Christian and Muslim relations in the Liverpool LGA. It anticipates that the proposed forum will take place during Liverpool's Harmony Day celebrations. This Forum will be to encourage interfaith dialogue in the local community.

Other than this, the way Council helps build relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in its LGA is through participating in and organising the following events:

- (i) Harmony Day, and
- (ii) Refugee Day.

PARRAMATTA CITY COUNCIL – NSW

Contact Person: Lisa Giacomelli

Department/Section: Service Manager - Community Capacity Building

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 04/07/2007

Tel: (02) 9806 5792

Fax: (02) 9806 5000

Address: 30 Darcy Street PARRAMATTA NSW 2124.

Outcome of the Visit: *Parramatta City Council* doesn't have on-going community development projects or initiatives which concentrate exclusively on improving relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians in its LGA. However, the Council is not totally disengaged from building communities based on faith. For instance, the Council held a one-off project called 'Religious Understanding Project' in August 2007 in which nine students from Northmead High School visited places of worship of various faiths including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. The project generated a better understanding of other faiths on a more experiential level.

Apart from this, it is involved directly and indirectly in a number of projects such as:

- (i) Parramatta City Council Multicultural Advisory Committee Inter-faith Project,
- (ii) New and Emerging African Communities Capacity Building Project,
- (iii) Support for Muslim Youth Association,
- (iv) Journeys Of The Spirit exhibition in partnership with Baulkham Hills, Holroyd, and Parramatta Migrant Resource Centres,
- (v) Arabic and Persian Library Collection,
- (vi) Harmony Week Culture Display with Council of Australian Palestinians,
- (vii) Ramadan Display in the Central Library,
- (viii) Information Sessions in Arabic at the Central Library in partnership with Centrelink, and
- (ix) Provision of venue for African Community meeting to discuss response to DIAC cuts to African Refugee intake.

ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL – NSW

Contact Person: Carrol Arrowsmith

Department/Section: Community Development Officer

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 12/06/2007

Tel: (02) 9562 1862

Fax: (02) 9562 1666

Address: 2 Bryant Street ROCKDALE NSW 2216.

Outcome of the Visit: The *Rockdale City Council* does not have any projects that seek to build relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians in its LGA. Despite being in reasonably close proximity to the Sutherland Shire where the Cronulla riots took place, the absence of Muslim specific projects is attributed to Rockdale being a racially harmonious and peaceful area. Carrol Arrowsmith suggests that there is no apparent manifestation of racial or ethnic conflict or tension in the area and therefore the Council, unlike several other councils in Sydney, has not paid attention to Muslim and non-Muslim-Australian community relations.

However, this does not mean that Muslim-Australians, or for that matter, any other ethnic community has been neglected. In fact the Council participates in numerous events and projects in which Muslim-Australians are active participants. For instance, the Council has been involved in 'inter-faith dialogue' and 'response to racism' initiatives organised by the St George Migrant Resource Centre. Also, the Council plays an active role in Harmony Day and Refugee Day celebrations in which people from many ethnic and religious backgrounds take part.

BRIMBANK CITY COUNCIL – VIC

Contact Person: Wendy Rose

Department/Section: Community Wellbeing Manager

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 18/06/2007 (Cancelled)

Tel: (03) 9249 4365

Fax: (03) 9249 4351

Address: Alexandra Avenue SUNSHINE VIC 3020.

Outcome of the Visit: The LGA of *Brimbank City Council* is both complex and diverse with over 90,000 residents residing there who speak a range of languages. In light of this, Council's community development efforts involve programs and activities that cover resident groupings across the board. The Council takes an all-inclusive approach in relation to promoting mutual tolerance and understanding in the community and steers away from focusing on one particular community such as Muslim-Australians.

Brimbank City Council holds an annual Community Grants program through which it distributes funds for a variety of religious and faith festivals as well as a number of community strengthening projects proposed by local community groups. Also, it conducts the following annual programs and events:

- Brimbank Festival,
- Community Festivals and Harmony Day events, and
- Brimbank Community Arts programs include various arts and culture workshops and exhibitions that represent the diverse cultural traditions and backgrounds of the community.

The Council is planning future events and activities to celebrate the diversity of cultures and faith in its LGA. The recruitment of a Diversity Officer will instigate the development of a Multicultural/Multi-faith Plan.

HUME CITY COUNCIL – VIC

Contact Person: Kristine Mueller

Department/Section: Social Planning and Policy Officer

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 19/06/2007

Tel: (03) 9205 2463

Fax: (03) 9309 0109

Address: 36 Macedon Street SUNBURY VIC 3429.

Outcome of the Visit: *Hume City Council* has no Muslim specific projects. Council is involved in a number of other programs and projects that ultimately, in their view, achieve that goal of building bridges between different communities. Council makes an indirect contribution to relation-building in the community and closing the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians in Hume LGA in the following ways:

- (i) based on extensive consultation with key community groups and individuals, established the Garden of Friends for the courtyard at Visy Cares Learning Centre for greater cross cultural understanding as well as the basis for a beautiful and tranquil public space,
- (ii) a community cultural development project based in Roxburgh Park called Home Sweet Home in which residents shared ideas about things that were seen as dear to them in their house and suburb,
- (iii) the Multicultural Kitchen which brought the local Dallas residents together who had a passion for cooking to share traditional recipes and information about their cultural background held at Dallas Neighbourhood House,
- (iv) the Weaving Lands Project which involved a series of workshops held at Hume's Multicultural Planting Festival, Broadmeadows Festival, at neighbourhood houses, migrant resource centres, and TAFE colleges focusing on interpreting the indigenous Broadmeadows environment based on traditional basket making techniques,
- (v) the Hume Winter Music Festival originated in 2003 as a four week popular world music festival to overcome the winter chill in City's historic avenue and has since continued every year, and
- (vi) Harmony Project in 2005.

These projects were part of the council's *Cultural Identity Building Initiative*. This series of projects aimed to highlight and celebrate the cultural, social, linguistic, and economic diversity of the Hume community.

Under the auspices of the Council, other gatherings such as a Multicultural Issues Forum and the Interfaith Leaders' Network have been organised as well as grass-roots level community out-reach programmes centred around Community Harmony. Importantly, recently the Council has entered into partnership with other councils in the region in a 3-year La Trobe University project coordinated by its 'Centre for Dialogue'. The objective of this project is to establish an inter-faith and inter-cultural network between multiple council regions for the northern region of metropolitan Melbourne.

MORELAND CITY COUNCIL – VIC

Contact Person: Eugenia Grammatikakis
Department/Section: Access and Equity Officer
Initiatives/Projects: None
Date of Visit: 20/06/2007
Tel: (03) 9240 2288
Fax: (03) 9240 2346
Address: 90 Bell Street COBURG VIC 3058.

Outcome of the Visit: *Moreland City Council's* community development projects do not focus on the Muslim community exclusively. Eugenia Grammatikakis claims that Moreland LGA has not experienced racial, ethnic, or religious tensions in the community and as a consequence the Council has steered away from developing any Muslim specific projects.

The Council sees its role in terms of providing assistance and support to all communities under its general program, through its *Multicultural Policy and Action Plan*. It sees its Multicultural Policy and Action Plan as a general approach to building a stronger culturally and linguistically diverse Moreland community. This is Council's fundamental tool for building relations in the community and the plan covers, according to Eugenia Grammatikakis, the local Muslim community adequately.

The Council also conducts public consultation forums on multicultural issues in which Muslims also participate. This, from Council's viewpoint, allows the Muslim community to raise concerns and highlight issues. The consultation forums seek to achieve the following objectives:

- better advocacy,
- community networking,
- project support,
- information dissemination, and
- internal networking to strengthen the links between the Council and ethnic communities.

Since the focus of these public consultations is to improve access to council services and greater equity for people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Eugenia Grammatikakis believes this covers the area of 'relation building' between all communities in Moreland LGA.

BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL – QLD

Contact Person: Sumathy Selvamanickam
Department/Section: Community Development Officer
Initiatives/Projects: Muslim Community Discussion Forums
Date of Visit: 03/07/2007
Tel: (07) 3403 4051
Fax: (07) 3403 4774
Address: Floor 20, BAC 69 Ann Street BRISBANE QLD 4001.

Outcome of the Visit: The *Brisbane City Council* Muslim Community Discussion forums emerged from numerous smaller projects that were initiated in light of tensions developing between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians in wider Brisbane after the events of September 11th and subsequent global events such as the Bali Bombings and the Madrid train bombing. Some of the earlier projects that paved the way for the current project were:

- Coping in a New World,
- It's not all Black and White: An African Story, and
- Getting to know Brisbane.

These were projects that all aimed to assist immigrants and refugees to adjust to life in Brisbane.

Recently, a forum 'Islam Unveiled' was held, which was mainly a profile of Islamic women aimed at encouraging open discussion. This and other projects such as 'Coles Morning Tea' and 'Brisbane Muslim Dialogue Project' (see case studies in chapter 8) were a 'one off' project organised after discussions with key Muslim organisations in the region. They were all designed to build better relations with community leaders and community groups.

CANBERRA CITY – ACT

Contact Person: Victor Rebikoff

Department/Section: Senior Multicultural Advisor

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 25/06/2007

Tel: (02) 6207 6048

Fax: (02) 6207 5862

Address: Level 1, 10 Rudd Street CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601.

Outcome of the Visit: According to Victor Rebikoff the *Canberra City* does not have a specific project catering to Muslim communities in the area. The Muslim population in Canberra is small but well connected through work in the community. Also, Muslim-Australians in Canberra are largely professional people and the LGA has not witnessed any tension or conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians in the community.

Canberra City has been actively involved in developing relations between communities through various programs and initiatives that have potentially reduced any faith-based tensions in the Canberra area. As such, it has contributed to building bridges between Muslims and non-Muslim-Australians in Canberra indirectly. Some indirect ways it has contributed towards relation building are:

- National Multicultural Festival,
- organised and ran a series of multicultural forums where issues raised led to a summit in 2005,
- ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009,
- holds regular meetings with Muslim Advisory Council,
- loans its Multicultural Centre to communities,
- organises regular multicultural activities, and
- language grants and radio grants through its Canberra Multicultural Services.

CITY OF CASEY - VIC

Contact Person: Phill Start

Department/Section: Multicultural Youth Programs Officer

Initiatives/Projects: None

Date of Visit: 19/06/2007

Tel: (03) 9705 5622

Fax: (03) 9705 5447

Address: Magid Drive NARRE WARREN VIC 3805.

Outcome of the Visit: *City of Casey* does not have a Muslim specific community development project or initiative. However, the Council would like to involve Muslim communities in relation building initiatives. Council realises that not only Muslim communities but various other communities such as those from Somalia and Afghanistan are also disengaged.

The Council has found from its own investigation that there is a lack of awareness in the community about different council services and about local service providers. To remedy this, the Council has opted for a consultative approach rather than simply developing a program and giving it to the community.

In regards to the Muslim community, the Council found a gross lack of involvement of Muslim-Australian women of all ages in various council programs. Hence, it is in a process of establishing women-only swimming at a venue that offers privacy.

Other council programs are as follows:

- (i) sustainable living program run by Casey Youth Ambassadors for multicultural youth, who in turn will then help lead the cause in their community,
- (ii) an on-going CALD youth meeting/forum that will meet monthly and provide feedback to the Council and service providers,
- (iii) programs targeting young Muslim-Australian women, and
- (iv) various in-school and after-school programs.

CITY OF GREATER DANDENONG - VIC

Contact Person: Michelle Watts

Department/Section: Community Development Officer

Initiatives/Projects: The Interfaith Network

Date of Visit: 18/06/2007

Tel: (03) 9239 5395

Fax: (03) 9239 5196

Address: 397-405 Springvale Rd SPRINVALE VIC 3171

Outcome of the Visit: *City of Greater Dandenong* does not have an ongoing Muslim specific community project. According to Michelle Watts, the *City of Greater Dandenong* has so far not experienced any community disharmony which has warranted a specific project to build relations between Muslims and non-Muslim-Australians in the community. However, the Council does recognise the need for interfaith dialogue and interaction between different communities, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslim-Australians in light of recent national and international events. Thus, it has forged a close relationship with the Interfaith Network which is a voluntary network made up of diverse cultural and religious faiths. Its objective is 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 is funded by the *City of Greater Dandenong* and other funding bodies for specific projects.

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 special tours for schools and other interested groups of the various places of worship within the *City of Greater Dandenong*, and
- informal get-togethers.

Since the network is not specific to Muslim groups, it forms an important conduit for leaders of Muslim groups to interact with those from other faiths and backgrounds and forge closer ties with the wider community.

AUBURN CITY COUNCIL - NSW

Contact Person: Noelene Rudolph

Department/Section: Multicultural Community Development Officer

Initiatives/Projects: Women's Swimming Program

Date of Visit: 12/06/2007

Tel: (02) 9735 1288

Fax: (02) 9643 1120

Address: 1 Susan Street AUBURN NSW 2144.

Outcome of the Visit: *Auburn City Council* ordinarily does not have Muslim specific projects, however, recently it was involved in organising a ten-week women-only Learn to Swim Program for 72 low income earning women living in the Auburn LGA. This was a cooperative effort involving Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, Auburn Community Health, STARTTS, Department of Sport and Recreation and *Auburn City Council*. It was held at Ruth Everuss Aquatic Centre, Church Street, Lidcombe every Wednesday. The program had various other aspects to it including:

- referral to health promoting programs after each swimming lesson,
- a bus trip to Cronulla Beach to learn about surf safety,
- a women's health talk,
- lunch at Auburn Community Health Centre,
- a bus trip to Wran's Aquatic Centre in 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.

The purpose of this program was to involve women from the low income backgrounds in an enjoyable, healthy activity that would link them with other women from within and beyond their own communities.

Apparently the program attracted almost all Muslim-Australian women participants, particularly those from Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. Some Asian women also took part.

Apart from this, the *Auburn City Council* has supported Muslim programs indirectly in the following ways:

- (i) working with the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre on Muslim issues and programs,
- (ii) providing free facility use, involvement in the Peace Forum organised by the Affinity Intercultural Foundation and the Centre for Peace and Justice,
- (iii) participated in 'Inside Out' Muslim Women's project initiated by Auburn Community Development Network.

CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL - NSW

Contact Person: Joanna Stobinski
Department/Section: Team Leader - Community Development
Initiatives/Projects: Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project
Date of Visit: 31/05/2007
Tel: (02) 9789 9472 **Fax:** (02) 9718 7227
Address: 137 Beamish Street CAMPSIE NSW 2194.

Outcome of the Visit: Since its Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project in 2003, *Canterbury City Council* has not been directly involved in any Muslim specific relation building projects. However, the Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project was an important initiative and the entire community of Canterbury LGA benefited from it. A cross-section of religious groups in Canterbury LGA were involved in discussing faith-based issues and ways of strengthening community relations using the universal teachings of religion. A group of over 19 religious organisations with over 30 representatives came together to exchange ideas and establish contact. The group met fortnightly and guest speakers discussed faith related issues and relation building in the larger community. The group also discussed developing appropriate strategies to build relations in the local community. There were other aspects to the Canterbury Inter-faith Harmony Project and these were:

- tours to 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,
- a community harmony poster competition - all of which received very positive coverage from regional media.

These strategies were used to build relations in the community, teach mutual respect, and educate the people about right to free religious expression of all citizens. Another important element of the project was an invitation to local high schools to host discussion groups or forums on religious diversity and inter-faith harmony with the help of Council personnel. Consequently, these were the outcomes:

- (i) 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,
- (ii) several small group discussions on faith,
- (iii) a netball game,
- (iv) a morning tea, and
- (v) a final large forum at the conclusion of the program.

Furthermore, there was another school strategy involving a poster competition among local high schools around the themes of religious diversity, harmony, respect, partnership and peace. Apart from this specific Muslim focused project, the Council participates indirectly to build relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians through:

- (i) Refugee Week,
- (ii) Harmony Day, and organising various multicultural events.

CITY OF WHITTLESEA – VIC

Contact Person: Maria Callipari

Department/Section: Multicultural Liaison Officer

Initiatives/Projects: Whittlesea Interfaith Network

Date of Visit: 18/06/2007

Tel: (03) 9217 2168

Fax: (03) 9409 9876

Address: 35 Ferres Boulevard SOUTH MORANG VIC 3752.

Outcome of the Visit: The *City of Whittlesea* has an important relation building project in which Muslim participation is actively sought. It is called Whittlesea Interfaith Network (WIN). The network has been meeting for one year now. It was brought together and initiated by the Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council and the Multicultural Resource Officer of the City of Whittlesea.

The *City of Whittlesea* recognises that faith leaders are connected to a broad section of the community, and in collaboration with Council, they 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 conduit for engaging various religious groups and fostering inter-faith dialogue and improving understanding between the leaders in the different communities. Using such an initiative, it is envisaged that the groups can better understand their role within a multicultural community and work with each towards forming an inclusive and cohesive societal environment.

DAREBIN CITY COUCIL– VIC

Contact Person: Abraham Mamer

Department/Section: Multicultural Affairs Co-ordinator

Initiatives/Projects: Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project

Date of Visit: 21/06/2007

Tel: (03) 8470 888

Fax: (03) 8470 8877

Address: 274 Gower Street PRESTON VIC 3072

Outcome of the Visit: The *Darebin City Council* in 2003 for one year was involved in the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project. This project was in partnership with representatives from the Cramer Street Neighbourhood. The project came of tensions that were brewing in the Cramer Street neighbourhood at time, due to noise pollution and traffic problems when Muslim-Australians were visiting the nearby Mosque on certain occasions such as on Friday for Juma prayer, during Ramadan, and various Muslim festivals. There were occasions when Muslim mosque goers and local non-Muslim-Australians were involved in verbal altercations.

The purpose, therefore, of the project was to tackle the racial tension that was brewing. The aim was to generate understanding of diverse cultures through dialogue.

Behind this backdrop, the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project set out to achieve the following:

- (i) develop a neighbourhood focused program which creates opportunities for neighbours to socialise, mix and enjoy cultural, social and educational activities,
- (ii) minimise isolation and segregation between neighbours which arise out of differences in ethnicities, culture, religions and languages,
- (iii) reduce conflict in the neighbourhood due to intolerance of difference,
- (iv) increase understanding and appreciation of difference,
- (v) 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, and
- (vi) bring key stakeholders together from the neighbourhood to lead the project's process and outcomes.

The project achieved this through a series of associated activities under the banner Cramer Street Project and they were:

- (i) Celebrations and festivals
- (ii) Mosque open days,
- (iii) Community BBQ's at the Mosque
- (iv) Interfaith Seminars
- (v) Traffic management

Discussion

Due to the secular nature of local city councils, a vast majority of councils identified as among the Top Twenty Muslim-Australian LGAs do not have Muslim specific projects or initiatives. Muslim specific projects and initiatives, according to some council personnel, are often seen by Councillors as faith-based or religiously oriented activities and therefore are discouraged and instead more broad-based inclusive projects and initiatives are undertaken. This was the case, for instance, with the Fairfield City Council and Debbie Cameron, the Team Leader Community Development, explains:

Council at this time has no specific initiatives for this community directly. The Community Development Team and other sections of Council embrace an inclusive approach to delivering services that include local reps from a variety of cultural, spiritual and religious groups. This would also include Muslim-Australians. However, there are always multicultural initiatives happening at any one time within Council. The From Dawn to Sunset Ramadan exhibition project being held at Council's, City Museum and Gallery; highlighting the Fairfield Muslim Community. Council always considers entering into partnerships within local community groups that have positive outcomes for the community.

Another such example is the exhibition 'A Sideways Glance' curated by the Fairfield Interfaith Committee at the Fairfield City Museum and Gallery. The Interfaith Committee comprised of Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Bahai' members who wanted to explore deeper areas of human and spiritual commonality in the Fairfield LGA through art. In the area of health, there is a future project to increase physical activity that will be delivered in partnership with Multicultural Health. It is envisaged that this may include this community. Many of the events, forums, and resourcing of groups would impact on service delivery and support for Muslim communities. As many projects within the community development team have a community development focus, this could in fact have an outcome of building bridges between these Australians.

Those councils who take this stance however support Muslim-Australian communities or faith-based projects in a different way. They offer their support either indirectly in kind, for instance, by supporting Muslim programs organised and run by local Migrant Resource Centres, local Community Development Networks or local Muslim Community Organisations through free council facility use or by participating in or supporting larger umbrella projects or events. These include Refugee Week, Harmony Day celebrations, and Multicultural Festivals in which various communities take part including the Muslim community, where faith is not a focus. This was confirmed by Social Policy and Planning Officer, John McInerney from Parramatta City Council in New South Wales who said that 'If no direct funding is available Council provides in kind support for example in the form of staff hours or venues'.

Similarly, the Manager Community Wellbeing, Wendy Rose from Brimbank City Council in Victoria suggests that:

the Brimbank municipality is a complex and diverse community that includes more than 90,000 residents that speak a language other than English. With this scale of diversity effecting Council's operating practises, Council's efforts must focus on programs and activities that impact a broad spectrum of residents and promote tolerance towards all people.

Further still, some councils 'prefer to focus on 'general' harmony activities rather than focusing on one group (Muslim-Australians)' because, as one council respondent argued:
'sometimes I think these activities contribute to discrimination by the fact that they tend to dichotomise groups, i.e. the groups get defined in contrast, or in conflict'.

Yet, there are some councils who have taken a more active role in faith-based initiatives and projects. These councils have developed specific Muslim projects or initiatives to develop relations between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians because the councils have taken a more 'inclusive' view of secularism in their approach to community development. Whittlesea City Council in Victoria is a good case in point. The Multicultural Resource Officer, Maria Callipari explains:

The Whittlesea Interfaith Network was developed in partnership with the City of Whittlesea and the Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council. The network has been meeting on a regular basis for just over one year. WIN became an incorporated organisation in August 2007 and has a committee of management who is responsible for its affairs. The WIN Statement of Purpose is: to acknowledge and promote faith as a community value; to provide the opportunity for interfaith dialogue; to undertake the facilitation of interfaith activities; to promote peace, understanding and harmony across faith and culture; and to apply them to the complexity of society.

The councils who hold an inclusive view of secularism actively participate in faith-based projects, because, as Maria Callipari again explains:

... we are supporting the Whittlesea Interfaith Network to be able to forge partnerships with all faiths in the municipality including Muslim-Australians. WIN hope that the Muslim faiths will participate in this network. It is difficult to engage ongoing participation from Muslim representatives in the municipality and WIN is working to encourage all local faith leaders to join the network. WIN is also engaged in a research project to develop an Interfaith/Intercultural Network across the North in collaboration with other local Councils and the lead agency, The Centre for Dialogue.

When it comes to the role of local councils—whether in relation to best practice strategies to promote inter-faith activity and dialogue or community capacity building in general—two crucial points need to be emphasised. First, local councils cannot build community capacity - only local people can build the capacity of their community. However, local councils can support and facilitate community capacity building, and this is perhaps one of the most valuable roles they can play. Second, local councils and individual communities do not have an exclusive relationship. In fact communities connect in a complex network of interaction, including private enterprise, community groups, and individuals.

Local councils do work closely with communities utilising and building networks and skills. These include community advisory teams or consultative processes, but also ongoing involvement, such as participation in broad-based events such as Refugee Day or Harmony Day. They are well positioned in the community and therefore can make more contribution to community capacity building.

Basic Connections with Community Capacity

According to Putnam (1993b) communities with elevated social capital have better economic opportunities and more collaborative and harmonious relationships with local

city council. Such communities share power with different community or non-government organisations, manage conflict and build trust with local council areas. A good practical example of this occurring is the case of Darebin City Council in Victoria with their Cramer Street Neighbourhood project. This project showed that as the organisation of local community increased, the 'level' and 'quality' of participation grew rendering the Cramer Street Neighbourhood communal and cooperative. Berry *et. al.*, (1993) argue that communal and cooperative neighbourhoods help increase and even improve local council's responsiveness to citizens' concerns. Improving the role of local council in community capacity involves the following:

- creating a means for concerns to be aired
- creating a two-way of interaction with communities with 'top down' and 'bottom up' community involvement, and
- developing and maintaining strong and close relationships.

Therefore, acknowledging community outcomes expands local council's role beyond simple 'service delivery'. This is not to suggest that local councils should not do this. They deliver important and sound services that promptly and efficiently assist local residents.

However, offering local residents what they define as necessary is only part of the role of the local council. This partial role restricts the 'rethinking', social networks or leadership that develops the capacity of communities to participate in the change process and manage it.

Service delivery forms part of a more enhanced and innovative dual role for local council that also involves paving the way for community capacity. Local councils can support communities to develop their capacity by providing a means for local residents to express and act on prevailing concerns. We saw in an earlier chapter that Brisbane City Council organised meetings, discussions and activities that facilitated the motivation of other community organisations such as the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland to come together and implement action. As a result, people built networks and closer relationships. Hence, in providing a means for local concerns to be discussed, local councils can interact with communities in different cycles of contact and build the community they are responsible for.

Conclusion

Local councils need to redefine their role in a way that acknowledges both the outcomes of service delivery and also the process of community involvement and community capacity building. They need to build relationships between their own personnel and local residents which requires working from both 'bottom up' and 'top down' principles of interaction.

However a prominent finding from the consultations with the top twenty Muslim LGAs was that there is very little recognition of the problem of Muslim-non-Muslim-Australian relations to begin with. Overwhelmingly, the councils were of the view that there were 'no tensions' between Muslim and non-Muslim Austrians in their areas. This, however, is quite contrary to the evidence produced in this study of widespread experiences of

racism, discrimination and social incivility experienced on the part of Muslim-Australians. A further problem lies in the 'boundaries' of local government, whereby as long as there are no 'local' tensions obvious, councils tend to see little or no role for them to play in building better relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim-Australians. This is an unfortunate conceptual blockage as the wellbeing of local Muslim-Australians relies in part on reducing these negative experiences, wherever they occur. Therefore a key challenge is to convince local councils that they do indeed have a role to play in this area, beyond small scale one off multicultural activities and interfaith dialogue sessions which include a very limited range of participants.