



# ACT Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre

Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government established the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre in Canberra to meet the specific needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and to bring a diverse range of multicultural community organisations under the same roof to share resources and to have ready access to a range of facilities.

A multi-purpose Centre has been established that offers flexible tenancy agreements and makes a range of services available to the wider community. The project was to make available accommodation for up to 32 multicultural community organisations and to include many facilities, such as a children's room, a function room, a commercial kitchen, meeting rooms and a multi-faith prayer room. These facilities meet the needs of the Centre's tenants as well as those of the general community.

The Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan Inc. and Canberra's peak multicultural community group, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, are the largest tenants in the Centre, in terms of floor space. The Office of Multicultural Affairs is also based in the Centre.

When announcing funding for the establishment of the Centre in the 2004–05 Territory's budget, Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said:

All Canberrans will have the opportunity to broaden their cultural experiences and understanding through a range of programs that will be undertaken at the Centre.

## Identifying a need through consultation with the community

The ACT Government held a series of community meetings over many years at which the need for a multicultural centre in Canberra was raised. Constituency representations also supported the concept of a facility where community groups could conduct their respective activities and functions.

The idea came to life in February 2004 when the ACT Government announced the establishment of the ACT Multicultural Centre, the first of its kind in Australia. The Centre's founding is consistent with social priorities that were identified in the *Canberra Social Plan* that promotes safe, strong and cohesive communities.

New and emerging multicultural communities were consulted to ensure their views were taken into account in the early design stages of the new Centre and to ensure that, from the perspective of multicultural community groups, the new facility was as functional as possible.

The project has given new and emerging communities an opportunity to start to establish themselves, to better support their community members and to more quickly become involved in the community life of the ACT.

## The Centre

The site chosen for the centre, the North Building, opposite the ACT Legislative Assembly, allows the culturally and linguistically diverse community and the general public to access key services and relevant organisations by public transport from right around the city.

The 2100 square metre Centre was officially opened on 8 December 2005 by the ACT Chief Minister and has since provided a space where new and emerging community groups, peak organisations and the wider Canberra community can meet both formally and informally. The general public can book space by consulting with the Centre manager.

The Centre provides the following services and facilities:

- office space for 32 community organisations
- the Multicultural Resource Centre with multicultural and multilingual material and six computers that can be used for teaching purposes

- English as a Second Language classes run by the Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan
- a children's room (for use by communities whilst holding meetings and classes)
- a large function room (seating up to 250 people)
- a commercial kitchen
- meeting rooms
- an interview room
- reception area display
- a multi-faith prayer room.

## Achievements

Since its inception, the ACT Multicultural Centre has allowed different new and emerging community groups to come together under one roof, thus making it easier to communicate and break down barriers that may have existed between different cultural groups.

As community volunteers are all working on similar issues, they can informally network and benefit from each others' expertise and ideas. This is especially beneficial for the less established groups such as the Sudanese and Eritrean communities.

The Centre has greatly facilitated organising many events including the National Multicultural Festival in 2007. Goy Malual Leek, President of the Sudanese Youth Australian Association, said:

The Centre has provided a range of benefits to the community, and especially to the young people. Getting together for the Sudanese community was very important and previously there was no access to these facilities. Eventually our community leaders got involved with the Multicultural Centre. After moving into this space we've become more organised in Canberra generally and are better able to support our new arrivals.

The relationship between the Office of Multicultural Affairs and communities has strengthened since the Centre opened and a more effective grass roots communication channel was established between communities and the ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

## Key factors that contributed to the project's success

It is fundamental to ensure the voices of new and emerging communities are heard. Community consultations were held with these communities prior to inviting them to come to join the Centre.

Once the Centre was established it was vital to ensure that all community groups felt comfortable working there.

Some new and emerging communities such as the Sudanese and Mon community groups needed to be given priority space.

## Key messages and advice for someone setting up a similar project

It is important to adopt an inclusive approach when establishing the Centre. An assurance needs to be made from the outset that no community organisations will be left out and that the views of the community groups are obtained from the early stages of planning.

## Facts and Figures

The following multicultural peak bodies are housed in the Centre:

Table 1: Multicultural organisations housed in the Centre

ACT Ethnic Schools Association	Canberra Multicultural Communities Forum
Multicultural Women's Advocacy	National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Table 2: Community organisations housed within the facility

ACT Chinese Australian Association	ACT Russian Ethnic Association
ACT Korean Community	African Australia Association of the ACT
Afghan Australian Council, ACT	Arab Australian Friendship Society
Arab and Australian Women Friendship Association	Australian-Burmese Association of the ACT
Australia Mon Association	Burringiri (Aboriginal) Association
Bangladesh-Australia Association, Canberra	Chinese Arts and Culture Association
Canberra Japan Club	Ghana-Australia Association
Fiji-Australia Association of ACT	Pakistan-Australia Friendship Association, Canberra
Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan	Philippine-Australian Association of the Monaro Region
Persian Australian Community Association	Radio Samoa Language and Youth Association
Queanbeyan Multilingual Centre (Multicultural Youth Services)	Sene Canberra (Papua New Guinea)
Samoan Culture and Youth Support Association	Taiwanese Association of Canberra
Sudanese-Australian Community Association	Vietnamese Community in Australia (ACT Chapter)
Thai Community of the ACT	

## Contact details

ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs  
 Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre  
 London Circuit  
 Canberra ACT 2601  
 Phone: (02) 6207 6014

ACT Multicultural Centre  
 Level 2, North Building  
 London Circuit, Civic, Canberra  
 Phone: (02) 6205 3297